ERIC L. CLEMENTS

CAPTAIN OF THE CARPATHIA

The seafaring life of *Titanic* hero Sir Arthur Henry Rostron

BLOOMSBURY

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To Julian Clement Chase,
a courageous man

For Barbara Anne Clements,
transatlantic voyager

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PREFACE

HERO OF THE *CARPATHIA*

Three weeks to the day after the Armistice that ended the First World War, two distinguished veterans of that conflict, a man and his ship, stood into New York Harbor with the first units of US soldiers returning from Europe. On Monday morning, 2 December 1918, the British troop transport *Mauretania*, Captain Arthur H. Rostron, RNR, commanding, brought 4467 doughboys home, among them 167 wounded in France or Belgium.

After Rostron had invited aboard a welcoming committee led by New York City's mayor and delivered by police boat to the lower bay, *Mauretania* moved slowly up the harbor. She paused briefly for clearance at the Quarantine Station on Staten Island at 9.30am then steamed for her berth on Manhattan Island in the Hudson River. Hundreds of soldiers crowded the transport's decks to take in their homecoming, a few standing atop and even inside of the huge ventilator cowlings that lined *Mauretania*'s uppermost deck. They waved to welcoming crowds aboard other vessels or gathered along the shores of the harbor cheering the progress of their ship. At Battery Park on the southern tip of Manhattan, 'thousands of people who had been waiting in the cold wind since 7 o'clock to see the Mauretania pass … cheered and waved flags frantically… From the Statue of Liberty to the pier the whistling of harbour craft was continuous.'

Another large and boisterous crowd had been gathering for hours at the foot of West Thirteenth Street outside Cunard's Pier 54 to meet the ship. A fifty-piece band, assembled on the pier, greeted *Mauretania*'s late morning arrival with such sprightly songs as 'When Johnny Comes Marching Home' and 'Hail, Hail, the Gang's All Here.'[1]

Arthur Rostron had assumed command of *Mauretania*, one of Cunard's most prestigious appointments, three years earlier at the relatively young age of forty-six and had seen her safely through most of her war service. Her first postwar visit to New York was not the last time that one of Rostron's ships would be greeted by an expectant city, nor was it the first. Six Aprils previously, the thousands at the Battery and outside Pier 54 had stood subdued in darkness and in sorrow, awaiting the survivors of what would become history's most famous shipwreck. His role in the *Titanic* disaster and rescue have kept Rostron's name alive for a century and is certainly the most obvious reason to write his biography, but just as certainly not the only one.

By the end of the First World War, 'Captain A. H. Rostron, hero of the *Carpathia* … and commander of the *Mauretania*,' as *The New York Times* described him, had served more than thirty years at sea. He made his first voyage in 1887 as an apprentice, an apprenticeship that might as well have been served in the age of Nelson, or even Drake. He spent his early years afloat beating around Cape Horn in sail, subsisting on salted rations and stale water drawn from casks, out of contact with land and its society for months, making annual voyages across the hemispheres aboard ships that advanced at an average of little more than one hundred miles per day.

Seven years as an apprentice and an officer in sail qualified Rostron for a master's certificate – and a career in steamships. By the time the apprentice Rostron unfurled his first canvas, sailing ships were already disappearing over the horizon into history. He, therefore, joined the Cunard Steamship Company, Ltd., at the beginning of 1895, spent twelve years with the line as a junior and senior navigating officer and attained his first command in 1907. His conduct as captain of the *Carpathia* on that night to remember five years later, would win him fame across two continents, numerous official and informal tributes and significant future assignments. He would serve with distinction in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic during the First World War and spend the 1920s commanding Cunard's most prestigious ships.

This biography will tell Arthur Rostron's story, of course, but also, through him, tell of seafaring in his era. Rostron began his career as an apprentice in a thousand-ton Cape Horn sailing ship. He ended it as the most celebrated and decorated master mariner of his generation, commanding a fifty-thousand-ton

ocean liner for the world's most famous steamship company on the world's most important seaway. In the forty-four-year term of his career, seafaring evolved from his pre-industrial voyages in sail to employing some of the most advanced technologies and sophisticated organizations of the Industrial Age. The wider history through which he sailed included the evolution of the transatlantic passenger trade, the two wars in which he was involved and some of the celebrated ships in which he served and commanded.

One can only recover such history thanks to the prior labours of other historians and of archivists. The notes and bibliography reveal my debt to many outstanding maritime historians, to whom I am grateful. For their courtesy and assistance I thank the archivists and librarians at the Bolton History Centre, Bolton; the Crosby Public Library, Liverpool; the Guildhall Library, London; the Imperial War Museum, London; the London Metropolitan Archives; the Liverpool Record Office, Central Library and Archives, Liverpool; the Maritime History Archive, Memorial University, St John's, Newfoundland; the Maritime Research Center, San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park; the Merseyside Maritime Museum, Liverpool; the National Archives (Public Records Office), London; the Southampton Archives Office; the Southampton Library and Archives; the Special Collections and Archives, Sydney Jones Library, Liverpool University; and the West End Local History Society, West End, Southampton.

Editor Lisa Thomas and the staff at Bloomsbury Publishing have ably transformed my manuscript into our book. Sir Arthur's grandson, John Rostron, granted this writer an interview upon perfunctory introduction and short notice and sent subsequent, valuable correspondence. My parents, Anna and George Clements and Alan and Vera Patrick, have made my life possible and theirs worth emulating. My sister, Bell Julian Clement, a fellow historian writing her own manuscript concurrently, was source and inspiration for solutions to several writing problems. The Canon Slade School, Bolton, provided, gratis and unsolicited, a copy of John Aldred's history of that institution cited herein. The Conway Club and the publisher Houghton Mifflin Harcourt granted permissions to use materials quoted extensively in the text. Southeast Missouri State University provided the financial assistance that made seven weeks of research in Britain, and thus this book, possible. Thank you all.

