

## ART. IV.—WORSHIP ON BOARD SHIP.

LORD BRASSEY writes of a recent visit to the Sailor's Home at Rangoon:

From the Superintendent I heard the story, with which we are painfully familiar, of frequent misconduct on the part of British seamen. Masters of vessels, who visit the Sailor's Home at Rangoon in search of crews, always pick out foreigners. The present state of the mercantile marine in relation to the manning of sailing ships in the foreign trade is most unsatisfactory. . . . It is sad to acknowledge that our superiority can no longer be asserted when we turn from the ships to the seamen.

It is easy to find fault. It is more just, and it may be more profitable, to consider the circumstances that have brought about a state of things which every Englishman deplures. . . . In the coasting trade, in the fisheries, in the great lines of steamers, Englishmen of a creditable type are found. It is to the sailing ships in the foreign trade, where the conditions of life are hardest and the lowest wages are paid, that the residuum has gravitated.

Had Lord Brassey inquired further, he might have found that English firemen in many lines of steamers in the Indian and Pacific Oceans are also sad examples of British Christianity. One of her Majesty's Consuls in the China Seas also assures us that foreign seamen are apt to lose their superior morality after serving a few voyages under the British flag, with the contaminations which it covers; and that the crews of cargo steamers are by no means immaculate. Moreover, it is still said that missions to the heathen, especially in lands bordering on the Indian and Pacific Oceans, are more successful when undertaken inland, than when begun near seaports where the impure, riotous, and prayerless lives of so many British seamen mar Christian teachings and witness against the Christ.

It will be observed that Lord Brassey draws a wide distinction between the Englishmen of a creditable type found in the home trade, and the crews serving in the foreign trade, especially the sailing-ships. The question arises, how is it that creditable Englishmen refuse to serve in the vessels animadverted upon? Men go to sea to win bread for their families at the risk of their lives. But respectable bread-winners cannot afford that those dependent on them for food should be kept out of their earnings

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pretation (*πονηρὸν ἐνταῦθα τὸν διάβολον καλεῖ*) was as old as the second century, and may be seen (1) in the so-called Second Epistle of Clement, (2) in the letter of the churches of Lyons and Vienne. Whether Canon Cook will accept these passages is another question. But it seems probable that Mr. Chase's view is right. Those who have difficulties about the inexactness of the quotations of New Testament books by writers of the second century would do well to study p. 86, where Mr. Chase traces through Chrysostom's works his quotations of one text in St. Luke. The sentence, containing in all fourteen words, appears in at least eight slightly differing forms. "Yet no one disputes that our present Gospels were in Chrysostom's hands."

during the whole period of a slow and distant voyage. So long as working seamen are kept out of their earnings for many months, and sometimes for one or two years, self-respecting men cannot afford to go in long-voyage ships. It is not the amount of wages, but the withholding of the payment to the end of the voyage, which makes it difficult for creditable Englishmen to serve in the foreign-going trade.

But starting with firemen and seamen of the low moral class, who are driven by poverty to serve under such conditions of non-payment, why cannot more be done by the captains and officers during the voyage to raise the moral character of their crews? The army has long been a great reformatory institution. Even the royal navy does much to improve the character of the firemen, artificers, and seamen entering that service. There is no place like an isolated ship on a long voyage for exercising a salutary influence on men, if an active Christian element be present. And if owners, captains, and officers of the British mercantile marine would only emulate the examples of those of Norway and Sweden, there is no reason why this taunt of the moral superiority of foreigners—by which northern Europeans are meant—should be so constantly thrown in our teeth.

It is an old saying in the British mercantile marine, that "there is no God round the two capes," meaning that there is no acknowledgment of God on board ships sailing in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Happily, there are many honourable and praiseworthy exceptions of British merchant ships in which God is honoured by weekly, and oftentimes by daily worship, quite as much as in Scandinavian vessels. The difference in the conditions of the crews in ships where God is worshipped, and in those in which He is not publicly recognised, is such that, even if there were no hereafter at all, it would be an act of humanity to introduce habits of worship on board.

