

"SCALDINGS!" cried the boy belonging to Roderick Random's mess on board H.M.S. "Thunder," lying at the Nore, as he descended the cockpit carrying a wooden platter full of boiling pease, and in spite of the addition of a lump of salt butter scooped from an old gallipot, a handful of onions and some pounded pepper, Random found the mess so unsavoury that he refused to eat his share, although his mess-mates pointed out that, being "Banyan day," he would get no meat till noon next day.

For the benefit of the uninitiated, although the term has long since passed into a phrase of everyday life, it may be stated that Banyan days—so-called from an East Indian sect whose principles forbade them to eat meat, were compulsory fast days—no meat being issued on Mondays, Wednesdays or Fridays, a restriction which existed until 1820, and the removal of which was strongly resented by the contractors for the supply of fish to the Royal Navy, who lifted up their hands in pious horror and their voices too, through their representatives in the House of Commons, at an innovation which, besides imperilling the soul of Jack, threatened a serious diminution of their profits.

And yet the *carte du jour* does not read so badly. Taking an even earlier date—that of a seaman's diet scale in 1622—we find that every man's allowance was one pound of biscuit and a gallon of beer per diem—two pounds of beef, with salt, four days in the week, one pound of bacon or pork, and one pint of pease, "as heretofore hath been used and accustomed," and for the other three days one quarter of stock fish, half a quarter of a pound of butter, and a quarter of a pound of cheese.

This substantial bill of fare was supplemented, according to one writer, by *Methernix*, which he apparently considered as a sort of seductive drink—probably confusing it with *Metheglin*—but as "*Methernix*" was in reality a kind of canvas it is doubtful whether it played a prominent part in the dietary scale of the Navy at any period.

It is to be feared that, however liberal in quantity, the quality left much to be desired, nor were these defects likely to be concealed by the culinary skill displayed in preparing the rations, seeing that the regulations directed that the cooks were to be chosen, regardless of their qualifications, from "such cripples and maimed persons as are pensioners to the chest at Chatham."

And yet good living was one of the prime inducements, ranking only second to prize money, held out to attract recruits. In an advertisement calling for 100 active, smart seamen and a dozen stout lads for royal yard men to complete the complement of H.M.S. "Leander," it is stated that:—

"This whacking, double-banked frigate is fitting at Woolwich to be flagship on the fine, healthy, full-bellied Halifax Station, where you may get a bushel of potatoes for a shilling, a codfish for a biscuit and a glass of boatswain's grog (*i.e.*, undiluted rum) for twopence. The officers' cabins are building on the main deck so as to give every tar a double berth below. Lots of leave on shore! Dancing and fiddling on board! And four pounds of tobacco served out every month!! A few strapping fellows who would eat an enemy alive, wanted for the Admiral's Barge."

In a pamphlet addressed to the Houses of Parliament in 1703, it is stated that "a hot country, stinking meat, maggoty bread, noisome and poisonous scent of the bilge water, have made many a brave sailor food for crabs and sharks," and again, "where we had one man dyed by shot in the Navy we had ten dyed by means of bad provisions," and yet, unsavoury as the stuff was, Teonge in his quaint diary relates how in

THE ADMIRALTY VICTUALLING YARD, DEPTFORD.

H.M.S. "Assistance," off the Isle of Wight, "two seamen that had stolen a peice or two of beife were thus shamed: they had their hands tyd behind them and themselves tyd to the maine mast, each of them a peice of raw beife tyd about their necks in a coard and the beife bobbing before them like the knott of a cravat, and in this posture they stood two howers." A truly ingenious way of adding to the pleasures of a Channel passage, especially if the "seamen" in question, as is possible, were some of the longshore hands pressed at the last moment before leaving Gravesend to make up the complement of the good ship.

The officers fared better at any rate when, as was frequently the case, they were guests at the table of the captain, for the same writer recounts how, off the rock of Lisbon, "our noble captain feasted the officers of his small squadron with four dishes of meate, viz.: four excellent henns and a peice of pork boyled in a dish, a gigget of excellent mutton and turnips, a peice of beife of eight ribbs, well-seasoned and roasted, and a couple of very fat greene geese; last of all, a great Chesshyre cheese—a rare feast at shoare. His liquors were answerable, viz: canary, sherry, Rhenish, clarett, white wine, syder, ale, beare, all of the best sort, and punch like ditch water."

Several of the items already enumerated have disappeared from Jack's bill of fare, or if still in use are provided out of his "savings." The beer, long a source of trouble and a fruitful cause of disease, has given place to cocoa, tea and rum; bacon, butter, cheese, and fish have disappeared altogether, partly from difficulty of stowage and the offensive odours consequent thereon, the "intolerable stench of putrefied cheese and rancid butter," writes Smollett; but each ship is provided with a plentiful supply of fishing tackle, and the lack of salt stock fish will scarcely be regretted. Nor will that of the much reviled "burgoo," a mixture of oatmeal and molasses, which formed the sailor's breakfast until cocoa, after several years of partial adoption, was finally established as a universal ration, a position from which it is not likely to be disturbed.