Three people merit special mention in association with this project. Its unwitting godfather is the maritime historian John Maxtone-Graham. I met him only once, when I was privileged to attend a series of lectures that he gave in the summer of 2009, but by then he had been a shipmate for decades through his book *The Only Way to Cross*. For a better understanding of the history of the transatlantic liners of the twentieth century, start there. I first read Maxtone-Graham's masterpiece forty years ago and it remains perhaps my favourite work of history. The book before you is not a masterpiece for the simple reason that I am not a master, but if I have written it with a fraction of his skill and grace, I shall be well satisfied.

Before she became my mother, Anna Bell Clements was a doctoral candidate in English in an era when not many women achieved that. Writer, teacher and philanthropist, the last work of her life was reviewing an advanced draft of this manuscript, rescuing us from the worst of my errors. One of her edits gives a glimpse of her character. Describing the bloodletting of 1918, I wrote of 'an offensive that cost Germany more than half a million irreplaceable casualties'. That last word is acceptable usage for the sum of those killed, wounded, missing and captured, but her editing pencil slashed right through it. Above it she wrote: 'men'. She was right, of course; they were men. They had mothers too.

My wife of thirty-three years, Barbara Anne Patrick Clements, provides the inspiration and support for my literary ventures. She helped research and edit this book, flawlessly organized the logistics of our seven-week research trip, has to live with a writer and is ever beloved. She is the reason that I sail as scheduled.

CHAPTER I

A CLASSICAL AND COMMERCIAL EDUCATION

Arthur Henry Rostron was born at Sharples, Bolton, Lancashire, in north-western England, on 14 May 1869, almost precisely the midpoint of Queen Victoria's reign. He was the second child and first son of thirty-year-old James Rostron and twenty-seven-year-old Nancy Lever Rostron, born in nearby Eccles and in Bolton, respectively. James and Nancy married in 1867 and raised five children. Edith was born in 1868 and Arthur came the following year. Fredric arrived in 1870, Beatrice in 1872, Ethel, who survived just two weeks, in 1875 and the couple's last child, George, in 1877.[1]

Located a dozen miles north-west of industrial Manchester and about twice that distance north-east of the world's greatest seaport, Liverpool, the Bolton of 1869 lay at the centre of the Industrial Revolution. The town specialized in manufacturing cotton textiles, with about 150 factories employing twenty-five thousand people to produce medium and fine yarns and cotton cloth products ranging from blankets to fancy goods. 'It is a large and prosperous town and probably ranks second to none in its progress and enterprise,' advised a contemporary business directory. The same publication estimated the number of cotton spindles in the borough at about three million, with the large factories having up to a hundred thousand each. Bleaching, which finished these goods to a bright and uniform whiteness, was 'largely carried on, it being estimated that 6,000,000 pieces of cloth are annually bleached here'.[2]

Bolton's staple industry employed both of Arthur's grandfathers, Henry Rostron as a dyer and Thomas Lever as a cotton-waste dealer. At the time of his marriage, James Rostron, Arthur's father, was also a cotton-waste dealer,

which suggests a connection to Thomas Lever and his daughter Nancy. By the time Arthur was born, James had become the manager of the Sharples Bleach Works of George Murton and Company. Arthur's youngest brother, George, followed his father and grandfathers into the trade as a cotton spinner and would later manage Chadwick's spinning mill at nearby Eagley. And if the cotton mills had no appeal, Arthur could certainly have found employment in one of Bolton's 'many extensive machine works … brass foundries, iron works, chemical works, collieries and other industries,' as did his other brother, Fredric, as a steam engine fitter.[3]

Except that none of Bolton's industry and enterprise interested young Arthur Rostron, who later recalled that he 'never had any ambition other than to go to sea. The spirit of adventure must have lived in some remote ancestor and come down to me; certainly there was in my home no encouragement to set out on long and hazardous trails. Yet at five or six years of age I announced my intention to be a sailor and all that was ever said to dispel that youthful dream – and there was a good deal of quite natural opposition – never had the slightest effect, unless it was to increase my determination.'[4]

This was not a determination that sat well with his parents. James Rostron, though certainly not wealthy, was fairly prosperous and he apparently wished to guide his oldest son through a good education and into a career more secure and less dangerous than seafaring could offer. Young Arthur's desire to roam the planet may also simply have been incomprehensible to his parents, both of whom lived out their lives within ten miles of where they were born. Arthur resisted his father's thinking, however, to the point of running away to join a ship at the age of fourteen, only to be sent home on account of his boyish looks. But Arthur's resolve would eventually force his father's acquiescence.[5]

First, however, came the requirement to gain an education. Arthur initially attended the Bolton Grammar School under headmaster the Reverend Distin Stanley Hodgson. The school, built in 1657, accommodated 116 boys, each of whom was charged one guinea per quarter. Baptized as an Anglican, Arthur next enrolled in the Upper School of the Bolton Church of England Educational Institute, in Silverwell Street. Under the headmaster the Reverend John Worsley Cundey, the Bolton Church Institute, founded in 1846, offered students 'a classical and commercial education, combined

with religious and moral instruction in conformity with the principles of the Church of England'.[6]

Besides its preparatory and upper schools, aimed at boys of the middle classes, the institute featured a library and reading room, offered evening classes for adults and, in 1879, opened a girls' school. Classes were 'open to all comers, but it must be distinctly understood that religious instruction is given according to the principles of the Church of England and there is no arrangement whereby the pupils can be withdrawn from such instruction; they are, in a word, distinctly Church of England Day Schools and are the only ones of the class in the town'.[7]