Only those who have served at sea can understand the misery of godless men shut up together for months in a prayerless ship, with nothing but their own thoughts and tongues to distract them, without a moment's privacy morning, noon or night, subject to all the ill-temper and evil passions of unrestrained companions, some sure to be men of vicious character, from whom there is no escaping, with all their selfishness and impure animal life laid bare, and without a leaven of good. Add to this, the worst part of sea-life, the minor ills, which Lord Brassey describes:

There are forms of discomfort more trying than storm and tempest to British crews. To spend months in a stuffy fore-castle, in a temperature ranging from 80 deg. to 90 deg., fed on biscuit and salt junk, with a limited allowance of water, is not a condition leading to contentment.

The misery endured in such prayerless ships is so acutely felt

by sailors that they themselves use a very strong term to describe their own moral sufferings, when they call such a vessel "a h—l afloat."

On the other hand, merchant ships sailing the same seas, under similar outward conditions, but in which God is acknowledged by united worship, either daily or on Sundays, are known as "happy ships." There is no drunkenness, tyranny, nor indiscipline, and much less sickness, proving that godliness suits both worlds. Some of these "religious ships," as they are sometimes called, are, in addition, commanded by God-fearing officers, who are made the means of bringing many of their crews into personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ as the Saviour from their sins. These crews, in their ubiquitous movements from port to port, and from country to country, are witnesses for Christ "unto the uttermost parts of the earth." When in heathen ports they are often active helpers of the Gospel, showing what a nation of missionaries Great Britain might become if a large number of those who sail under the British flag were men of prayer and of earnest devotion to God's service.

That this is no idle dream, we need not quote the customs of united worship habitual in Scandinavian ships, or in British ships of war. The British mercantile marine itself is rich in such examples of united worship and of the domestic happiness and purity which it brings into the forecastles, and that in the very class of foreign-going ships to which Lord Brassey's adverse comments refer.

The late Alexander Balfour, of Liverpool, owned a fleet of sailing ships trading round the Horn. He was one of the few shipowners who did not confine their religious activities to objects on land. He cared for his officers and crews, as a manufacturer might care for his factory hands. And amongst many good and liberal things devised for them at sea, as well as in port, he took care that his ships should be sanctified by prayer and praise, at least on the Lord's day. Discontent, tyranny, oppression, drunkenness, and disobedience were thus banished. There was no difficulty in getting creditable Englishmen to man Alexander Balfour's foreign-going ships. If any of the "residuunt" embarked as part of the crew, they had ceased to be "residuunt" before they reached England again. Speaking at a large assemblage of shipowners, captains, and their crews, to whom he had issued 3,000 invitations to a soiree and conversatione at Liverpool, presided over by the Bishop, Mr. Balfour said :

I have the pleasure of speaking to a great many ships' captains and their wives, and I should most earnestly impress upon them the importance of beginning service on board their vessels, even under difficulties,

from the very next Sunday. "Where there's a will there's a way." What do we find to be the present state of things—say aboard a ship bound for a distant port? The captain may be three months on the voyage, and the men and boys under his command have no opportunity for public worship. When he arrives at his destination, perhaps there is no chaplain and no one to go on board the ship to read to or to address the men, and there may be no services which they can attend. He may be there a couple of months, and he then comes home, his men being again three months without any service or religious meetings. What would be the effect upon us if we were kept for six or eight months without worshipping God? We might be expected to get as hard as iron, and if these men do become so, who is to blame? I feel strongly that these are things that have been neglected too much. I was engaging a shipmaster not long ago, and, having satisfied myself as to his professional capability, I asked, "Are you accustomed to have worship on board your ships?" He said, "No." "Well," I said, "it is a very extraordinary thing. Did you have family worship at home at your father's house?" The man was a Scotchman, from Aberdeenshire, and he answered, "Yes." "And you have been all these years the captain of a ship, and have not had worship on board?" "No," he replied, "I have not." "And how long have you been at sea from beginning to end?" I inquired. "I have been twelve years at sea." "And you have not held or attended service all that time?" "No." I told that man, "If you join this ship, service is to be conducted as an act of discipline while you hold the command." I think this matter of service on ship-board is one at which we should aim and expect a reformation. . . . What has been done in the royal navy, in establishing worship on Sundays, can be done in the mercantile navy if shipowners and shipmasters would but take the matter in hand.

