

Charles Parry



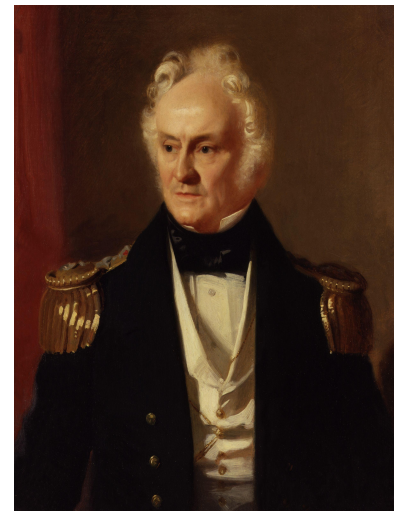
Charles Parry Lieutenant on HMS Trincomalee 1854 to 1856

Charles Parry was born on the anniversary of Trafalgar, October 21st, 1833, at Tahlee House, Port Stephens, New South Wales, the temporary home of his father, Sir W. Edward Parry, who, soon after his return from his last Polar voyage, had accepted for four years the post of Commissioner to the Australian Agricultural Company. The next year Sir Edward returned to England. Charles's mother died when he was five years old, and Sir Edward remarried in 1841. At the age of twelve, Charles was sent to Dr Burney's Naval school at Gosport.

His first experience at sea was as a naval cadet aboard the *St. Vincent*, 120 guns, the flagship of the Channel Squadron to which he had been appointed on 5th May 1847. On 1st August that year he wrote to his sister whilst at sea:

'I like being at sea very much, and am quite used to it now. I was only sick one day whilst we were in the Bay of Biscay There is a great deal of difference between the dinners we have now and the dinners we had at Spithead. I do not know if I told you that, when the Queen came on board, when we were at Spithead, we were all presented to her, and the Captain told her all our names as we passed her.'

'You would laugh, I am sure, to see all the desks now. There has been a report that there will be an opportunity for letters soon, so every one scrambles with his desk to get a place at the table.'



Sir W Edward Parry

Later that year, he was appointed to the *Vernon* in the East Indies, returning to England that autumn. His captain, Sir Alexander Milne, found him to be 'very attentive and zealous', and Charles subsequently joined the frigate *Cambrian* under Commodore J. H. Plumridge in which he served for three years on the East India and China station. Whilst visiting Bombay he observed the silver nail ceremony just as was performed for the *Trincomalee* when she was built there. On March 30th, 1849 he writes:

'I went ashore two or three days after we came in to see a very superstitious custom that the ship-builders have here, namely, when any vessel is laid down they have a small silver nail about eight inches long, which they drive into the stern-post, and meanwhile all the men employed about her say prayers and throw some rose-water over everybody there, and give nosegays and cakes away to them. They would not go on building the vessel if they did not drive the nail into her, as they believe they would never finish without her.'

When the *Cambrian* arrived back at Plymouth on the 30th October 1850 Commodore Plumridge wrote the following to Sir Edward:

'Your son, I am happy to say, is one of the very best and most exemplary midshipmen of the Cambrian, and has not only a claim for anything in my power, but of any and all indulgences the service can grant.....I shall be woefully disappointed if he does not make a first-rate officer, for I

believe him to be clever and good.'

On the 31st January 1851 Charles joined captain Frederick aboard the *Amphitrite*, the sister ship of the *Trincomalee*. Sir Edward saw his seventeen year old son off from Spithead, writing to his wife on 1st February:

'I have just returned from the sea-wall, where I have been straining my eyes to catch a last sight of the Amphitrite. After watching her for about an hour and a quarter, knowing that she must go soon, having a fine E.N.E. wind, at length, at a quarter to five, I saw the sails loosed, and at five minutes past five she was fairly under way. I spent that hour and a half in prayer for my precious boy, and when the ship was moving I knelt down on that black stone seat and poured out my whole heart, with strong crying and tears, on his behalf. I felt as if I never knew what prayer was before.'

