

hindrance to the others, I said: "I don't want to interfere with any man's pleasures; you can smoke and listen too." Thus reassured, the bulk of them came near, and lay on the deck or sat on the hatch around me. I reminded them that we were to be in the same ship for many weeks together, and, as we should always be ready to help one another, I was anxious to do them what little good I could. We were all away from home; our dear ones were far away from us; we were in common conditions of danger; brought hourly face to face with solemn evidences of the Creator; we might surely spend a few moments together in talking about God, and in talking with God for those we had left behind. "Are you willing," I asked, "that I take up a quarter of an hour of your leisure to read God's Word to you?" "Aye, aye, sir," was the fairly-general response. I read the story of the Prodigal Son, and applied it in the simplest and most practical way. On concluding my address, I asked permission to pray. The same ready response came. Smoking ceased, and caps were doffed as I rose to pray. As I commended the ship and its living freight to God, our wives and children and friends to the care of our faithful Father, there was solemn silence, broken only by the noise of the engines, and the splash of the waves.

The night, the sudden Mediterranean night, had stolen upon us before our little service was done. The crimson horizon cast a weird light upon the scene, and added to its solemnity. Before we separated, I made the proposition to come every evening, if they would consent to forfeit a quarter of an hour of their evening's leisure. To this they readily, and with acclamation, agreed. Their hearty "Good-night, sir," assured me, that some little progress had been made in reaching the susceptible heart of "poor Jack"; and as I heard the shrill whistle of the bo's'n arranging the watches for the night, I felt that they would not be less faithful to their trust because of the little service which had preceded work.

The "dog watch services" became, henceforward, an institution of the ship. The second night opened up a pleasant surprise for me. On reaching the forward hatch, I found that sundry preparations had been made for the service. Seats had been improvised out of planks, and formed three sides of a square—my camp-stool being placed in the centre. Sandy, whose good-will I had evidently secured, announced to the occupants of the fo'c'stle the commencement of our service. Out they came, and, occupying the seats provided, formed a most respectful congregation. Distributing hymn-books among the men, we commenced our services with singing. It was singing! The deep bass from those broad-chested sailors rolled through the ship from fo'c'stle to the saloon. It brought the officers in a body to the

bridge, and the passengers from their state-rooms, forming a large and most respectable auditory.

This order of things continued as long as the weather permitted. After a hot day, with the thermometer at ninety degrees in the shade, it was pleasant in the cool of the evening, before the copious dews began to fall, to meet thus, and offer our evening sacrifice. But calm gave place to storm, and our conditions of worship became impossible. With a ship plunging, rolling in a stormy sea, and taking in tons of water almost at every pitch, the open deck was no place for a service. But the earnestness of the seamen was tested by the determination not (as they said) "to be done out of their service by a breeze of wind." By dint of no inconsiderable labour in removing of spare stores in chain and cable from the fo'c'stle, they fitted up what they called "the church in the fo'c'stle." The arrangements were of a rather precarious character, as they often proved. A heavier lurch than usual would overturn their improvised forms, and roll a dozen men occasionally on the floor. It was often precarious for me. With all the sea legs possible for a landsman, in time of prayer I would be rolled over in a most undignified manner. It was all taken as a matter of course, and nothing like a jest found its place in our worship. "The church in the fo'c'stle!"—it was a holy place. The sound of many waters—now loud as a thunder-peal, drowning all other sounds, now hushed into a moment's calm—impressed each meeting with a deep solemnity. How near one felt to God in these wild nights! How grand it seemed as human voices and the storm's hoarse roar mingled in one song of praise! It gave the old words a new form:

Jesus, where'er Thy people meet,
There they behold Thy mercy-seat;
Where'er they seek Thee, Thou art found,
And every place is hallowed ground.

During a fortnight's anchorage in Smyrna Bay, with the city before us, nestling on the slope of Mount Pagus, and with the sites of the churches in Asia sufficiently near for purposes of reference, I gave the crew short lectures on the "Seven Churches." At the close of the course I was told that it was incomplete, for there were eight churches in Asia—the eighth being "the church in the fo'c'stle." The "eighth," to them, was of more importance than all the others—it was their own.

Many a letter from distant seas have I received from these men, full of tender mention of that rough church and simple service—not a few of them dating their change of life from the fo'c'stle service, and all expressing deep longings for some kindred privilege in their present spheres.

(To be continued.)