We would venture to point out that Alexander Balfour, godly man that he was, did not insist that his captain should be first a converted man, and then begin to pray; or that he should be assured of his own personal salvation before he sought the Lord in public worship, as some good men insist. Mr. Balfour expressly said: "Service is to be conducted as an act of discipline;" or, as another speaker put it on the same evening: "I remember hearing our good friend and kind host, Mr. Balfour, remark on one occasion that formal services were better than none at all, and, no doubt, often much good may be done in this way." It is an everyday experience that God is present and blesses many souls, in churches and chapels, where there is no reason to suppose that the clergyman or minister is converted. Yet this is one of the objections raised by good people against urging captains in general to restore the ancient custom of the sea of Divine worship on board ship.

But there is another difficulty in the way of Sunday worship, especially in steam-ships, which was thus spoken of by Captain Ward, a leading nautical authority at Liverpool:

We have great difficulties to contend with in regard to Divine service on Sundays, especially when ships are *in harbour*. Would you believe it?—there are *no Sundays* on board ships abroad. We are in such a state of "go-ahead," that we must work our crews on Sundays as well as on other days, and when a ship goes *into port* the work goes on just as usual. I am

now speaking of steam-ships. With sailing-ships it is a much easier matter ; for, as a rule, their captains have Sunday under their control. I can speak of the London ships more particularly ; and when I was going to sea—now some thirty years ago—almost without exception the crews were mustered for Divine service, weather permitting, and the order and regularity with which it was done, I think, could not be beaten even on a man-of-war. I feel certain that if they met with due encouragement, most ship-masters would only be too glad to have services held.

And now a word to ship-owners. They have rules to guide their ship-masters, and if they would only instruct their captains that it was their wish that such services should be held, it would beyond doubt have a most wholesome influence. I remember on one occasion that I sailed from London with a very questionable crew ; but there was one godly man on board, a sailmaker, and his influence was so great that it became as good a crew as anyone could wish for. If such was the influence of one man over a ship's company, how much greater would be the influence of a godly captain or officers ? . . . It seems marvellous that we should have to stand up and advocate the worship of God in the nineteenth century !

There are 38,000 ships flying the British red ensign, and the great majority of their crews are debarred from worshipping God at sea. The miseries incidental to this absence from God are, however, mainly felt by those shut up together for months on long voyages. The crews in the home trade are more frequently in English harbours, where worshipping facilities are sometimes provided for them, and do not suffer from prayerlessness afloat so acutely as those in the foreign-going trade.

All honour to those merchant captains who, of their own volition, without any request or encouragement from bishops or clergymen or ministers, do institute united worship in their ships. Their clear sense of spiritual responsibility towards the souls under their command supplies the lack of interest so generally displayed by the Church in this matter. Some captains, indeed, brought up from boyhood at sea in prayerless ships, in their new-found zeal for God do not always act according to knowledge. But even so, to their own Master they stand or fall, and He is able to keep them from falling. It is no small advantage that, as a rule, with a little tact in its use, the crews are all willing to meet before the throne of grace under the guidance of the Book of Common Prayer. Differing in nationality and creed, the men have more confidence when they see the captain using a book of some sort, in which they can follow his words with their own eyes, and see that he is going straight. Besides, they like responding and hearing their own voices. It is, moreover, the only book for worship which has prayers for those at sea, for sick bunks, for various exigencies of life, and for reverent burial of the dead, in which latter sailors, however thoughtless, are much concerned.

It requires no little courage for a British captain to stand out alone as a worshipper of God, amongst surrounding prayerless-