The chocolate, or cocoa, as it is always called afloat, is manufactured at the Admiralty Victualling Yard at Deptford, and is of two kinds, ordinary and soluble, the former being that which forms the usual ration. As it requires several hours' boiling it is served out overnight with a due proportion of sugar in the presence of the ship's cook and the petty officers of the day, and locked up in a tub which is placed under the charge of a sentry until required to be put into the ship's coppers, which is done during the early hours of the morning. After boiling for three or four hours the sugar is added and the cocoa is then ready for running off into the cook's tub when the bugle sounds "Cooks of Messes."

Jack has only three meals a day, breakfast at a quarter to seven, dinner at twelve, and supper at 4:30. At breakfast and supper the "ship's allowance" consists of cocoa and biscuit and tea and biscuit respectively, any additional luxuries being provided by the messes out of their savings.

The menu of the dinner is more elaborate, the changes being rung between fresh beef and vegetables, salt pork, salt beef, the former with an accompaniment of split pease and celery seed for conversion into soup, the latter with flour, suet and raisins, which eventually take the form of "duff," and preserved meat, familiarly known as "Fanny Adams," with which are issued preserved potato and rice so as to admit of a portion of the meat being converted into stews. Mustard, pepper and vinegar are also issued, but, oddly enough, no salt, which has to be obtained by purchase when in harbour or, when at sea, by scraping the insides of the salt meat casks. The omission from the scale of rations was no doubt due, in the first instance, to the fact that Jack's bill of fare consisted in the old days almost exclusively of salt provisions, and of such a decided character that the addition of salt would have been "carrying coals to Newcastle," but that has long since ceased to be the case.

On the whole the English sailor, though he may growl occasionally, is the best fed seaman in the world. The staple commodities of his food—biscuits, flour, oatmeal, etc., are specially manufactured for him so as to ensure absolute freedom from adulteration, while every other item undergoes the most rigorous examination before it is issued.

Navy salt beef may not be inviting to the landsman, but it is excellent stuff to tackle with a sea appetite on, though the old names, "junk" and "salt horse," the former being a delicate allusion to the bull-rushes, of which ropes were formerly made—are still retained in the most conservative of Services, they have ceased to bear any relation to the actual quality of the article to which they are applied.

What landsman would have dared to tackle the dish described by Roderick Random?—a slice cut off a piece of salt beef taken straight from the brine, mixed with an equal quantity of onions, seasoned with pepper and salt, and brought into a consistency with oil and vinegar.

In this direction, as in others, great improvements have been made in the last few years, as there are many still serving who will remember the solid masses of black meat, almost petrified by age and brine and which required the use of an adze to reduce them to strips. Indeed, it was not an infrequent amusement for Jack to display his artistic skill and, perhaps, to indicate with subtle sarcasm his opinion of the quality of his rations by carving models of ships and other curios out of a portion of his allowance of salt junk.

The biscuit is manufactured at Deptford, Gosport, Plymouth, and Malta; but though each ship is compelled to carry a certain specified quantity, the consumption is not so large as formerly, owing to the greater facilities that exist for obtaining fresh bread. In some ships arrangements exist for the daily baking of soft bread for the whole of the ship's company, even at sea, and it would be well if this practice could be extended. It is issued in bags or cases, according to the service on which the ship is employed, and unless exposed to exceptional circumstances, remains in good condition for a considerable period; but the modern type of ship is not well adapted for stowage purposes, the iron beams and the large number of engines in use producing condensation and consequent damage to the biscuit through damp.

Still, the lively "weevil" is pretty well a thing of the past, and the skittish young lady who, when regaled on board ship, showed how thoroughly she was up to the ropes by rapping the biscuit sharply on the table for the purpose of dislodging the maggot, would give herself terribly away now as belonging to pre-historic times.

The arrangements for tea making leave something to be desired. The practice is, at three o'clock daily, to weigh off the requisite quantities both of tea and sugar in the presence of the ship's cook and the petty officers of the day. The tea is put at once into the coppers and the sugar added in about half-an-hour's time. The general serving out is at 4.30, but it is frequently necessarily postponed, and the result is an acrid mixture, good neither for the palate or the digestion. However, it seems to suit the sailor, for when an attempt was recently made to remedy the evil by the use of infusers on a large scale, the innovation did not prove acceptable.

Fresh meat is issued to as large an extent as possible, ships at Portsmouth and Devonport drawing their allowance from the victualling yards at Gosport and Plymouth respectively, while others are supplied by contract. It is received on board in quarters, which are weighed and cut up in a public part of the ship in the presence of the petty and non-commissioned officers of the day. The

meat is then issued from the block to the officers' messes and to a few of the ship's company's messes in turn, the remainder being delivered to the ship's cooks for the purpose of being boiled in the coppers, whence it is distributed to the various messes by the time-honoured custom of "pricking."

