

Something about sailors

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been said before they reached town — Robbie sprang to attention, saluted, and said with a cheeky grin: «Thank you for a most memorable and instructive day, Mr. Mason» and vanished up the gangway into the bowels of the great liner.

As Errol slowly drove away, his heart at once gloriously happy and sad, he started reckoning how many weeks would elapse before he would again be speeding to the docks; this time to meet and not to part with his newly found happiness.

As he drove through town his eye noticed a «Cape Times» placard which read «ANOTHER TROOPSHIP DIVERTED». He smiled as he drove off into the night . . . maybe this next ship would bring someone else the same sort of unexpected happiness.

Something About Sailors

There is a popular belief among shoresiders that all sailors, sexually, are «fair game». Why — I do not know, and I am a sailor. Certainly, when we go into a bar in uniform, there is a much greater interest shown in us, by both men and women, than when we wear ordinary civilian dress. If in civilian dress, once our occupation becomes known, the atmosphere immediately becomes much more friendly, much more intimate. When I was a soldier, I was less aware of public interest in people in public places, and when I was a civilian, no one ever offered me a bed for the night without preliminaries nearly so many times as they do when I wear my sailor's rig.

Is it the uniform that does it? Lots of people see glamour in a uniform, and collect uniformed personnel as others collect postage stamps. It is not, I think, entirely the uniform, because as I have already said, invitations are freely forthcoming, once people know that a man is a sailor.

Is there a general idea that all sailors are homosexual, or potentially so? Is there a general belief that once they get on the high seas with no women within reach, all sorts of orgies go on, and the homosexual leads a free and completely uninhibited life? No, if such ideas exist, they have no real foundation.

I will admit that a large number of purely homosexual people take up the sea as a career, particularly in the merchant service. It is also true that a great number of seafarers are bisexual. According to Kinsey about 40% of American males are not averse to bisexual practices, and this I think applies also in Great Britain, at sea as well as on shore. The figure at sea may even be a little in excess of this, but I think, not very much. Certainly at sea, there is a much greater tolerance towards homosexuality than there is on land, and when a purely heterosexual sailor knows that someone else is as queer as a coot, he might kid the other along a bit, but in my experience, never maliciously. For example, I have seen a big burly fireman approach a steward, throw his arms around him, and say, in reference to a passing bell boy — «Listen Duchess, next voyage you and me are going to get married, and we'll have the little princess as our daughter». But it did not mean a thing, and it goes on all the time.

Regrettably, the only time when unpleasantness occurs, is when two homosexuals fall out with each other, which they do frequently. If a heterosexual or a bisexual forms an association with a homosexual at sea, it may be purely

platonic, and everyone knows about it, but no one ever criticises, at least not publicly. Private life on a ship just does not exist. If the relationship between two people does have an emotional basis, the others generally still maintain a sympathetic understanding. Sailors are good at living, and at letting others live. This, I hasten to add, is the situation as it applies in the merchant service. In the defence navy, where homosexuality is a crime, the individuals may be tolerant, but the law is not.

Life at sea is strange, even unnatural. On shore, a man goes to work by day, his entertainment by night, and when he finally goes home, he closes his door on the outside world. Sailors can't do that. From the day they sail to the day when they return to their home port at the end of a voyage, they live together, and there's no privacy, no escape from one another, and no doors to close. They travel all over the world, and often one or even two whole years pass before a voyage is completed. This is a long time to pass in a small restricted community, and the only break they get is shore leave in a foreign port. It is their only chance to escape from those around them, or to meet new people.

Life on a liner is rather different from that on a tramp or a tanker. In a liner, some at least of the crew can make contact with passengers. Lots of the liners have their concert parties which gives the female impersonators an opportunity to demonstrate their talents, to the enjoyment of passengers as well as crew. But luxury liners with their short voyages and ever changing passengers and crews are impersonal things. It is in the cargo ship with a small crew and no passengers that life is more intimate. As a rule there is no entertainment on these ships apart from what the boys make for themselves. Dancing to radio or records is the most popular entertainment, and the fellows have to dance with each other. Mostly it's jive, or rock 'n roll, but the sight of two men dancing with each other does not raise anyone's eyebrows, as it would ashore, and men dance with each other with pleasure and abandon, but usually with no thought of sex.

