

SAILORS ARE NOT OUTCASTS

(Written for "The Listener" by DAVID K. MULGAN, who served throughout the War in the Merchant Navy)

THE captain eyed the new cadet critically. He was a lad making his first sea voyage.

"Same old story, I suppose," the old man snorted. "The black sheep of the family sent away to sea."

"No, sir," came the reply. "That's all changed since your day."

THAT anecdote gives the gist of what I want to say. For a long time sailors have been social outcasts, a race apart from the rest of humanity. This has been more so with merchant seafarers than with men of the Royal Navy. The latter service, so far as the quarter-deck was concerned at any rate, has been regarded as a fitting and even a coveted career for sons of "good families." But the Merchant Navy—well, a general impression existed and still exists to some extent, that it is composed of ne'er-do-wells who are good for nothing better.

Not long ago in England a magistrate, when dealing with a family bad boy, was told by a welfare worker that the lad aspired to join the Royal Navy.

"Oh, no, he can't do that," the Magistrate said. "Only boys of good character are wanted there. He'll have to go into the Merchant Navy."

This is typical of an attitude which is still fairly general, that the Merchant Navy is a dumping ground for undesirables.

In British countries the Royal Navy is the senior service. Yet in actual age the Royal Navy is centuries younger than either the army or the Merchant Navy. It is actually an offspring of the latter. In pre-Elizabethan times battles sometimes took place at sea, but not in a naval sense. They consisted merely of hand-to-hand combat between soldiers in different ships drawn close together. It was Drake who first conceived of the idea of a ship itself being a fighting unit. But in his day there was no "Royal Navy." The fleet that routed the Armada consisted of merchantmen hurriedly armed for the purpose and manned by merchant sailors. When their task was done the men and their ships resumed their peaceful trading activities. They were equivalent in a way to the armed merchant cruisers of this war. It was not until the reign of Charles I. that ships were specially built for fighting purposes. In fact the king's attempt to levy a special tax to build his ships was one of the reasons why he lost his head.

Tested in War

For a long time the Royal Navy had a lofty contempt for the Merchant Service. But when merchant ships were attacked in the first world war on the "sink without trace" principle it fell to the men-o'-war to protect them. There was certainly plenty of friction at first. Then shipping losses became so serious

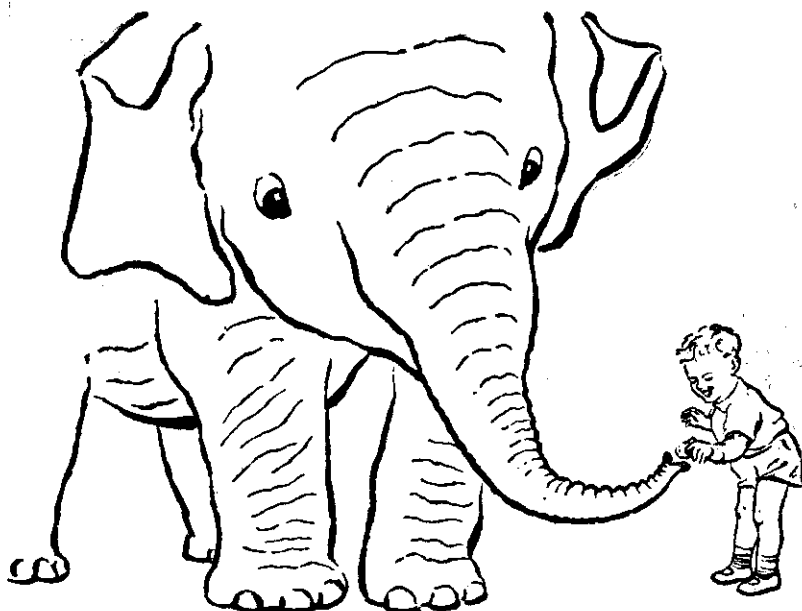


that they nearly spelt defeat for the Allies. The convoy system was suggested as the only remedy. But the Lords of the Admiralty scoffed. How on earth could such a ragged, lawless, and undisciplined body as the Merchant Service ever be made to co-operate with the precision and efficiency needed for convoys? In fairness it must be mentioned that the merchant captains themselves shared in this doubt about their own ability to make such a system work. But Lloyd George, a layman, over-ruled the admirals and ordered the system to be brought in. To the surprise of all it was an immediate success. It is no easy matter for a fleet of merchant ships to sail at a uniform speed and keep the correct distances apart, as all ships have different cruising speeds which cannot be varied within fine limits; also it required some adaptation on the merchantmen's part to act as members of a team, but the lessons were soon learnt.

The publicity given to the Merchant Navy during the war inspired many youngsters with adventure in their hearts. They flocked by the thousand to the mercantile marine offices hoping to get passages to sea. They could not all be accepted so that a system of selection of suitable entrants had to be devised. Those selected were required to do preliminary training in shore establishments before going to sea. It is to be hoped that these two wartime innovations, careful selection of candidates and pre-sea training will be permanent features of the service.

In 1919 an order-in-council authorised the service to be known as the "Merchant Navy," and the King appointed the then Prince of Wales as "Master of the Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleets." A dignified standard uniform was devised for the service. Previously there was no official uniform but most of the larger shipping lines had their own uniforms and cap badges for their officers. This new uniform has been very rigidly protected by law against its being worn by anyone not entitled to it. All this was in recognition of the service rendered during the war and the sacrifices of the men. It was an attempt to raise the "status" of a service which is centuries old.

But attempts like this will have little effect on "status." What is really needed is a change of attitude on the part of everyone, and particularly those in responsible positions, towards the service. It must be recognised once and for all that a body of men who pursue a very honourable and most essential calling should not be scorned.



The Demand Exceeds the Supply—

The demand for Bruce Woollens, too, exceeds the supply. Although we are all out on civilian production once again, we cannot yet satisfy all those who have had to go without Bruce quality Woollens during the war years. Every effort to increase quantities is being made. So keep on asking for the best—for



BRUCE

King of Woollens

The Bruce Woollen Manufacturing Co. Ltd., Milton, Otago.



Keep that
Sweet Personality
with

Camtosa

ANTISEPTIC AND MEDICATED TOILET SOAP

At all Chemists and Stores

Mfrs.: FRANK JACKSON LTD. - 535 Parnell Road, Auckland.