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Among the Deep-sea Fishermen.

(Dr. Wilfred T. Grenfell, in the 'Outlook.')

PART I.

In 1883, while I was studying medicine at the London Hospital in Whitechapel, I was attracted by a huge crowd going into a large tent in the slums of Stepney. There was singing going on inside, and curiosity led me in.

As I left with the crowd, I came to the conclusion that my religious life was a humbug. I vowed in future that I would either give it up, or make it real. It was obviously not a thing to be played with.

I was then playing on several athletic teams, and confess that the idea of a sneer and a cold shoulder had no attractions for me, and it had never occurred to me that popularity might be too dearly paid for at the price of my own independence.

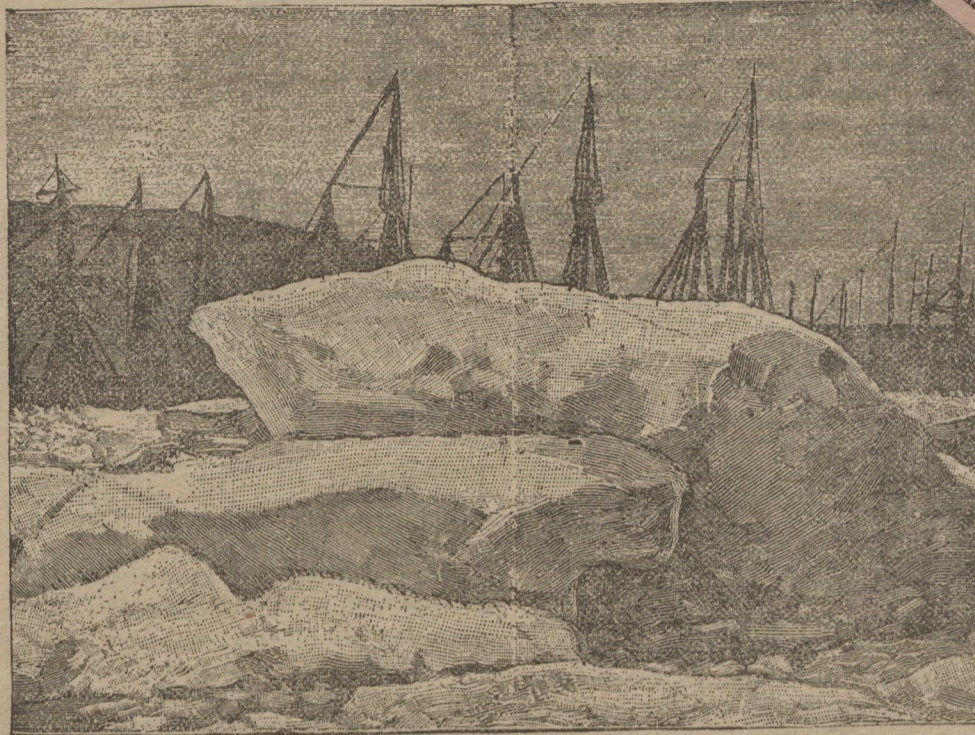
Some time later I heard that one of England's famous cricketers, whose athletic distinctions I greatly admired, Mr. J. E. K. Studd, was going to speak in the neighborhood, and I went to hear him. Seated all in front of me there were two or three rows of boys from a training-ship, all dressed in the same uniform. At the end of his speech, Mr. Studd invited anyone who was not ashamed to confess that Christ was his Master for this life, rather than a kind of insurance ticket for the next world, to stand up. I was both ashamed and surprised to find that I was afraid to stand up. I did not know I was afraid of anything. One boy out of all this large number rose to his feet. I knew pretty well what that meant for him, so I decided to back him up and do the same. . . .

With this theological outfit, I started on my missionary career.