The classical curriculum, intended to prepare students for their university examinations, featured 'Religious Knowledge, English, Modern Languages, Latin, Mathematics and Science,' but the school offered drawing, music and military drill as well. The commercial side of the programme, largely vocational, consisted of a technical school that offered applied mechanics, machine drawing, building construction, principles of mining and such locally useful skills as practical chemistry, dyeing and bleaching, and cotton manufacturing. The institute offered three terms a year, charging fees of two guineas per term for students under twelve years of age and three guineas for those older, although it did offer some competitive scholarships.[8]

On leaving the Bolton Church Institute at the end of 1884, the problem of fifteen-year-old Arthur's career choice resurfaced. Perhaps in compromise – to let the lad test the waters, as it were – James Rostron agreed to enroll his oldest son aboard HMS *Conway*, a merchant marine school ship moored in the River Mersey at Birkenhead on the opposite bank of the Mersey to Liverpool.

HMS *Conway* came into being ten years before Arthur was born thanks to the efforts of the Mercantile Marine Service Association, founded in 1857 to improve the status of Britain's merchant service and its officers. In 1859 the association acquired the surplus 28-gun frigate HMS *Conway* to use as a training ship for merchant officer cadets. The success of the undertaking soon rendered the original ship inadequate and she was replaced two years later by the 51-gun frigate HMS *Winchester*, renamed HMS *Conway*. That arrangement lasted until 1876, when the second ship was replaced by the former HMS *Nile*, a 92-gun, 4875-ton, two-deck, second-rate ship of the line originally built in 1826 and with a steam engine and screw propulsion

added in 1854. With her machinery removed and rigging rehabilitated, this third HMS *Conway* would capably fulfill the multiple roles of training ship, campus and dormitory for the following seventy-five years.[9]

Conway shared the river with three other moored school ships. Two were reform schools intended to turn troublesome youths into sailors. The third school ship had the same mission, but her clientele was the orphaned sons of British seamen and other indigent lads. *Conway*'s goal was more exclusive: to train future merchant marine officers. She was, as described in 1883, 'a school for the sons of gentlemen,' intended to develop character as well as craft and 'to this extent … is the same as many another boarding school'. Even if status had not set *Conway* apart from her neighbours, cost certainly did; James Rostron's total expense for Arthur's fees, clothing and extras for his two years aboard *Conway* amounted to £105.[10]

Between reveille at 6am and taps at 9pm, *Conway*'s 170 or so cadets studied and drilled and learned the ropes. The cadets were organized into port and starboard watches, with the watch on deck learning practical seamanship while the watch below attended classes. *Conway*'s academic offerings were both scholastic and nautical, while the cadets also had time for concerts and shows and played their share of sports. *Conway* offered cadets prizes for swimming, rowing, boxing and fencing, held an annual sports festival with nineteen events for 'Running and Jumping, &c,' and fielded its own cricket and football teams. As at other English public schools, cadets went home on holiday between terms.[11]

Rostron enrolled on 1 February 1885. At fifteen years and eight months, he may have joined the ship a term ahead; *Conway*'s academic calendar normally began in September and ended with Midsummer examinations and awards in July. Nevertheless, Rostron had made his mark by the end of his first term. The results of the spring examinations of 1885 put him fourth overall in the second form. Cadets sat for examinations on English history, scripture history, geography, French, arithmetic, algebra, trigonometry and physics, although not all students stood for all subjects. Rostron attained the highest marks in his form in English history and placed second in geography, third in algebra and fourth in arithmetic. Another series of examinations were held for the seagoing subjects of navigation, nautical astronomy and the laws of compass deviation, though students in the second form may only have stood for the

first of these. Conway's staff also assessed cadets in a more general review at the end of every term. This evaluation was divided into a 'school report' and a 'naval report', each indicating 'ability', 'application' and 'conduct' and through his first year Rostron's evaluations ranged from 'satisfactory' at worst to 'very good'.[12]

On the Midsummer 1885 Prize List, among the Horsfall Prizes, Rostron won honourable mention from the second class 'For General Proficiency in Geography'. He also received recognition 'For General Proficiency' in the second form under the Clark Aspinall Prizes and was awarded the book *A Voyage in the Sunbeam*, Annie Brassey's 1878 account of her family's circumnavigation of the world by yacht.[13]

Rostron's senior year was even more impressive. He later wrote that he reached the position of head boy, the leading cadet. While he did not attain the highest score scholastically, he certainly did very well. He stood for examination in twelve subjects at the Midsummer examinations for the senior class in July 1886, his total score placing him third among thirty-nine cadets. Rostron scored particularly well in history, dictation, trigonometry and practical navigation. He also took examinations in the academic fields of scripture, geography, arithmetic, algebra and physics, in the vocational topics of nautical astronomy, meteorology and compass deviation and avoided the French exam altogether.[14]

Seniors also faced separate tests in navigation and seamanship administered by an independent examiner from the marine board in Liverpool. These included 'Rule[s] of the Road at Sea, Use of Charts, Signals, [and] Nautical Instruments,' as well as 'the practical work comprised in an Able Seaman's Duties'. Ironically, given his subsequent exploits, Rostron received no special mention or any awards in these nautical subjects.[15]