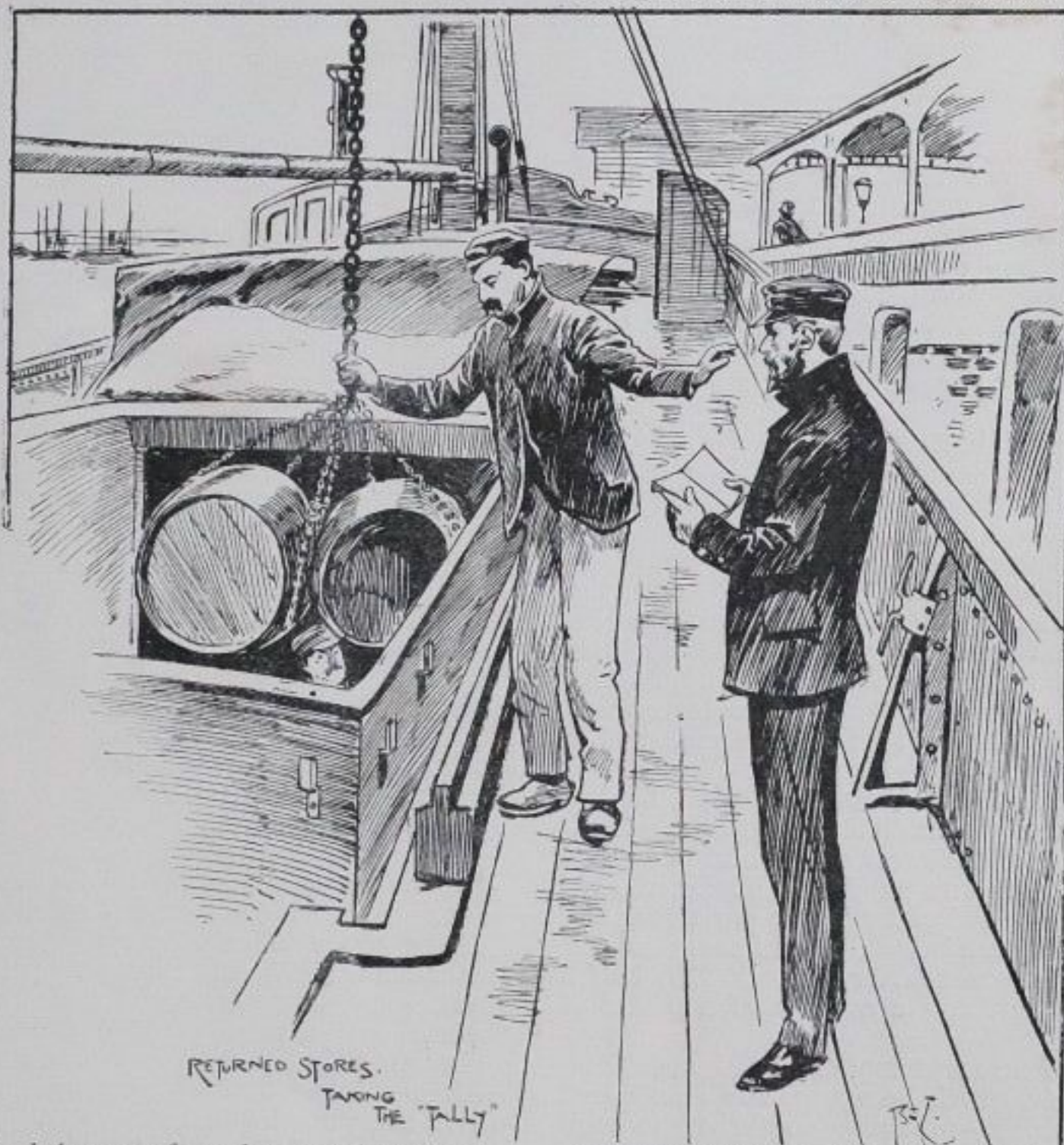
An allusion has been made to "savings," an institution which is justly popular as affording each mess the means of varying their diet by the addition of small luxuries. The term signifies the allowance paid monthly to each mess for the biscuit, meat, etc., not taken up by them, and without this Jack would be puzzled to find the wherewithal to supply himself with such luxuries as fresh potatoes, not to mention something "extra special" for Sunday.

Training ships have a special scale of their own, and it is of such a varied and substantial

character that the boy who elects to serve his Queen and his country as a bluejacket must be fairly startled, if he is of an active turn of mind, at the provision made for his comfort and development, and even if he is of a more bovine temperament he will find no lack of means for chewing the cud.

With all these advantages the cost of victualling is only about £15 per head per annum, and for this it may be claimed that Jack is the best fed sailor in the world. Even he does not grumble at the quality or quantity, though he does sometimes growl at the hours at which he is called upon to eat his victuals.

The death rate of the Navy, too, is in startling contrast to the time when Admirals buried the ship's companies of the squadrons under their command twice over within the limits of a commission, and on the whole it may be claimed for those who are responsible for the "Food of the Bluejacket" that they have laid to heart the words of an ardent Naval reformer of bygone times, inasmuch as they have recognised that "the victualling is a business that requires not only indefatigable industry but conscience also, since the lives of the sailors of England are under their care."



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