

LAWRENCE D. HILLS, F.R.H.S.

HORTICULTURAL and AGRICULTURAL JOURNALIST

"Miniature Alpine Gardening."
"Rapid Tomato Ripening."
"The Propagation of Alpines."
"Alpines Without A Garden."
"Alpine Gardening."
"Russian Comfrey."
(Faber & Faber.)

20 CONVENT LANE.

BOCKING,

BRAINTREE.

ESSEX.

26th December 1955

To His Highness The Sultan

Male

Maldivé Islands.

Your Highness,

You are now the only Ruler in the world of a country whose merchant fleet includes square rigged sailing ships, and I am writing as a subject of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain and the Empire which last owned a sailing ship in 1926.

We build great modern ships, but no where else in the world are brigantines built as you build them in the Maldivé Islands. I saw a photograph of one, taken in 1953, and I am writing to find out all I can about your fleet of these vessels.

Almost nothing is known of your country in England or America, and no one knows that you deserve to be as famous for your ships as America is for motor cars or aeroplanes. You may not want tourists, your people may be better off without too much contact with the world of the West, but you are great navigators and ship builders. In the West Indies, the Cayman Islands have built an industry building schooners to be sold as yachts, and if you wanted to, some publicity for your lovely ships might well mean that you could do the same. Selling a few brigantines as training ships or yachts to rich men could build up a useful industry that

would employ your craftsmen and bring wealth to your country, not by altering your people's lives, as oil wells would, but by using the skill that the world has lost.

In England I would write to the Ministry of Information, but I do not know if you have one, so perhaps you would pass this letter to someone who can tell me about your ships. I write for British magazines and those in America and I would like some photographs of your square rigged ships, your brigantines especially and some information on them, how long they are, what they carry, what trades they still sail in, how many men are in the crew and above all when you built your most recent and whether you could still build them and what they cost. I can work this out in dollars or pounds if you give it me in rupees, but allow a bit on top because if by any chance someone wanted to buy he would probably be a bit more awkward to deal with than one of your people buying for himself.

I am also an agent for one of our biggest publishers of books, my task is to find men to write books on unusual subjects. Could you tell me if any of the captains of your ships can write English? Even if he could not write English well we could help him? A book by one of the last sailing ship captains in the world would be read in all countries, and anything on the modern history of your ships would earn anyone on your island a great deal of money.

In presuming to write to you and ask your help I myself am not seeking to make money except by my craft of words, I am writing because I want to know more of your islands and your ships because they are beautiful and few and far away

Please accept my grateful thanks,

Yours respectfully

Lawrence D Hills