Rostron's senior-year marks on his school and naval reports were uniformly 'very good', and he repeated his successes at the Midsummer awards ceremony held on *Conway*'s quarterdeck under an awning in pouring rain on 22 July 1886. Rostron placed first among the senior class in English history, second in scripture history, second in physics, third in geography and fifth in trigonometry. He won honorable mention in the competition for the Royal Geographical Society's prize for proficiency in geography and carried off the Torr Prize for the senior class, a barometer, for proficiency in history. He tied

for first for the Horsfall Prize for scripture history, receiving a copy of James Macaulay's 1882 book *All True, Records of Peril and Adventure by Sea and Land*. He also came second in the Samuelson Prize for proficiency in physical science, receiving a certificate of merit, and received the only mention 'for Medical Lectures', with a prize, awarded by the school, of Sir Frederick G. D. Bedford's *The Sailor's Pocket Book*, of 1875.[16]

Arthur Rostron concluded his two years aboard HMS *Conway* with an Extra Certificate, issued on 20 December 1886, and the final assessment of: 'Conduct Very Good[.] Ability Very Good.' Four days later, he received an appointment as a midshipman in the Royal Naval Reserve. Rostron later recommended 'that every boy going to sea spend a couple of years on one of the training ships… He will get invaluable ground work and his liking for the life will be well tried.' Cadet Rostron had certainly found his calling. *Conway*'s Register of Cadets also noted that Rostron would next join a sailing ship named *Cedric the Saxon*, his first billet in the merchant service and the beginning of his lifetime at sea.[17]

CHAPTER 2

THE BUSINESS OF A SEAMAN

On 24 February 1887, Arthur Henry Rostron, aged seventeen years and nine months, signed an Ordinary Apprentice's Indenture with the Liverpool shipping firm of Williamson, Milligan and Company. In it, Rostron committed to serve an apprenticeship of four years. He agreed to provide his own bedding, clothing and necessities or to see the cost of same deducted from his wages. He also promised to not 'frequent Taverns or Alehouses … nor play at Unlawful Games'. A final stipulation, handwritten at the bottom, stated that if Rostron's ship were wrecked, the company could cancel his indenture. A third party to the agreement, James Rostron, as surety, was bound to Arthur's completion of the contract at a penalty of forty pounds. In exchange for these obligations, Williamson and Milligan agreed to teach the young man 'the business of a Seaman,' to provide him with 'sufficient Meat, Drink, Lodging, Washing, Medicine and Medical and Surgical Assistance,' and to pay him forty pounds over the four years – five pounds the first year, eight the second, twelve the third and fifteen in the fourth year of his indenture.[1]

Williamson, Milligan and Company, headquartered in the Old Castle Buildings, Preeson's Row, Liverpool, 'engaged in general trade to all parts of the world'. The company owned a fleet of nine ships, ranging from six hundred to twenty-two hundred tons, including one iron-hulled and one steel-hulled steamer and seven sailing vessels, six of iron and one of steel. Rostron's years with the company would be spent in two of the iron-hulled sailing ships, *Cedric the Saxon* and *Red Gauntlet*.[2]

By the time Rostron joined the company, sailing ships had lost the competition with steamers for high-value cargoes on the major sea lanes.

What remained for sailing vessels were long voyages hauling low-value, bulk commodities such as coal, grain, nitrates and timber. These ventures took them to many of the world's outposts on voyages that typically lasted most of a year. Rostron's first ship, *Cedric the Saxon*, was a three-masted, full-rigged sailing ship built at Port Glasgow, Scotland, by J. Reid and Company in 1875. She was 1705 gross tons, with a length of 260 feet and a beam of 40 feet. She had two decks, subdivided by one bulkhead and, as Rostron would soon discover to his discomfort, a freeboard amidships under maximum load of less than five feet.[3]

Rostron joined his new ship at Hull and she sailed for San Francisco on 28 February 1887 under the command of William P. Haines. Born in Birkenhead in 1857, the twenty-nine-year-old Haines passed his master's exam in 1884 and *Cedric the Saxon* was his second command. Haines' officers were first mate George Linden, aged forty-four, and a Swedish second mate named George Peterson. The ship's ratings included a boatswain, carpenter, sailmaker, cook, steward and a donkeyman-seaman who operated the cargo-moving apparatus when the ship was in port. Sixteen able and two ordinary seamen completed the crew. The ship also carried five apprentices, including Rostron, ranging from sixteen to eighteen years of age, one of whom, Francis Williamson, reached the end of his indenture and was promoted to third mate shortly before the vessel reached San Francisco.[4]

Cedric the Saxon's newest apprentice later remembered the first month of the voyage as idyllic, the stuff of the dreams of armchair sailors and enthusiastic cadets. Once the ship reached latitude 40 South, however, the clouds descended – often literally. Fierce weeks of beating slowly around Cape Horn followed as the southern autumn faded toward winter darkness, the ship relentlessly assaulted by the Horn's 'bitter green water'. The howling fury of an unusually rough passage eventually drove *Cedric the Saxon* four hundred miles south of the Horn on her slog around South America into the Pacific.[5]

'I was to find out that sailing ships meant hard work, sometimes bullying by more or less ignorant officers, great risks and poor food, [and] every sort of discomfort that one can conjure to the imagination… Sleep, rest, food, drink – all gone without through long periods.' Aloft at all hours, in all weathers, he soon learned that even the pretended security of 'one hand for the ship and one for yourself' would not avail in the chaos of a storm, for 'no sail can be

furled with one hand while the other is devoted to your own safety'. He was left to wonder, years later, whether ship owners safe ashore 'ever realized what titanic labour and risk went to make their dividends. I fear not. And certainly little of the ship's profits found their way into our pockets!'[6]

