

Bound for Melbourne ! All doubts settled. Melbourne is very near home. How pleasing to contemplate ! How pleasant now to calculate. A ship's officer had said ten days to Fremantle (or the rumours said so). Ten days of Indian Ocean, crossing the equator again, through the tropics.

I forget calculations and recall the voyage of four years ago, crossing this same stretch of ocean with the world's two largest liners and three other trans-Atlantic leviathans forming the convoy. What a wonderful sight ; we on the great grey *Mauretania* to look across to where, steaming in line abreast, her big sister ships, the *Queen Mary* and *Queen Elizabeth* lanced blue waters with prows and stream-lined bulks. They were days of hot, calm weather with a flat sea tilting first to one horizon and then the other as the great ships rolled evenly on a miles-long, imperceptible swell. Day after hot day with vagrant breezes welcomed on sun-burned perspiring bodies. Day after day with the wet-brown, glistening bodies of porpoises playing follow-the-leader in a seemingly endless chain. Nights of pleasant cooling calm, with a hard deck the mattress. Night after night when the convoy glided on in a majestic silhouette of great decks, funnels and masts, its course traced by snow-white bow waves and creaming wakes which cut the ocean in broad, even swathes. And lying on the deck, drowsy with the rip of water along the giant steel sides and the drone of the ventilation system, to see the stars, the Southern Cross dropping further towards the horizon every night until it no longer appeared—the last familiar sight before the strange world ahead and the adventure of war.

It will be the same again—only the course is reversed. We are coming away from those four years.

So I count the ten days to Fremantle. It may possibly take five days to Melbourne from the west and five days across the Bight means probably the roughest weather of the trip, with wet decks heaving in the mist. It was not so bad when we crossed in 1941. The first day on a truly troubled Tasman had inoculated me against sea-sickness, and



'Tween decks.

the rolling, tumbling mountains and valleys of the Bight had not affected me. But sea legs do not come with weeks of calm in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, and I face the prospect of some discretionary fasting and resting, even though the atmosphere in "B Deck Dormitory—20 Officers" will not be the best for resting when everybody is doing it. But that is anticipating with gloom. There is a much better way of looking at it. Those five days will race by because the adjustment in time as we travel east has the satisfying illusion of making the journey quicker, and clocks move on some hours across the Bight.

So there is a total of fifteen days to Melbourne. Without stretching our legs ashore since leaving Suez we hopefully expect one day's shore leave at Melbourne while the convoy refuels. So far there has not been a rumour on the question of leave. But, assuming the convoy, leave or no leave, stays two days at Melbourne, I can count, so far, seventeen days.

Seventeen days. Then the Tasman. Four days to cross the Tasman. That makes twenty-one days. It is unlikely that we will go ashore and entrain the day we arrive in Wellington, especially if it is late afternoon or evening. So it will be the twenty-second day. Twenty-two days ! The fog of unreality begins to clear a little more. Twenty-two days from now I should arrive at Napier railway station.

Is it twenty-two days to heaven ? Perhaps.

(To be continued.)