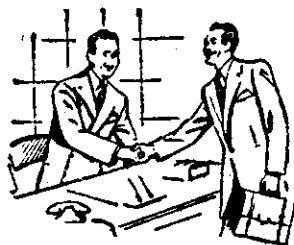


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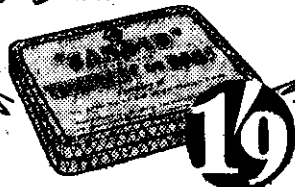
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ON A SLOW BOAT TO GREECE

(continued from previous page)

mainly witless snobs and barbarous capitalists, with a sprinkling of priests going to Rome for Holy Year and, to judge by the unsanctifying glances they cast on the heaving waters, doing penance by a sea voyage. No, by far the most interesting people on board are the crew, 250 odd, all Greek but for a few Italians and one negro.

THE reputation of the modern Greek is much the same as that of his ancestor of the Periclean age: intensely vigorous in mind and body, moderate in his habits, extremely friendly and hospitable, combining simplicity of manner with a subtle and lively wit, and the traditional Attic curiosity and love of all things new; so astute in business that Greece is the one country in Europe where Jews have never been unwelcome—the Greek business shark need fear no rival. For the same reason every third man in Athens is a lawyer, so they say. The Greek is volatile of temperament, very jealous of his honour; the individualist par excellence, capable of unity only in the gravest emergency, and so fond of disputation, so quick to change his viewpoint to anticipate changing circumstances, that it is said that where you find six Greeks together, you find seven political parties. The same spirit that drove out vastly superior forces in 1941 from their little country is shown in the axiom: "If you lose money, you lose nothing; if you lose time, you lose something; if you lose hope, you lose everything."

With few exceptions our crew of 250 illuminate this reputation. Snobbery and class distinction are unknown to them and their curiosity and friendliness are shown with the spontaneity of childhood. If two passengers begin comparing photographs, all the sailors in sight come up and join in the game, passing them from hand to hand, profuse in compliments and criticism. Sit on deck and open a book, and any passing seaman will come over to see what it is, frequently gazing at it upside down—before the war 55 per cent of Greeks were illiterate; the figure is assumed to be much higher now since the prolonged disruption of war and civil war. Put the book down for a moment, and you return to find someone sitting in your chair, poring over it. The bulky boatswain never passes me without borrowing the book of the moment and reading half a page to satisfy himself of the subject. Once, when he became absorbed from one chapter to the next, I asked him after twiddling my thumbs for some time if he ever read books of his own: "No, no, books no interest for me," returning it calmly.

WORK goes with a swing and plenty of jollity, with none of the rivalry apparent in English ships, seamen despising stewards and engineroom crew despising seamen. In fact, I have several times seen stewards scrubbing and painting on deck, apparently from sheer domestic affection. Their easy camaraderie and high spirits are reminiscent of the Maoris. A mingled group rarely sits down without a lively conversation

ending in laughter or song. Starchy discipline is happily absent. When the boatswain discovered me one day reading my grammar, opened it at random and proceeded to give me a lesson (he speaks even less English than I do Greek), he was hailed with ribald cries of "Professor! Professor!" by all and sundry, from the boy greasing hawsers to the second mate laughing from the wheelhouse. The first mate's watch on the bridge is always signalled by the sound of his fruity baritone carolling away to relieve the monotony.

Their sympathy with personal idiosyncrasy is such that when I complained jokingly that the colour of my cabin



"A fine-boned old man with the dignity of an Abyssinian emperor"

was aesthetically displeasing to me, a small army appeared the same day and proceeded to paint it a more pleasing colour, protesting meanwhile that it was nothing, they were about to repaint it anyway. The slightest hitch in one's personal affairs, a jammed suitcase latch, a defective cigarette-lighter, brings a troop of excited helpers overflowing with advice, suffering agonies of distress, though not, certainly, too distressed for words, departing finally rejoicing that your little problem is solved.

Speaking of hospitality, a Greek friend assures me that wherever I go in the country or the islands I will "be everywhere easily hospitalised"—not as grim as it sounds, just that the Greek countryman, like the backblocks farmer in New Zealand, loves to entertain every passerby, plying him with questions, regaling him with the best at his command and detaining him as long as possible.

CHRISTMAS DAY as we simmered towards the equatorial horizon was a festival from dawn till midnight. We have a four-man orchestra aboard, led by a fine violinist, who lost everything but his fiddle in a recent shipwreck. He has to compete with a saxophonist with mountaineer's lungs and no taste, a piano-acordionist who obviously yearns

for a quiet life and takes his revenge for the lack of it, and a drummer who has seen too many American films and is moreover the ship's clown. We have also a large set of gramophone records. But the crew are independent of organised music; they snatch up the first tin-tray or dinner-gong at hand and, with the aid of a few guitars, make a competent band. Such a band roused the captain on Christmas morning singing carols below his cabin, one in particular a very lovely air, in a minor key like most of their traditional songs. We dined all together in the first-class saloon, a Christmas tree in our midst, and the orchestra outdoing itself in the musicians' gallery above. As we descended the grand staircase towards the phalanx of stewards, the chief at their head stepped forward to clasp each fair hand and kiss it warmly. Good liquor flowed and the day waxed in hilarity. The afternoon was spent around banquet tables, on a flag-draped deck under awnings. And all the afternoon in the heat-haze the Greeks celebrated their national dances, singly, in pairs and in groups, each following the last without pause, to the ultimate exhaustion of the orchestra. Unaffected by their potations the dancers pursued an infinite variety of convolutions, with solemn concentration and many graceful flourishes of the handkerchief each carried, wreathing it about neck or waist, fluttering it on the breeze or passing a corner to his neighbour to form a circle. Neither wine nor fatigue could defeat their most intricate steps, only the unpredictable heaving deck.

The sun set in a purple-black cloud mass to the sound of renewed carols.

Two nights later in the steaming heat we crossed the equator and headed for Colombo. Next morning an Austrian lady with little English approached me, inquiring solemnly, "Have you heard anything in the night?" "No, why?"

"They say we have sailed right over an equator in the night, but I have not heard nussing, either."

Presumably Triton should have sounded his conch in greeting.

Music by the Guards

DURING the last two or three years the BBC has encouraged band and choir concerts by having special arrangements made of the accompaniments of choruses, so that the two chief amateur music-making forces can join together. They are heard in recordings of works of many types: sacred music, an operatic chorus, some part songs and programmes by bands alone. As a direct outcome of this combining of bands and choirs, the whole orchestral accompaniments of Handel's *Messiah* were made available for brass bands, and choirs and bands have thus been able for the first time to combine in the performance of a complete major work. One programme in the BBC series *Bandstand* is devoted entirely to choruses from this oratorio. *Bandstand* is heard frequently from various NZBS stations, and the next programme, by H.M. Grenadier Guards, conducted by Captain F. J. Harris, will be broadcast by 3YA at 9.22 p.m. on Sunday, February 12. It will include a march, "Agueo" (Franco); overture, "The Black Domino" (Auber); "Camp-town Races" (Clive Richardson, arr. W. J. Dawson); "Serenade" (Elgar, arr. Carver); waltzes from *Der Rosenkavalier* (R. Strauss, arr. Geillet); and march, "Homeward Bound" (Denis Wright).