This was the last time Charles saw his father. For the next five years Charles was on the Pacific station, serving successively in the *Amphitrite*, *Portland* and *Trincomalee*. Charles had very strong Christian principles. As Charles's brother, Edward, writes:

'The act of kneeling for private prayer was at this period almost unknown on ship-board. With what astonishment, then, must his messmates have witnessed, for the first time, Charles Parry kneeling at prayer at his chest before going to bed! And when morning came, and this act was repeated, we can well understand the jeers and scoffs which would reach the ear of the lad learning to 'endure hardness as a good soldier of Christ.'"

When the *Amphitrite* anchored at Valparaíso on 25th March 1853, the *Portland* and *Trincomalee* were already there. The three ships leaving the port together on 12th April 1853, with Charles now on the *Portland*. Charles joined in hymns, prayers and bible readings whilst in dock and wrote:

'According to their custom on board the Trincomalee, at seven o'clock, we went to the gunner's cabin. He is a most truly good person, and an old soldier in Christ's service. There we met two men, both petty officers, who are true Christians, and W., a nice little naval cadet, a great friend of D.'s, and who meets with no ill-feeling from others in the berth, having so good a champion to befriend him should they be so inclined.'

It was whilst on board the *Portland* that an accident occurred which had a great influence on Charles Parry's subsequent life. The entry in his journal for 3rd October 1853 says:

'Last Friday three weeks, the 9th September, whilst skylarking with several of the others at 'sling-the-monkey', on the quarter-deck of the Portland, I received a blow in the right eye, which I felt immediately would cause more than a common black eye, from the feeling I had of a shooting pain in the head, and so giddy was I that it turned me quite sick.

'I made the best of my way into the Commander's (Fairfax Moresby's) cabin, where I bathed it, and found, on the candle being lighted, that I could not tell light from dark even, with the left eye closed. I asked the doctor to have a look at it, and then fainted. After which, I turned into the Commander's bed place, which he most kindly volunteered for my use, as he himself always sleeps in a cot. The doctor applied leeches to my temple, and cold lotions to my eye and head, which subdued the pain in a great measure.'

On the 8th of October, a month after the accident, he was removed to Valparaiso Hospital, where he remained for three months. On the arrival of the *Trincomalee* at Valparaiso, on the 3rd January 1854, the Commander-in-Chief offered him an acting commission as lieutenant on the ship which he accepted. This promotion had the added bonus of his own cabin on board ship for the first time:

'April 10th Though rather small in comparison with others, my cabin is by no means the least comfortable. Somehow or other, it is never dark there in the day-time, so I am always able to read and write. This is a very odd thing; for if the opposite cabin, which has the scuttle similarly placed, ought to be receiving the light, it does not; but by the good sun favours me by looking round corners and shedding plenty of light into mine, and every one tells me it is because he knows I want him! What a comfort a cabin is! To have a private place for retirement and prayer is a great blessing, and is most assuredly a talent given to us, to make good or bad use of.'



Asleep in Cabin

The *Trincomalee*, though a frigate manned by two hundred and fifty men, was without a chaplain. In accordance with the first article of war, divine service was regularly performed by the Captain (Houstoun) once every Sunday, all on board being obliged to attend. Charles was given the task of leading Bible readings with the boys aboard:

'Sunday, April 23rd, 1854 - I commenced with the boys this afternoon, but not without asking God's blessing on my endeavours. I got permission from the first lieutenant to have a screen put up, that the attention of the boys might not be so much taken away by what was going on about the deck. I fear that I am not at all adapted for teaching the boys; but God can make use of the feeblest efforts, and I must try my best to do what I can, with His help. I found it much more difficult than I had expected even, as the very great inattention shown by them, and their readiness and pleasure in taking notice of everything they could see, except their Bibles, is sadly disheartening. The screen is a great thing, as they cannot see much about the deck, and I do hope I may practise patience successfully, and not be led to be hasty with them.'