This was an era described by one of Rostron's contemporaries, Samuel G. S. McNeil, as 'the bad and hard old days when there were plenty of hard kicks and very few pennies,' particularly for apprentices. McNeil recalled that on their early voyages apprentices 'had to do any kind of dirty job, just the same as the ordinary seaman,' but that the apprentices had their own quarters off watch and were always considered part of the 'after-guard'. One of Rostron's future shipmates, Harry Grattidge, who also apprenticed around the Horn under sail, remembered that the worst of the experience might have been the 'watch and watch' that alternated every four hours. This port-and-starboard regime 'meant that never in all this time could we snatch more than three and a half hours' unbroken sleep… In time you came to hate any emergency as robbing you of those three and a half precious hours… but with the incredible resilience of youth we became adept at carrying out a job while sleeping on our feet.' Even with the dangers and discomforts, however, McNeil saw the value of such an apprenticeship. 'Training in sail taught a youngster to be resourceful,' he found, 'and also taught him to think and act quickly… He learned not only how to lead men, but how to command them.'[7]

Sometimes the sea could at least inflict its hard lessons in grimly humorous ways. One night the new apprentice Rostron was dispatched forward to get hot water for the evening's cocoa. He recalled:

> It was blowing fresh with an occasional sea tumbling over the rail. Foolishly I went along the weather side of the deck to the galley, the door of which was abreast of the fore rigging. I had opened the galley door, had just time to see the cook, carpenter, sailmaker and donkeyman sitting on the bench before the fire smoking, when we shipped a lump of a sea. The first thing I knew I was sprawling in the lee scuppers. That sea had lifted me into the galley, swept me right across it, pushed me through the other door and onto the deck again. It had also done much the same for the galley's occupants! We were all

> mixed up in the scuppers together and you may take it as authentic that the language was neither polite nor complimentary. But I had learned my lesson and on bad nights the weather side of the deck saw no more of me.[8]

Not for the last time in his career, Rostron was lucky. If he needed a horrifying example to caution him further, the sea provided one as *Cedric the Saxon* finally beat her way past Cape Horn and was rounding to the north-west in mountainous seas. At 2.30am on 9 May 1887, a boarding sea caught nineteen-year-old ordinary seaman R. W. Wilkinson on the open deck unprotected and flung him over the rail. He was never seen again.[9]

Cedric the Saxon and her remaining crew finally bested the Horn, only to have the pugilistic Pacific land a last, vicious blow on the trip northward. On 2 June, 'while running in a furious gale from [the south-east, *Cedric the Saxon*] shipped a heavy sea over the stern, carrying away [her] wheel and binnacle; at the same time [the] ship broached to, losing all the sails that were set.' At least that was the dry account of the mishap that appeared in *Lloyd's List*. Rostron remembered that the boarding sea carried away the helmsman and the senior apprentice along with the wheel. 'Fortunately they were caught in the fore part of the poop and regained their feet unhurt.' Unfortunately, the accident also snapped some of the braces securing the ship's masts and *Cedric the Saxon* had to lie to for about thirty hours, while her crew repaired the damage to her helm and rigging and bent on new sails.[10]

Cedric the Saxon arrived in San Francisco Bay on 27 July 1887, after a voyage of five months during which Rostron saw land once between England and the Golden Gate. She tied up at Oakland wharf to unload her cargo of railroad rails. There, nineteen of her crew deserted, including the boatswain, donkeyman, cook and almost the entire forecastle. And it turned out that Oakland had its own hazards; two weeks after her arrival, while lying alongside Oakland wharf, *Cedric the Saxon* was rammed by the steamer *Navarro*. The collision cracked the sternpost and damaged three iron hull plates on the ship. After eight weeks at Oakland, her damage repaired and a cargo of wheat loaded, *Cedric the Saxon* departed for Queenstown, Ireland, on 20 September. Following a less vigorous springtime passage of the Horn, she arrived at Queenstown in the first week of January 1888, remained a week

and reached Liverpool on 15 January, completing her round voyage in ten and a half months.[11]

Six weeks later, on 29 February 1888, *Cedric the Saxon* and Arthur Rostron put to sea for San Francisco again. This time the excitement began before the ship reached the high southern latitudes. On the evening of 25 April *Cedric the Saxon* made the harbour at Rio de Janeiro, where she remained for four weeks undergoing repairs after having been 'partially dismasted in a gale'. Rostron later declared that misadventure 'the only happening of importance' on a round voyage that lasted six days less than a year, but even a relatively uneventful voyage produced its share of uncertainty.[12]

Cedric the Saxon had gone to sea again under a new commander, James Veysey, a thirty-four-year-old native of Brixham in Devon. Her officers were first mate Alfred Pope of Liverpool and second mate George Boyd of Belfast. Her midships personnel consisted of a boatswain, carpenter, sailmaker, steward and cook. In her forecastle sailed an able-bodied seaman-donkeyman, sixteen other able-bodied seamen and two ordinary seamen. This gave her a total complement of twenty-seven, consisting of ten Englishmen, three Swedes and a Noah's Ark assemblage of pairs of Scots, Finns, French, Canadians and Americans, plus an Irishman, a Norwegian, a Corsican and a native of the Isle of Man. The ship also carried four apprentices: Virgil Marani, Arthur Clay, William Keiller and Arthur Rostron. Four and a half months into the voyage, Marani's apprenticeship expired and he was promoted to third mate.[13]

As might be imagined of such a polyglot assembly of sailors, their abilities were perhaps as diverse as their origins and their loyalty in the face of hardship was not guaranteed. Excluding the apprentices, fifty-one men signed the articles, eleven of whom – two officers and nine men – completed the entire round voyage from Liverpool. At Rio de Janeiro the ship picked up a new cook, three able-bodied seamen and two boys. Of the five sailors who left the ship there, one departed on account of illness, two deserted and two left by 'mutual consent'.[14]

When *Cedric the Saxon* reached San Francisco on 5 September 1888, more than a third of the crew, ten in all, jumped ship. On 15 October, a day before she sailed for Queenstown, Captain Veysey resigned and the first mate, Alfred Pope, assumed command. Pope was twenty-five years old and had passed the master's exam in his native Liverpool just two years before.