ness. A captain recently commanding a steamer belonging to the north-east ports, was allowed by his owners to control the Sunday work. Whilst other British crews in foreign ports were discharging or embarking cargoes on Sundays, he ran up to his masthead the blue flag with the flying angel carrying the everlasting gospel in the midst of heaven, showing that he was a Missionary to Seamen Helper, and that as for him and his crew they would serve the Lord, by "resting the Sabbath-day, according to the commandment." His owners were quite willing to bear the loss, if any, of Sunday labour. He also gathered the crew, seamen and firemen, for social worship, when practicable, on week evenings; held a Bible-class on board; encouraged the more devout men to *kneel* in daily prayer in the fore-castle; visited his men when sick; supplied them with reading-matter; and in many ways added to their physical comforts. The owners gained by all this in having a contented, happy crew, who did not care to leave their employ. There was no crime or oppression, and not much sickness, on board; no drunkenness or impurity on shore. But, in the midst of all this, the ship was chartered by British merchants trading in the Indian Seas, from whence Lord Brassey writes. The charterers had control of the whole of the ship's time. They insisted on the crew being worked all Sunday when at anchor, and that the captain should order this unnecessary work. Divine service had to be given up. To read the fourth commandment publicly was felt to be a mockery. In vain the captain remonstrated. The charterers and their agents were inexorable; they must have their pound of flesh. The captain had to choose between his duty to God and his duty to his new masters. The bread of his wife and children hung in the balance, yet he gave up the command and came home. Hundreds of steam-ships were then laid up for lack of freights, and, of course, without officers or crews. For a long period no other command was to be had. He and his family had to eke out a subsistence from his little savings. But eventually his old owners, who valued the services of an able and conscientious captain, were able to give him another command. Meanwhile, if his old crew, handed over body and soul to the charterers, British merchants, and by them stripped of their Christian privileges, should fall away into those godless practices with which Lord Brassey is painfully familiar, who is to blame? Depend upon it, amongst the first persons to declaim against the misconduct of British seamen and to uphold the superiority of foreigners, would be just those British merchants who chartered that ship, and did their worst to make seamen reckless of good.

British seamen are a manufactured article. Some of them are manufactured into the saintliest and noblest of men; others

are manufactured into dissolute and degraded sots. The one set are manipulated by good owners and good officers; the manufacturers of the other set are indifferent employers and officers acting out an evil system. Alter the system, and its product will be altered. This is the experience of a volunteer Missions to Seamen Helper commanding a steam-ship, who writes at sea :

It has pleased the Lord to bring me within His fold, and to make me one of His flock. Oh ! He has wrought a good work in me, and is still working. He has given me grace to become a total abstainer, and also to put away the pipe ; and, what is better, most of my crew have become abstainers—nineteen out of twenty-one. Glorious ! all except two, and the Lord will bring them in before we reach port.

I hoisted the Lord's flag [the Missions to Seamen flag] last Sunday for the first time. A glorious day ! Officers and engineers hearty workers. I gave them the lessons to read. It gives them an interest in the work. . . . I have started extra rations of coffee, so that I may wean our dear lads from England's curse.

Another captain, who has embarked on the manufacture of godly seamen, writes from abroad to a Missions to Seamen chaplain : " We arrived here after a very fine weather passage, and, as you wished, we were enabled to have our services regularly on Wednesday evenings, and twice on Sundays, which were well attended by the crew. And we have great cause to praise Him from Whom all blessings flow, for He has brought us to our destination." Another volunteer Missions to Seamen Helper, in command, writes from abroad :

I dare say you have been wondering if I kept my promise to hold service on board my ship every Sabbath day. I thank God I have, and am thankful to Him for courage to take up my cross ; and I have no cause to repent it. I have had as comfortable a voyage as I ever had, and the men did enjoy the singing. In the trades, all hands used to attend.

Under proper encouragement, British seamen are not backward in witnessing for Christ and doing their part to leave the world better than they found it. A foremast man, a volunteer Missions to Seamen Associate, writes from abroad :

As you say, it is not an easy matter to serve God on board ship, and if I rested entirely on my own strength, I know and feel I should not stand an hour ; but I can truly say, humbly and with all reverence, that I have put my whole trust in God, and have had many happy seasons of prayer and praise on board. I am now sailmaker, and I live with the carpenter in a nice little berth, and every night I have two or three of the crew in there, and sing and pray to the best of my ability. The books you put on board were a great pleasure to us. Many thanks for the tracts ; I read them aloud to the whole crew, and think they made a great impression on several of them.