Lack of attention to religious matters was not only confined to the boys aboard the *Trincomalee*, as the contents of a letter written by Charles to his step-mother whilst at sea on 16th February 1855 reveals:

'The Service Day for the Captain to dine in the gun-room is generally Sunday, by what are called "the good old rules." I have found out that neither our cook nor our steward has attended divine service on Sundays once since the day this ship left England. Two years and six months have passed, and these two men have found an excuse, for the sake of what we call a "heavy dinner", to keep from attending divine service. I have several times thought, "Ought I to sit down to a dinner on Sunday, when I know the light, and sometimes worse than light conversation that is sure to take place for, at least, two and a half hours?" I have, however, come to the conclusion (though I must own, not exactly satisfactory to my little friend inside) that it is a duty belonging to the service, and therefore necessary. I should very much like my father's opinion. If the Captain is at table, his superior age and rank of course make the difference to my being able to put in a word to change the conversation when foolish.'

It was while the *Trincomalee* was docked at Vancouver Island that Charles learnt in September 1855 of his father's death in July 1855, the news reaching him via a friend in the *Amphitrite*. He enters in his journal:

'Friday, September 21st, 1855 - My dearest earthly father is no more! For a long time I have had an irresistible feeling that I never was to see his face again! It is this which has given me such a desire to go home, such a yearning after home.'

The Reverend Edward Cridge of Victoria, (see Summer 2010 Quarterdeck) wrote the following about Charles:

'We had the privilege of having him as a guest for a few days after he heard of the death of his father; his grief was deep and touching, but evidently controlled by a confident hope concerning an honoured parent whom he tenderly loved.'

On 16th October 1855 the *Trincomalee* sailed for Honolulu, Charles having his twenty second birthday during the passage. At Honolulu he took great interest in the effort then being made to provide a Sailors' Home there, contributing to a fancy bazaar for this object the collection of Esquimaux and Indian curiosities he had made during the previous five years.

Charles was left in shore at Acapulco to await the mail steamer for Panama, *en route* to England:

'It was a hard matter leaving a ship where I had spent two such pleasant years with so many kindred spirits. Our last evening together in Mr. C.'s cabin was one to be long remembered. I chose St. John xvii., feeling it to be a suitable subject, when parting from each other, to bear in mind Christ's parting prayer for us to our Father in heaven. It was a pleasant hour we spent together.'

'On Wednesday morning, 9th January 1856, I saw the last of my old shipmates. My heart was full when I said "Good-bye" to them all, and I hurried over the side into the gig, where my traps were already, and went ashore with the captain (Houstoun)- as worthy and excellent a captain as I could wish to sail with.'

Crossing the Isthmus of Panama, Charles reached England on the 16th February, 1856.

After leaving the *Trincomalee*, from April 1856 to March 1857 he was on board the *Excellent* at Portsmouth where after training he gained a first-class gunnery certificate and the same in mathematics. Subsequently he was appointed First Lieutenant on the gun-vessel *Surprise* which saw action in the bombardment of Canton on the 28th and 29th of December 1857. The *Surprise* returned to Plymouth on the 12th April 1860, and in June the same year Charles accepted the post of First Lieutenant aboard the *Bulldog*, a powerful paddlewheel steamship, commissioned for the purpose of surveying the projected course of a deep-sea telegraph to America.

He had subsequent appointments on the Royal yacht, *H M Yacht*, the *Aurora*, and *Duncan*, taking command of the *Cordelia*, a sloop of war in the West Indies in 1867. Whilst on board the *Arethusa* anchored at Naples, Charles developed symptoms of dysentery on Monday 6th October 1868 and died at 3 am the following Saturday at the age of thirty four. His brother Edward wrote:

'Sixteen hours afterwards - a stern and sad necessity - early on Sunday morning, the ensigns of

the British squadron in Naples Bay were at half-mast, and a long procession of men-of-war boats followed the Arethusa's pinnacle to the Custom House stairs, whence the funeral train made its way, through a pitiless storm of rain, to the Protestant Cemetery. With the Union jack for his pall, he was carried by seamen - as a sailor might wish to be borne - to his grave on a foreign shore, not without loving hearts hard at hand.

'While the coffin was being lowered into the earth the pouring rain ceased, and a cheerful streak of sunshine fell across the place where, within view of Vesuvius, Charles Parry's body sleeps in hope.'

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