With her new master, a new first mate, a boatswain, a donkeyman, eleven able-bodied seamen and yet another cook signed for the voyage and a cargo of wheat loaded, *Cedric the Saxon* departed for Queenstown on 16 October 1888. She made that port on 14 February 1889 and departed six days later for Liverpool, where Rostron's second sojourn under sail ended on 23 February.[15]

Rostron's third and final voyage as an apprentice began three weeks later. It took him and *Cedric the Saxon* in the opposite direction from the first two, around the Cape of Good Hope bound for Calcutta with a cargo of salt. She departed Liverpool on 16 March 1889, with Veysey back in command, Pope as first mate and William Bond of Liverpool as second mate. The ship arrived at Calcutta three months later, on 20 June. After enduring two months of India's summer, *Cedric the Saxon* departed on 22 August, leaving behind six of her crew due to illness. A two-month voyage brought her to Port Pirie, a grain port in South Australia on the eastern shore of Spencer Gulf, a few miles north of Adelaide. She remained there for more than three months in a more agreeable climate, before sailing for Queenstown, Ireland, with a load of wheat on 3 February 1890. This time she cleared the harbour without one of her able seamen, thirty-nine-year-old John Kennedy of Liverpool, who had died the previous month in the hospital at Port Pirie following an accident. *Cedric the Saxon*'s return passage took four months, with the ship reporting at Queenstown on 4 June to receive orders as to where to deliver her cargo. Those orders were for St Nazaire, on the west coast of France, where the ship unloaded from mid-June until early July. The ship then returned to Barry, Wales, concluding her voyage on 12 July 1890.[16]

After finishing his third voyage in *Cedric the Saxon*, the management of Williamson, Milligan and Company declared that Rostron had completed three and a half years of his four-year indenture 'to our entire satisfaction [and to] that of the captains under whom he has served, who report that they always found him able and attentive to his duties, well conducted [and] strictly sober'. The firm thereupon voided the remaining six months of his apprenticeship, in light of his having passed his second mate's exam, and appointed the twenty-one-year-old Rostron second mate in the company's barque *Red Gauntlet*. As a second mate, his wages increased from the ten pounds a year he averaged over his apprenticeship to a somewhat more reasonable five pounds a month, a sixfold rise in salary.[17]

Red Gauntlet, Rostron's new ship, was a single-decked, iron-hulled barque of 1053 registered tons. Of 205 feet in length and 33 feet in beam, she was built in 1864 at Greenock, Scotland, at the mouth of the River Clyde, by the shipbuilder R. Steele. In this ship, Rostron would undertake his widest-ranging voyage, but his first as a mate was a simple, if lengthy, out and back. *Red Gauntlet* and her new second mate sailed from Barry, south-west of Cardiff, on 10 October 1890. Her master, the Cornishman F. E. Grow, aged forty-six, had also commanded the ship on her previous voyage. The first mate was the thirty-one-year-old George Boyd of Belfast and the ship carried a twenty-one-year-old third mate named H. B. Harvey. *Red Gauntlet* was bound for Port Pirie and made the run around the Cape of Good Hope in twelve weeks, arriving on 9 January 1891. Two months later, on 13 March, she sailed from Port Pirie for Rouen, France, loaded with wheat. The ship arrived in the Rouen River exactly five months later and reached the city itself on 19 August, whereupon Boyd, Rostron, Harvey and fourteen of the crew left the ship 'upon mutual agreement'. After unloading, another crew signed new articles and sailed *Red Gauntlet* to Liverpool on 14 September. Rostron's first voyage as a mate had lasted ten months and nine days, short of the full one year of sea time required to sit for his first mate's certificate.[18]

So Rostron signed the articles again as second mate in *Red Gauntlet* for a voyage that would prove to be his greatest odyssey under sail. The ship departed from Liverpool on 29 October 1891, this time captained by Alfred Pope. Pope and the first mate had been shipmates of Rostron's aboard *Cedric the Saxon*, so, he observed, 'the company was pleasant'. *Red Gauntlet* crossed the equator in the third week of November and reached Adelaide on 23 January 1892, after a passage of eleven weeks. From Adelaide, South Australia, *Red Gauntlet* sailed for Newcastle, New South Wales, on the east coast of the continent. On 12 March 1892, after loading coal at Newcastle, the ship departed for Valparaíso, Chile, on the west coast of South America. It was a passage that almost cost Rostron and his shipmates their lives.[19]

Disaster nearly overwhelmed *Red Gauntlet* South of New Zealand. At midnight Rostron had been relieved by the first mate and had just turned in below, when the ship was struck by 'a real southerly buster'. The blow shredded her sails and knocked the ship onto her beam ends, which caused her cargo of coal to shift and the ship to list dangerously. There she lay,

her lower lee yards under water and her deck submerged to the hatches, while her crew scrambled to save their ship. For three days they fought to right her, with the watch busy aloft repairing rigging and bending on new sails, while half of the watch below laboriously trimmed coal back to the high side of the ship and the other half slept. Fortunately, the weather moderated sufficiently to allow *Red Gauntlet* to be repaired and righted, as no hope of rescue existed in that wild and empty ocean. Although he would face other crises during his long career, Rostron later declared that this mishap was the closest that he came to dying in his entire forty-four years at sea.[20]