The perils and dangers of the deep are an awful reality. Out of about 4,000 men who annually die in British merchant ships,

only about 1,000 die from diseases or natural causes. Three-fourths of the deaths at sea would involve an inquest, if there only was a coroner to ask, according to the ancient laws of Oleron, "Who killed them? and unto whom the said ship did belong?" Last winter was very fatal on our western coasts. And amongst the drowned was one of these faithful captains who had been a living witness for Christ on many waters. A Missions to Seamen chaplain reports :

Amongst the valuable lives that have been lost was that of Captain Puxley, one of our Mission Helpers. A conscientious, brave, and God-fearing man who did his duty as a sailor and a Christian—his loss is a great one. Fighting bravely against the storm early in October, his vessel, dragging both anchors, was seen to strike on a rock in the Bristol Channel, too far from shore to render any help possible; and while hundreds of anxious spectators looked on, unable to help, the barque went down, and all hands, including the captain's wife and child, perished. What a comfort to know that his heart was right with God, and that he had also been working as a Mission Helper for the promotion of godly living amongst his men!

In the perilous ventures of the hardy fishermen in the North Sea, the Mission to Seamen flag flies on fourteen fishing-smacks, certifying that their skippers are conducting Divine worship under the guidance of the Missions to Seamen chaplains, thus evidencing to Lord Brassey's assertion, that in the fisheries Englishmen of a creditable type are found. Noble fellows many of them are, who are a credit to Christianity.

We are far from joining in the ancient croak that "the former days were better than these." When the Queen began her glorious reign, matters were much worse in the mercantile marine; many merchant captains and officers were drunken and incompetent. The system of paying wages was the fruitful parent of every disgusting vice, giving rise to crimping, ruffianism, and unspeakable immoralities. The food, water and accommodation were not legally supervised, and often hardly fit for the lower animals. There were no checks on the brutality and tyranny of godless captains and mates. Merchant seamen on the high seas were outside the protection of law, and might be drowned with impunity, no coroner inquiring, "Who killed them?" Ships were rarely visited by a clergyman. The forerunner of the Missions to Seamen was working afloat as a solitary volunteer clergyman. In very few vessels was there any public worship. Kneeling in the forecables was unknown. God seemed to be cast out of many British merchant ships.

Much of this is happily altered in this Jubilee year of our gracious Queen. But there are large companies, with thousands of shareholders, who take no interest in the moral and spiritual welfare of their crews, in whose ships there is no public acknowledgment of Almighty God, and who never give a sixpence



towards making spiritual provision for their men. But in spite of such heartless speculators, other owners are striving to do their duty to their crews. And the Church on shore is arousing itself to care for souls upon the seas. Thrifty seamen cared for their families last year by remitting home £190,628 of their wages, besides depositing £70,000 in the Seamen's Savings Bank. 61,259 seamen, fishermen and bargemen became total abstaining members of the Missions to Seamen Branch of the Church of England Temperance Society, in the last eight years; whilst 40,270 seamen bought Bibles and Prayer-books from the Missions to Seamen chaplains alone in the last seven years. And 752 captains, officers and seamen are striving to promote godly living amongst their comrades by acting as the Missions to Seamen Helpers or Associates on board their ships. And the voice of prayer and praise rises from every ocean to the Lord God of Hosts, of land and sea. In some vessels men, seeking after God, administer to themselves the Lord's Supper, as they read it in their Bibles, showing at least a desire after God, whether rightly or wrongly expressed.

These are at least symptoms that all seamen are not given over to the service of the devil; and that where decent spiritual provision is made for those who live on the waters, they are willing to accept its aid, and God is present to bless it. The fault—the grave fault—for the frequent misconduct on the part of so many British crews lies in the main with their employers, with their officers, and with the system, which might easily be amended. The prayerless condition of many ships is clearly not the fault of the unfortunate crews. The lack of sympathy between the employer, the captain and the crew, is certainly not due to the seamen alone. These strifes and divisions do not exist where there is a mutual recognition on board the ship of Almighty God, of His Word, of His day, and of His worship. It is God Who maketh men to be of one mind in a house. The crew are almost helpless in this matter. The responsibility lies with those above them, who should not forget that man is a trinity, consisting not only of body and of mind, but also of soul. Let those merchants, and employers, and officers who are more ready to lift the finger of scorn against British seamen than to lift a little finger to raise them out of the mire, take Lord Brassey's sensible words to heart, and remember that "It is easy to find fault. It is more just, and it may be more profitable, to consider the circumstances which have brought about a state of things which every Englishman deploras."

WM. DAWSON.

