

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

CHRISTIAN WORK IN ITALY.—III.

HARBOUR MISSIONS IN MEDITERRANEAN PORTS.

There is perhaps no class of men who more need sympathy and help from their fellows than sailors, especially those "before the mast." The merchant service of all nations is recruited, for the most part, from the lowest type of men—the thriftless and immoral—men unaccustomed to control their passions—many of them alone in the world, without a friend, without ambition, without even hope. Their life at sea, too, is always a hard one; they know nothing of home life, and the Sabbath to them brings no cessation of labour. Even when they are treated as human beings, which is far from being always the case, they are constantly exposed to the dangers of the deep, to sufferings and to death in its most terrible forms, and yet it is only within a comparatively few years that any one thought of these poor men, or made any effort to alleviate their physical and moral condition, or to minister to their spiritual necessities. In 1818 attention was first called to the need which existed for doing something to ameliorate the condition of British sailors, and in that year was organized the

BRITISH AND FOREIGN SEAMEN'S SOCIETY,

a society which has been the means of conferring immense benefits not only on sailors themselves—mentally, morally and spiritually—but on shipowners, underwriters and on all "who go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters." There are now some twenty-nine stations in England where this society is actively carrying on work on behalf of sailors, while in connection with it are similar societies at Antwerp, Rotterdam, Hamburg, and many other European ports. My object at present, however, is to give some information in regard to work in some harbours on the Mediterranean, beginning with

ALEXANDRIA.

The Mediterranean, as is well-known, was the birth place of mercantile navies, as of commercial, colonizing and christianizing forces generally; and from its geographical position, it must ever be a great centre of shipping enterprise. And here again it was the British Society which took the initiative, in trying to improve the condition of the sailors who frequent the harbours of the "Great Sea." In 1854 a "Bethel" flag was given for use in the port of Alexandria, and in 1859 the Rev. William Gooby was sent, at the expense of this society, to be the first missionary to the sailors of this ancient seaport. From that time the mission began to develop rapidly, and has proved to be a great light in a dark land. The Pacha of Egypt being asked for a more suitable vessel in which to meet with the sailors, at once replied that although a Mohammedan, he was no bigot, and was always ready to help forward anything likely to do good. An iron ship was found and fitted up at an expense to the Pacha of £500. As the result of this mission, I mention only the fact that a young sailor here first received those religious impressions which led ultimately to his becoming the active and efficient secretary of the B. and F. Sailors' Society, whose name is now favourably known in almost every great harbour of the civilized world. During the burning and bombardment of Alexandria last year, the "Bethel" remained uninjured though the Society's depot in the town was burned.

MALTA

is the place of call for all outward and homeward-bound vessels, more than 4,000 touching at its harbours in the course of the year. Captain Stephens during the last fifteen years made 18,717 visits to ships, conversing with the sailors, selling 2,401 Bibles and Testaments, and giving away 14,651 Gospels in various languages. He has now a steam launch in which he sails from port to port and which greatly increases his opportunities of usefulness, and facilitates the good work in which he is engaged. At

NAPLES

Mr. Burrows labours with great assiduity and success, everyone testifying to the great improvement in recent years amongst the sailors who frequent the harbour, as regards temperance and morality. There is also an international hospital here in which sailors are cared for with great skill and tenderness by an able physician and an English directress—both of whom

do their utmost to make the house as much like a home as possible.

The saloon of the mission ship here is the rendezvous for sailors at all times, and particularly at Christmas when it is made one of the happiest and merriest spots in Naples. The chapel and reading-room are then prettily decorated with flowers and illuminated Scripture texts. The tables are spread with refreshments including tea, bread and butter and immense *pannidi milano* as a substitute for Christmas cake. Along with the sailors meet the English and other foreign residents of the city, and a pleasant time they have, the programme consisting of songs and readings and short addresses, the sailors contributing the best part of the evening's amusement. The meetings on these occasions are models of denominational and international unity, ministers of all sects, and people of all countries, testifying by their presence, to their interest in the work in which Mr. Burrows and his assistants are engaged. To the support of this mission, the American Seamen's Society contributes largely.

LEGHORN.

The Rev. Dr. Stewart of the Free Church of Scotland has laboured here for thirty-eight years, in advancing the cause of the Gospel in Italy. His work on behalf of Italian missions is well known; but it is less known that during all these years he has done what he could for the sailors, visiting the port of Leghorn, and that, towards this work, beset for want of appliances with many difficulties, he has ever cherished a peculiar and loving interest. The success of the floating Bethels at Genoa and Naples has suggested to the friends of Dr. S. the idea of presenting him with a similar one for Leghorn, and funds for this purpose are at present being raised. They believe that in this way, they will fittingly testify their appreciation of a life of rare devotion, and by the "Stewart Testimonial Fund," will aid and consolidate a most useful work amongst the sailors who are in the habit of visiting Leghorn. This brings me to