Eventually, *Red Gauntlet* reached Valparaíso and delivered her cargo, leaving port on 27 May 1892, headed 175 nautical miles up the coast to Guayacan to load nitrates. Three months later, on 27 July, she sailed from Guayacan for Portland, Oregon. The nitrates delivered to Portland at the end of September, the next cargo was grain bound for Plymouth, England. *Red Gauntlet* left Portland on 16 October and arrived at Plymouth fifteen and a half weeks later, after an eastbound summer passage around Cape Horn, on 26 February 1893, completing her circumnavigation of the earth in sixteen months. After a month at Plymouth, *Red Gauntlet* departed for London, arriving at the South West India Dock in the first week of April, 1893.[21]

At the end of this epic voyage, Rostron took his leave of *Red Gauntlet* and of Williamson, Milligan and Company. He spent a couple of months back at home where he passed his examinations for first mate. He then landed a first mate's billet, at six pounds per month, with the Liverpool firm of Squarey and Kendall. This posting required a trip to Antwerp, Belgium, to join his new ship. *Camphill* was a steel-hulled barque of 1240 registered tons, a length of 226 feet and a beam of 36 feet. She was built by C. J. Bigger of Londonderry, Ireland, in 1889 and registered at Liverpool. On 19 July 1893, two days after Rostron and the rest of the crew signed on, *Camphill* departed from Antwerp loaded with explosives and bound for Valparaíso.[22]

After many months under the capable command of Alfred Pope, Rostron now found himself under a less impressive master. James Butters was a fifty-five-year-old Scotsman who had commanded *Camphill* on her annual voyages to Australia in 1889, 1890 and 1892. Perhaps the rigours of these long voyages had worn him down for, according to Rostron, upon reaching the South Atlantic *Camphill*'s captain 'became very fond of his cabin – and

its contents!' That left the twenty-four-year-old Rostron, assisted only by the twenty-year-old second mate, A. J. McDonald of Deptford, effectively in command of a crew that proved to be almost as dangerous as the cargo.[23]

Camphill carried a carpenter, sailmaker, cook, steward, ten able-bodied seamen, two ordinary seamen and two ship's boys who were making their first voyages. They came from all over Europe, including eight from Scandinavia, but, and perhaps significantly, only three – two Scots and an Englishman – came from Britain. With the master sequestered in his cabin, it appears that the crew decided to test the limits of their young first mate. Whatever the sequence of events, relations between Rostron and the crew deteriorated to the point that he received threats to knife him. 'I quite understood that this was no jest,' he later wrote, 'and in consequence for weeks I carried a revolver, even sleeping with it under my pillow. Never did I approach a man, or let him approach me, unless I was armed.' The revolver established an uneasy truce, but the truce held. *Camphill* rounded the Horn and made Valparaíso on 24 October 1893, 'without anyone being knifed or shot'.[24]

After some reordering of the crew at Valparaíso, *Camphill* sailed on 1 December for Pisagua, a nitrate port in northern Chile. It was on what another English sailor described as 'a bleak, barren coast all right; where trees don't grow and the rain never rains'. She arrived on 9 December, loaded and sailed on 6 January 1894, for 'United Kingdom or Continent'. Her destination turned out to be the Cornish port of Falmouth, which *Camphill* reached on 29 April. After a week there, she sailed for home, arriving at Liverpool on 9 May. Rostron recorded that as *Camphill* approached England, her captain's disposition improved to the point that he had recovered completely by the time she docked.[25]

Whatever *Camphill*'s particular discontents, this was an age when officers, especially in sail, were expected to enforce their orders with their fists, if necessary. Rostron, who had fought before on occasion, would have his last such confrontation on *Camphill*. As he recounted the incident, Rostron was obliged to correct the work of a man who responded first with insolence and then, when called on that, with abuse. 'There was nothing for it,' Rostron believed. 'An officer dare not let a man take the upper hand or all discipline is gone.' The sailor landed the first blow, but it was Rostron who prevailed in the fisticuffs that followed. He thought that 'a fight like that seldom left bad blood,

so long as it was a clean scrap.' In his opinion, a brief physical confrontation was a better resolution than entering the man's name in the ship's log, thereby exposing him to formal ship's discipline. In Rostron's experience, a man who had been logged would take his first chance to desert, 'and until then you had to keep your weather eye open, for you were dealing with a man who, with a threat over him, felt he was suffering under a grievance.'[26]

Usually, of course, matters did not come to blows. Rostron's fellow Cape Horner Samuel McNeil believed that 'the mate of a large sailing-ship should be a good organizer,' always on top of the 'hundred and one things to be thought of,' but McNeil declared that 'there is one virtue that an officer in a sailing-ship must have, and that is "courage" – both moral and physical. He has to know what to do and do it without hesitation; he must give his orders in no uncertain voice, and he must have an authoritative manner. The worst of hard-cases will nearly always act decently when given orders by an officer who knows what he wants done and how to set about doing it.' Although not the most physically imposing of men, Rostron had developed into such an officer under sail: competent, authoritative, and a leader. He wrote of his days in sail that during the inevitable intervals 'of stress and messy work … let me say, I was always up to the neck, for I loved the old ship and my work, wanted to be a hundred per cent sailorman and, when leadership and encouragement were required, I never thought of being anywhere save with my men.'[27]

By the time *Camphill* returned to Liverpool in May 1894, Rostron had completed seven years and two months in sail and had demonstrated repeatedly that he could hold his own in tough circumstances. In three voyages as an apprentice, two as second mate, and one as first mate, Rostron had survived fights with discontented sailors, at least seven passages of Cape Horn, *Cedric the Saxon*'s partial dismasting in the Atlantic, and *Red Gauntlet*'s knock down south of New Zealand. He had also personally suffered two significant falls aboard ship, the first from the rigging to the deck during his final voyage as an apprentice in *Cedric the Saxon*, and the second from the deck into the hold at Portland, Oregon, on his circumnavigation as second mate in *Red Gauntlet*. Lithe and lucky, he did not suffer serious injury in either accident.[28]

