

"I want to speak to you, sir." I expressed my willingness to talk with him.

"I am very miserable, sir, and I thought as perhaps you wouldn't mind me telling you something about myself, sir."

I encouraged his confidence. He told me he had a religious wife. She was a Methodist. He knew she was praying for him. Often had the thought of her prayers annoyed him in his wickedness, but now he felt so miserable that he did not know what to do. He sketched for me his life in dark, sad colours. He did not spare himself. "I want now to be a Christian, sir, like my wife, that when I go home, I shall make her happy as she has never been before." Shrouded by the darkness, we conversed together of the things that belonged to eternal life. I pointed him to the Saviour, who would cast none out who came to Him. I found, in conversation, that my friend Tandy, his mate, was also in deep concern about his soul. I arranged to meet them both in the bo's'n's state-room after next evening's service.

On entering the state-room as arranged, there were not only the bo's'n and his mate, but a boy of thirteen or fourteen years of age, each with a Bible before him. It was explained apologetically to me, by the Dutchman, that he and this boy had been rather "chummy" for some time, and that they had been trying to have prayer together for some nights past; and that he would like the lad to get good as well as himself. I willingly and joyfully assented to his presence. Then I had to hear Tandy's story. In a word it was this: He had only been married three weeks when he started on this trip. He described himself as fearing neither God, man, nor the devil. My prayers for the dear ones left behind had drawn out his sympathy, and now, like the bo's'n, he would like to go home a Christian. We had a happy conference together for over an hour. I read with them, prayed with and for them, and left the fo'c'stle with a grateful heart, that God was using a feeble instrumentality to draw hearts to Himself.

The constituency of inquirers slowly increased, until I was acquainted with the outlines of the personal history of half the crew.

The work was not confined to the crew. Standing on the bridge at night, a conversation would be begun by the officer on the watch, revealing that interest in "The Gospel Afloat" had extended to the superior officers of the ship. Many a confidence was imparted to me in these dark nights, and many a resolve expressed to lead a different life. How near God was! The dark yet star-lit sky, the solemn sea, the impressive silence, combined to make these scenes sacred. The fellowship on the bridge and the meetings for prayer in the officers' quarters can never be forgotten. One officer I must here specialize. He was the third

officer—a gentlemanly young fellow, of good family and education. He was a great favourite with the passengers and crew. The "old, old story" touched his heart, and drew him into close fellowship with me. At his request I frequently visited his state-room; and kneeling at the same camp-stool, with hand clasping hand, we often enjoyed sweet fellowship at the throne. After we parted at Liverpool, I never heard from him again. He had to make a voyage in a sailing ship to qualify for a master's certificate. Whispers have reached me of the wreck of his ship—true or not I cannot tell. The possibility but adds truth to our short fellowship in the Gospel.

May the seed cast under such impressive conditions yet appear in harvest form to the glory of God!

A difficulty presented itself in the scarcity of Bibles in the fo'c'stle. Out of a crew of fifty-one, there were only four Bibles and one prayer book. This difficulty presented itself to me as we were nearing Malta. I laid the matter before the captain, and suggested that he and I should join in purchasing Bibles for the crew. I was pleased with the readiness with which he responded. We were not, however, allowed to enjoy a monopoly. Several of the passengers insisted on helping in the good work. Sufficient money was easily raised before we anchored in Valetta Harbour. It was Saturday afternoon when we went ashore to see the city, and make our important purchase. After getting rid of that Maltese plague—self-invited guides—we strolled down the principal street, the Strada Reale, in search of the Bible Society's depôt. Failing to find it, we inquired. With a significant shrug, our informant answered: "The priests have done for that." How the priests had managed that piece of work, which we knew would be congenial work, we did not learn; but, sure enough, the depôt had ceased to exist. On the following day, after returning from service in the Scotch Church, we found a way out of our difficulty. An agent of the Seamen's Mission was on board distributing tracts to the men. To him I stated the case. Very kindly he offered to sell me all he had, and taking his mission boat, with its snow-white awning, he was soon back with a large parcel of Bibles. The "blue peter" was flying at the fore. As I should have no other opportunity till we reached Smyrna, I therefore effected the purchase of fifty-one Bibles on the Sunday afternoon, without the slightest consciousness of having broken the fourth commandment. There were no suggestions of Sabbath around. The market on the quay was in full operation, and Maltese "pack men" were busily trying to seduce our lady passengers into purchases of lace and jewellery.

From the missionary to the seamen I gathered much information. He drew a sad picture of the religious condition of Malta. It was overrun with