GENOA

which, according to captains who have been round the world, possesses the handsomest and most commodious seamen's chapel afloat. Genoa, through the opening of the St. Gothard Tunnel has become the most convenient port of transit for goods to and from Switzerland and the south of Germany. Its geographical position is favourable to trade between the Levant, the south of Russia and central Europe—and great efforts are being made to provide increased accommodation for shipping and commerce in the port, for the improvement of which the late Duke of Galliera left twenty million francs. The harbour consists of a semi-circular bay about two miles in circumference, which is protected by two long piers, on which are placed lighthouses, one of which rises more than 400 feet above the sea-level. When the moles in process of construction are completed, the largest ships will be able to approach the quays and unload without the aid of lighters. In the inner harbour is moored the

"CALEDONIA"

the new floating chapel which was opened for service on the first January, 1882, and which forms a most comfortable meeting place for sailors of all nationalities. This mission was begun in 1872 by the Rev. Donald Miller, the resident minister of the Free Church of Scotland—a man of great administrative capacity who speaks English and Italian with equal facility, and who has shown himself the friend of every movement calculated to promote the spiritual interests of Italy his adopted country. The Scotch Church, 4 Via Peschiera, built under his superintendence, is a model of beauty and taste. The "Caledonia" was also constructed under his watchful eye, at Sestri near Genoa, and has proved in every sense a complete success. The extreme length of the ship, which is rectangular in form, is seventy-six feet, and the extreme breadth twenty-six feet—the cost being £1,800 sterling, which was all raised by Mr. Miller's personal exertions. At the stern are two comfortable rooms with bookcases and other conveniences—one for Mr. Jones the English missionary, the other for Sig. Delfino, the Italian colporteur. Next to these is the main hall which is capable of seating 150 men—a moveable partition at the other end of this hall divides it from the sailors' reading-room which is large enough to seat fifty men; and here nightly sailors come to read, a library of selected books being provided for their use,

as well as several monthly and other periodicals; pens, ink and paper are also placed at their disposal in case they wish to write letters—a great boon for men who have no rooms in the ships, nor any conveniences for writing. No wonder a young man remarked one night: "my poor old mother would not have to complain of my neglect if now and then I had a place like this to write in." I was told that occasionally the reading-room is so full that with common consent they adjourn to the chapel and have service. On other occasions Mr. Jones asks them to join in praise and prayer before separating. "This is far better," said a Scotch sailor one night, "than going ashore and getting drunk." The attendance at the

SUNDAY SERVICES

varies from twenty to eighty according to the number of ships in port and the state of the weather. On these occasions mission boats go round to gather the men. I was present lately at two successive Sunday evening services—Mr. Jones preaching on one occasion and Mr. Miller on the other. The attendance was good and the singing excellent. Mr. Jones, who had been a sailor himself, knows the peculiar trials and difficulties against which sailors have to contend and in what language to address them. He is quite enthusiastic, and spends his whole time in going about amongst the English ships in the harbour, and in reading and conversing with the sailors, and in this way prepares them for visiting the Bethel. The weather during the past winter was very inclement, still the attendance on Sunday evenings was 4,929. The previous year the number had been 6,309. Mr. Jones has also a weekly Temperance meeting, and in the course of the last year 210 men signed the pledge.

THE COLPORTEUR

is occupied principally in selling Bibles and Testaments and other books in different languages. While doing so aboard the emigrant ships, he is often called upon to combat opposition in the form of superstition and bigotry or scepticism and profanity. He has occasionally also to engage in discussions with priests in presence of large groups of passengers—to meet objections to Diodati's version of the Scriptures—to see Bibles torn up or thrown overboard. But he has also opportunities of reading the Bible and of holding profitable conversations with well-disposed listeners. He visited last year more than 13,000 emigrants, and to some of them made sales of the Bible and other books.

On most of the small coasting vessels Sig. Delfino is always sure of a welcome; and for nearly ten years the crews of these boats have listened to his readings and comments on portions of the Bible. Many of these sailors he considers to be really Christians, though they have not the courage always to avow it before others. By patience and perseverance which are greatly needed in such work, he has won the confidence of many of the dock labourers who were once his greatest opponents, often insulting him and throwing lumps of coal at him—now they come to him for books, for conversation, and even for advice in regard to family troubles. Being gifted with the faculty of turning all conversations to religious subjects, he has occasions daily of witnessing for Christ amongst men who pride themselves in being careless, sceptical and profane, so that in the midst of much that is discouraging there are not wanting proofs that his testimony to the truth has been instrumental in leading some poor erring ones to the cross.

Unhappily, there are too many sailors who still disgrace themselves and their country by vicious conduct; but the contrast between the present state of things on shipboard, and that which existed fifty or even thirty years ago is very striking. A chaplain to seamen recently stated that "wickedness of every kind was then the rule. Officers and men, with few exceptions, threw off all restraint and abandoned themselves to work iniquity with greediness. From the admiral to the afterguard, from the captain to the cook, all were, as a rule, in the same condemnation. Drunkenness abounded: blasphemy, impurity and insubordination were prevalent. It was almost as much as a man's life was worth to be found engaged in any religious service, or to be suspected even of having any regard for his soul's welfare. It was not believed that a man could be a Christian and a sailor at the same time. Indeed a true description of the condition of seamen in those days would be unfit for general reading." Happily now the consistent Christian, the man who has the courage to reprove sin in the fore-castle,