My medical course being finished, I began to cast about for some way in which I could satisfy the aspirations of a young medical man and combine it with a desire for adventure and definite Christian work. Sir Frederick Travers, the famous surgeon, also a daring sailor and master mariner, who had twice helped us at our camps, and for whom I had been doing the work of an 'interne' at the London Hospital, suggested my seeing if a doctor could live at sea among the deep-sea fishermen on one of the vessels of the Society of which he was a member of the council. Work in the London docks had made me familiar with the sailing vessels that one associated with 'deep sea' voyages, and I innocently went to the east coast expecting a two-thousand-ton vessel. Only a fear for my reputation prevented my backing out of it when I stepped aboard a fishing smack of sixty tons burden—about the size of a canal barge.

The idea of the Mission was to preach the Gospel to these men of the sea, whose inclinations did not lead them to prayer meetings when, for a few days, after months at sea, they patronized the land. Before one of their smacks, on arriving in port, had heard the last of her anchor-chain running through the hawse pipe, someone was over the rail—and that someone was not a missionary.

The outlook for success in a 'Mission' was not very encouraging. Generous prophets



WINTER IN NEWFOUNDLAND HARBOR.

predicted a three months' existence when a small smack was hired by a few independent laymen, and was sent to sea with a net alongside to help her to maintain herself. She had no missionary on board, except the skipper, whose best qualification was that he had been turned out of his own vessel because he had refused to fish on Sundays, though he was a well-known successful fisherman. He had preferred to walk about on the quay, and see his children hungry, to surrendering his principles and doing that which he believed to be wrong. There were not many such men in the fleets in those days. To encourage him, the necessary qualification for success was engraved on his wheel: 'Jesus said, Follow Me. . . . and I will make you fishers of men.' To solve the problem of fishing on Sundays, he was told he must catch more fish in six days than anyone else did in seven—which he did, and that this is possible twenty years' experience of many Mission fishing boats has never failed to confirm.

The skipper's first sermon was preached in this wise: The admiral of the fleet and three burly skippers had come aboard to inspect the new arrival, and had given it as their solemn opinion that what fishermen wanted was not 'this 'ere cant, but more whiskey.' For a fisherman is always dry inside, if he is wet out. The skipper got them below, showed them the cheerful bright cabin, treated them to the most generous pot of tea that they had had for a long time, and then produced four long, well-knitted, and warm mufflers.

'Look yere, Joe,' he said to the admiral, 'do y' see them 'ere mufflers?'

The admiral took them and overhauled them. 'What do they cost, Bill?' he said.

'If ye like 'em, I'll give 'em ter ye, on one corn-dishion.'

'What's that?' said the Admiral.

'W'y, that ye'll admit there is love in 'em, fer the ladies as knit them 'ere mufflers never seed yer, did they?'

'That's right,' said the men.

'W'y, then, they must 'ave loved yer to send yer these mufflers.'

'That's right,' they all chimed in.

'Well, then, there ye are—take 'em.'

The four men took the mufflers, and thanked the skipper, whereupon he replied, 'Ow much more must Jesus Christ 'ave loved yer, when 'e gave 'imself for yer!'

If sermons are to be valued by their success, this was a great sermon, for three men not only admitted it as a theory, but before leaving the ship that night, after tears had stained those bronzed cheeks, to which they had been foreign for many a year, they decided to try and return that love, and to the day of his death Joe Quester, admiral of the 'Short Blue Fleet,' was an effective missionary among his admiring followers.

There seems to be a love of music in all those who do business in great waters, and this has been turned to good account in attracting men to the Mission vessels. I have heard the solitary watch, as he jumped up and down by the mast during the long hours of a wintry night, while the wind was howling through the cordage, and every now and then the top of some watery mountain struck the ship and left her shivering like an aspen, singing to himself, hour after hour.

The men love getting together for singing. When the bulkheads between the cabins were removed, and the large hold thus made was crowded with men gathered round the rolling harmonium, balancing themselves on seats made of fish-boxes, their stentorian voices raised a paean of praise, which did not jar on one's ears, though some did not know the tune, and, unwilling to be left out, were impressing the nearest tune they did know into the service.

Cheerful reading matter, especially pictures which all can read, was an attraction to the men, and so was always kept on the Mission ship. Checkers, or draughts, is a great fishermen's game. They have regular 'checker tournaments' and 'checker clubs,' so these in plenty and other simple games were provided