

When Ships Come In and Ships Go Out They Are on Duty to Guard Both Passengers and Cargo

By ERNEST KAYE.

WHEN a vessel is moored and the passengers have gone, the average New Yorker would probably think there is little more for pier policemen to do; in reality this is the time they must keep their eyes widest open. A vessel in port is a fair mark for thieves. Valuable ship's stores, rugs, linens, paintings, ornaments and fixtures are exposed to pilferage and theft. In addition there is her cargo which is being discharged to the pier.

The guarding of all this treasure cannot properly be considered the duty of the city police, situated as it is on private property. Therefore, a small army of private police is employed for pier duty. Much that is of interest, because of the variety of happenings on ships and piers, occurs behind the privacy of the big pier gates, but the world outside seldom hears about it. On the other hand, good work by a city policeman always receives due publicity. The pier policeman's work is usually unsung.

It is seldom realized that from the moment passengers reach the pier until the gangplank is pulled in their personal safety as well as that of their baggage is watched over by men whose sole business it is to see that all goes well. This item of expense does not appear on any bills and passengers are unaware of the beneficial presence of their protectors. Moreover, when shipments of coffee, toys, wicker chairs, or whatever else it may be, are hoisted from the hold and placed on the pier, the policeman never takes his eyes off the men who are doing the handling. If the cargo has to remain on the pier over night, as it often does, he is there also. Three in the morning is the same as three in the afternoon to him.

Thorough Pier Protection.

When a truck is loaded on the pier, it would seem that at last this surveillance might be lifted, but no. Again the officer is in evidence. If any one wants to find out how efficient the service is, just go to a pier with an empty truck and try to get a load.

The truckman can never get past the gray uniform at the gate until he has submitted elaborate documentary evidence. If there is any scrap of doubt he may be allowed to drive in, but he can be certain that what is doubtful is being checked up while he is loading. Unless he proves that he is entitled to his load the gray coats detain him. If entitled to the load, the truckman is required to pass another examination on the way out, and it is well to remember that he can put on his truck only just what he was authorized to put on it.

Naturally, there is a close cooperation between these hundreds of private policemen and the city police, as well as the United States customs men whose duties require a constant surveillance of the piers in order to prevent the smuggling of contraband.

A Variety of Duties.

The oceanic policeman has many duties. A prominent banker or industrial magnate is going abroad. Whether the public is friendly or not, he may not care to have his comings and goings advertised. Such a man is always exposed to danger. Confidential secretaries arrange for his passage, and no passenger agent would think of advertising his reservation. He cannot go to the pier on sailing day as others do. He goes there in the most inconspicuous way possible with one or more of the oceanic policemen keeping near at hand. As they are dressed like any ordinary business men, nobody notices them. Usually a roundabout way or a remote gangplank is used and no one is aware that the greatest toothbrush magnate in the world is safely housed in the \$4,000 suite. If he chooses to meet the reporters or the ever-present camera men, that is his privilege; but it is the duty of the salt water police to deliver him safely at his stateroom first.

Versatility is another trait of the oceanic policeman, and many little courtesies are practised in the course of the day's work. The man who is ready to fight at need is also capable of the gentle amenities. In a sense, he personifies American hospitality and the American way of getting things done speedily, intelligently and politely. It would not be fair to the commanding officers to attribute all of this to spontaneity on the part of the rank and file. The policies of this service are in skillful hands and there is a rigid code. The great American secret of success, "friendly cooperation," does the trick.

Sailing-Day Problems.

On a sailing day, when the general public is freely admitted to the pier and no credentials are required to go aboard the vessel, four principal dangers require special vigilance—fire, pickpockets, confidence men and bag thieves. During the hours that the pier is open to the public one of the policemen acts as fire chief and devotes his entire attention to fire hazards. No smoking is permitted on any pier. If one violates this rule, consciously or unconsciously, the policeman on duty, instead of "bawling out" the offender, hands him a little slip of paper on which is printed: "No smoking, please."

The other three dangers are essentially police in character. Experience has shown that pickpockets, or "dips," find a crowd their most fertile field. When the crowd is swayed under the emotion of waving good-

bye to those on the outgoing vessel even people who are ordinarily careful are robbed with ease.

Confidence men prey principally on second cabin and third-class passengers. He who is doing the trick assumes a jaunty and self-confident air, which, together with a peaked cap, are apt to deceive. He comes to the passenger, often right at the stateroom of the latter, and politely calls attention to the fact that there is a safe in the purser's office and that there is danger of theft. He will be glad to take any valuables or money to the purser and give a receipt for it. It is surprising how many people fall for this game. First-cabin passengers are by no means free from this gentry, either.

The Stateroom Bag Thief.

The bag thief has a little way of his own. He has to be a fast worker. He is usually of good, even attractive appearance. Knowing the thrifty habits of stewards generally, he wanders around among the cabins until he sees a likely steward whom he tips half a dollar "just to let him see two or three cabins." He explains that this is "just curiosity, you know; never been on a big ship before." This is done within an hour or so of sailing time. The steward gets tired of acting as guide and as he has his half dollar he disappears.

The genial visitor goes back to the rooms where he has seen hand baggage and goes through it. He takes only small stuff—papers, jewelry and valuable odds and ends which can be dropped into special pockets in his clothing. Occasionally a bold one brings an empty bag with him, puts it in a vacant cabin and trots back and forth until he assembles a load. If he finds a good haul, he walks off with the whole thing while dozens of people are taking their farewells in the very corridor where he is working. All of this the pier policeman is expected to prevent, and usually does.

One would not think that style in dress played much part in the life of a longshoreman, but it does. Time was when the "swag jumper," or baggy blouse, was popular with longshoremen. These garments may have been all right sartorially, but it was found that they held too much merchandise. When one appears nowadays, its wearer is "frisked" so often that he sacrifices appearance for utility. If inquiring police fingers feel anything besides ribs under the blouse there is trouble ahead for the blouse's owner.

Stowaways Delivered.

A call comes from a ship which is going to dock over in Brooklyn. There are three bad stowaways. In this case "bad" means exactly what the word signifies. A squad of several huskies are there when the ship docks and the troublesome trio are turned over to them. There is not the slightest doubt about their being safely delivered to the proper authorities, because there is a matter of a \$1,000 fine per head in the event of an escape. The other side of the picture is that the steamship company pays the private police a substantial fee for the service and in so doing transfers the liability to them. If there is no escape the service is very profitable. Hence the 100 per cent. successful delivery.

A woman who was on the first-cabin list of a big liner had been wearing much expensive jewelry during the voyage. One day a bracelet of dizzy value disappeared. The silence of the sunlit day at sea was interrupted by the lady's lamentations. There was a great commotion, of course, but diligent search failed to disclose the bracelet. A chance remark made by a sailor supplied a slender clue. What happened within the next two weeks would make a long story. The trail led all over New York after the ship landed, but the marine sleuths had their noses close to the ground. To make the tale short, suspicion settled on a bos'n of another vessel then on the high seas, outbound. Some wireless exchanges with the officers of that ship finally brought the laconic message: "Bird in brig; bracelet in safe."

Around the watery edge of Manhattan and Brooklyn adventure is always lurking. Always something is happening which the average New Yorker, be he ever so sophisticated, seldom thinks of.