Close friendships develop, and also enmities, and though these friendships and enmities sometimes have a sexual basis, it does not necessarily follow that they must have. Friendship may be deep or casual. One remembers them, or forgets. To stand in the ship's bow at night as she ploughs through the ocean with stars above and dark white-topped waves all around and wind and spray in your face cannot help but engender a warm feeling of intimacy towards a man standing beside you, though no words may be spoken.

When they land in a foreign port, most sailors lose no time in heading for the beach. Some go sightseeing, alone or in small groups, but nine out of ten make for a bar, for after a few years at sea one feels one has seen all the sights worth seeing, and the nicest thing to look at is a row of bottles, and ice in a glass, and the nicest thing to do is to find someone new to talk to. Sailors are lonely people, and that is why they emphasize their loneliness. Probably all of them are a little bit crazy, more or less, because no sailor can ever explain why he goes to sea, and why he never leaves it.

Most of the bars around the big waterfronts of the world are in actual fact, bar-brothels. The women who pretend to be so glad to see a sailor have only the end in view of relieving him of whatever money he has, with a little dispassionate lovemaking if he insists. And they fall for it, because at the time it seems worthwhile, just to talk to someone new. Sailors talk to anyone. Sailors usually have money when they go ashore and like to get rid of it as quickly as

possible. So many times, though, pleasures on the beach are just dead sea fruit, and it is often with a real feeling of relief that they get back to the ship and under way again, trying to make themselves believe they've had a wonderful time. As a rule, it is only the younger members of the crew who mess about with prostitutes; those who have been at sea for a few years generally do not bother.

No, sailors are funny people. They have a mentality all of their own and only a sailor can understand how the mind of another sailor works. They are happiest among their own kind. Life on shore is too restricted to satisfy the demands of a man used to the freedom, disciplined though it may be, of sea-going life.

To those of you who live within solid walls of brick and stone, in streets that rarely change, in towns that grow ever larger and drearier, if you should meet a sailor sometime, and spend with him a day, or a night, or a week, and you enjoy each other's friendship for just that long, and he goes away and you never see him or hear of him or from him again, do not think that he has not appreciated your kindness, if you have been kind, or your sincerity if you have been sincere. He'll not forget you, if he has liked you.

«Swift like a sea gull flying
In the night he goes alone . . .»

STORNOWAY.

Studying Sex Offences

By The Rt. Hon. KENNETH YOUNGER, M.P.

Efforts to make our penal system both humane and effective have always been handicapped by lack of exact knowledge upon which to base reform. The Cambridge Department of Criminal Science, directed by Dr. Radzinowicz, therefore decided to make a start towards meeting this need by investigating a broad sample of sexual offences known to the police during one year, 1947: and the results are now published in a 500 page volume: *Sexual Offences*. Edited by Dr. L. Radzinowicz. (Macmillan. 40s.)

Of the two contentious topics shortly to be reported on by the Wolfenden Committee on Homosexuality and Prostitution, prostitution was outside the scope of the group's inquiry; while on homosexuality no very radical suggestions are made. The most interesting fact revealed about homosexual offences committed between consenting adults in private is the rarity even now of prosecutions for this kind of offence. Only two were found in the sample taken, and there may have been no more than a dozen or so in the whole country in 1947.

While this fact by itself may be open to a number of constructions, it lends some support to the criticism, often made of the existing law, that effective enforcement is, in the nature of the offence, impossible, and that what offenders have to fear is not so much public prosecution as private blackmail.

The experience of Scandinavian countries and of Belgium, on which there are interesting chapters, suggests that in the last thirty years all these countries have, after careful inquiry, narrowed the scope of their traditional laws on homosexuality so as to impose sanctions only where the victims are young people, or