He had matured into a man about five feet, eight inches tall and weighing about 160 pounds, who would retain somewhat boyish features into middle age. An American newspaper described him at mid-life as 'gaunt of frame

and ruddy of complexion, with blue eyes and light hair inherited from the … Norsemen'. Although a citizen of the world by the time he reached adulthood, a shipmate at the end of Rostron's career recalled that he 'retained quite a marked Lancashire (Bolton) accent' for the rest of his days. Fellow sailor James Bisset, who met Rostron when Rostron was forty, described him as 'of thin and wiry build, with sharp features, piercing blue eyes, and rapid, agile movements. … In his habits he was austere. … He did not drink, smoke, or use profanity.'[29]

Rostron had developed those shipboard habits during his days in sail. He dissipated neither himself nor his hard-won wages ashore. Tied up at the foot of Market Street in San Francisco – a port that a fellow Cape Horner declared had 'the worst reputation of any sea port in the world for lawlessness, not excepting New York' in the 1880s – Rostron hardly ventured ashore. He wrote that he 'was perfectly happy and content where I was – on board with my job. For one thing beer was not to my taste and as for the other "attractions" of life in port they had no lure for me.'[30]

This was an attitude that would please ship owners and lead to advancement, certainly, but Rostron held to it for several reasons. One was his belief that sailors were the victims, not the beneficiaries, of their excesses ashore. The beneficiaries were those who preyed upon men just landed after months of danger and privation. He decried the mistreatment of sailors ashore, assailed by 'harpies and sharks … sometimes to die, always to be robbed, often to be beaten, filled with loathsome liquor and, alas, not infrequently with disease'.[31]

The other foundation of Rostron's personal sobriety was the profound religious faith that he developed during his formative years. It is perhaps a cliché, when discussing sailors and religion, to evoke Psalm 107: 'They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep.' But the wisdom of those words fit Rostron's understanding exactly. Expressed in his sailor's vernacular: 'A sailor has his faith; he lives so close to nature, there are times when he feels in touch with the infinite,' or: 'It is so easy watching nature in her vigorous strength and serene beauty, to believe that behind it all there is a destiny shaping our ends.' He once described himself as 'not "religious" in what the ordinary sense of "religion" means, you understand. But, man, nature is with us!'[32]

This was not a faith that Rostron imposed on his shipmates, however. He once observed that 'there is one thing the sailor hates and abhors and that is to see a man coming on board with a Prayer Book in one hand and a Bible in the other. There is no class of men in the whole wide world who have a greater conception, or a greater reverence for the Power that rules over us. Sailors as a rule are not given to saying much as regards religion but they stick to it and they hold it in their hearts. The heart is the place, not the mouth.'[33]

Rostron later admitted that old Cape Horners tended to romanticize their time in sail. He certainly did. At least he did long after his days of losing fingernails to raging canvas or eating salt pork first soaked in sea water to make it 'fresher and more palatable. And this, mark you, is given out with no generous hand.' With such hardships not forgotten but in perspective, Rostron could also write lyrically about days of smooth sailing, when 'we spread our white wings and let the breezes bowl us along with a song in the rigging and music at the prow'. *Cedric the Saxon* would remain the pride of his years in sail. 'She was a beautiful model, taught and trim as a yacht,' he wrote. 'I've known her [to] reel off eighteen knots in a squall with every stitch set … she just heeled over to it and clipped off the knots… I was on board when she ran 325 miles (nautical) in 22 hours [averaging 14.77 knots] with a hard gale blowing under our stern and heavy seas running.'[34]

Rostron's days under sail were coming to a close, however, at least for the moment. Although *Camphill*'s owners wanted him to remain with the ship as master, his previous voyage in her had left him a few weeks short of the sea time he needed to sit for his master's license. Rostron decided not to make another voyage in sail, which involved investing many months in order to acquire the necessary weeks of sea time. The solution was a shorter passage in his first steamship, *River Avon*, a thousand-ton, single-screw tramper belonging to J. Little and Company and registered in Glasgow. She measured 235 feet long and 33 feet in beam and spent her time knocking around ports in northern Europe and the Mediterranean.[35]

Exactly when and where Rostron joined *River Avon* is uncertain, but if he needed six more weeks of sea time and paid off at Ipswich, as he recalled in his memoir, he would have sailed in her from Newcastle for Bilbao on the north

coast of Spain on about 12 September 1894. She arrived at Bilbao on about 20 September and sailed for Swansea after a two-week turnaround, arriving on 4 October. A week later, *River Avon* began a voyage that introduced Rostron to the Mediterranean, a sea with which he would later become very familiar. A passage of twelve days landed the ship at Algiers; a few days after that she headed for Huelva on the Atlantic coast of southern Spain. On 1 November *River Avon* left Huelva, arriving at Ipswich on 9 November, where Rostron took his leave of the ship.[36]

With his sea-time requirements satisfied, twenty-five-year-old Arthur Rostron sat for his master's examinations a month later. He was awarded his Extra Master's Certificate on 17 December 1894, at Liverpool – the 'Extra', the highest possible credential, earned for demonstrating special competency in navigation – and enjoyed the bonus of spending Christmas and the New Year in Bolton with his family. That new year, 1895, would find the recently certified master serving in both sail and steam and entering into another apprenticeship of sorts served during the many years between certification to command and command itself, one that would carry him to new ports and increasing responsibilities.[37]