"They Sail The Seven Seas"

By Lois J. Stucky

The "romance of the sea" captivated the heart of the Irish teenager. He spent hours in the docklands of his home city, Dublin, fascinated by the ships' "bridges and wheelhouses, with weather-beaten seamen tending ropes, and winces swinging cargos ashore."

As soon as he could, young Walter began approaching ships' captains for a seaman's job. Though his first efforts failed, he persisted. Once he barely missed being hired aboard the schooner, "The Antelope." This turned out to be fortunate for him for it later ran aground and was wrecked.

Eventually, writes Walter Burrell, he was hired to sail to Norway. After seven more years passed he found himself seeing in person strange and interesting places about which he had only read or heard previously: Suez, the Red Sea, Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, etc..

He was a godless young seaman, and he says of himself, "The bars of the world took my money as I traveled the world and the paths of sin. But like broken cisterns, the waters failed."

God had a far higher purpose for the life of Walter Burrell. Today he runs zealously from ship to ship in harbors of Ireland, up and down gangways, seeking seamen to come to the Gospel services at the church. Nine big seamen trying to squeeze into his car prove too much, so he makes two trips to the service. At times he and his wife are able to extend the hospitality of their home, especially over holidays when the hearts of seamen turn toward home.

Walter stops to talk to girls who roam the dockyards presenting strong temptation to seamen who are long months from stable influences of a good home. Through his efforts, some of these girls find the reality of Calvary and leave such a life for a Christian marriage, home and family. Sadly, others go into an early grave, smitten down by AIDS. But to the end, if possible, Walter and his wife, Mary, offer the comfort of the redeeming Gospel.

Bitterly cold mornings, rain, sleet and snow sweeping the docklands, making the gangways treacherous, do not stop him from sharing the Gospel. Ridiculing laughter, calling the Bible a "fairy story," refusing the literature he kindly offers, do not stop him. He realizes he is grappling with men who are blinded (2 Cor. 4:4).

From different Christian organizations he receives Gospel literature in many languages. Whether the ships come from Belgium, Germany, Sweden, Holland, France, Russia, Poland, Greece, Iceland, the West Indies, South America, etc., he is prepared to share the Gospel through the printed page. Long hours at sea afford good opportunity for the reading and pondering of this literature.

Seamen need to ponder carefully about eternity. Mr. Burrell tells us that each year hundreds

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of ships are pulled beneath the cruel seas and all lives aboard may be suddenly lost. The riskiness of the seaman's life on uncertain seas, the ferocity of storms sometimes encountered speak loud and clear to those who have ears to hear, "Prepare to meet thy God!"

For about twenty years Mr. Burrell has been receiving Herald of His Coming literature to share aboard ships, and he tells us, as he thanks us for sending the papers to him, "They sail the seven seas, to all nations!"

We are grateful to God for the wonderful privilege to co-labor with zealous Christians like Walter and Mary. There are other dock missionaries on the Herald mailing list as well, who place Herald literature on ships, ships which may sail to and from countries "closed" to the Gospel. In some cases the literature may end up in the homes of the seamen where families have not heard the Gospel. One seaman saved becomes a missionary to fellow seamen and to home folk.

We think of Fred Lovell in Barbados, who was a seaman reading and supporting and distributing Herald of His Coming literature for many years as he worked aboard ship. Now retired from the ship, he meets many seamen with Gospel literature as their vessels dock in Barbados. Who better than those who have spent years at sea know the opportunities, the needs, the lonely times aboard these vessels which are cut off for months from the normal life to which most of us are accustomed. Thank God for those with a burden to give the Gospel to seamen.

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