

## THE CHURCH ON THE SEA.

OVER twelve years have passed by since the Mission to Deep-Sea Fishermen was organized for the purpose of aiding and ministering to the physical and spiritual necessities of thousands of British fishermen and lads engaged in the North Sea fishing trade. Of the blessings which the mission has borne, and the results witnessed, the most gratifying statements are issued.

In earlier days these hardy "toilers of the sea," were a totally neglected class. Unbefriended and exposed to the rigors of the wild North Sea Storms, they suffered alone, without a helping hand being stretched out for their relief. Happier surroundings now attend them; and, amid the pursuit of their hazardous calling, the mission has proved a Heaven-sent benefactor.

At the outset of the philanthropic undertaking there was some misgiving that the peculiarities of the men's occupation, and their isolation, would be almost insurmountable obstacles, and then again there was the difficulty of grappling with notoriously reckless groups of men. Fearless before peril, and hardened, for the most part, in life, these seekers after the harvest of the sea were not the likeliest characters to be reclaimed. With this knowledge, notwithstanding, the first missionaries on their ocean pilgrimages were devoted men, and had the joy eventually, with the help of the good hand of God, in laying the foundation, building up, and establishing the "Church on the Sea." In some degree they have seen the fulfilment of the promise "The abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee," in an unexpected form.

The fishermen, some twenty thousand in number, are absent from the port and their homes for eight weeks at a time, irrespective of the state of the weather, and after this spell of toil they return for a week's rest and fresh outfit. Evils of many kinds formerly befel them, and very scanty were the means of alleviation. Even the influenza, with its devastating attacks, followed them out to sea, and disabled one of the mission ships.

In some respects the fight with the Dutch "copers" has been the most prolonged and arduous. This style of craft cruised to and fro among the men tempting them with bad drink, adulterated tobacco, and the vilest literature. Gradually this solitary visitor and agent of mischief in olden times, which had a disastrous monopoly, has been pretty well beaten and driven from the field. In winning the victory over the Dutch "coper" the mission has been generously seconded by the British Government allowing the men to have tobacco out of bond free of duty, and thus underselling the Dutch "bird of prey."

Very varied were the services of the mission ships, some eleven in number. Seven of these are mission vessels proper, and the remaining four are utilized for hospital use. In a measure the mission might be called the gospel of splints and bandages, inasmuch as the bearer of these are aware that in relieving the bodies of the men they are employing the best agency by which to touch their hearts. Happily, the endeavors to benefit and succour the fishermen are growingly appreciated. The hospital ships carry a fully trained doctor and all conveniences for the treatment of the sick and wounded. An idea of the frequency of accident may be gathered from the report that in the course of one year 8,300 medical and surgical patients were received and treated.

Except in cases which were not of a serious character and with which the captains of the

mission snips could deal, the man dangerously hurt was transferred to the hospital ship, and another man was sent to do his work. On the seven mission ships, which all took part in the fishing, the skippers in charge were able to render first aid to the injured, besides conducting religious gatherings. Of course, periods occur when the sea is unruffled, and the spectator finds a charm in the divers hues which play o'er the deep in the fantastic shadows of travelling clouds on its bosom, or in catching the musical sweetness "of its unrhymed lyric lines." Nevertheless, the life is checkered, and fraught with manifold perils.

It is startling to learn that on an average annually two hundred and seventy-eight of the fishermen perish on the wide, watery stage, eight of which number die from natural causes, and upwards of two hundred and seventy are cut off by wrecks and casualties. Many are the tragic stories told, when vessels return with flags at half mast, of furious gales, and of ships

"That were hailed,

And sent no answer back again."

One of the most pleasing features in the lives of the men is a deepening religious spirit, which shows itself when crews are occasionally separated from the body of the fleet. Not infrequently, through the long, dreary nights, the words of the great Fisherman of Galilee are read and made the subject of address, or the Mariners hymn is heard ascending above the roar of the tempest:

"Eternal Father, strong to save,  
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave.  
Oh, hear us when we cry to thee  
For those in peril on the sea!"

To-day the work is growing, and its influence telling on the habits of the men, both at sea and ashore. A gentleman coming in contact with the fishermen recently, was impressed with their refinement and an absence largely of coarseness of expression. On the other hand, only a few years ago the North Sea men had an unenviable reputation at Hull, Grimsby and similar fishing-ports, for lawless doings.

The Deep Sea Mission ministered to the entire humanity of the men. Temperance work had routed the Dutch vessel, with cargoes of fiery, poisonous spirits. In plentiful supply magazines and books were provided; and, more helpful still, religious instruction and services were arranged in a brotherly manner. The founder of so praiseworthy an organization Mr. E. J. Mather, is venerated by the seamen. His difficulties in promoting its inauguration were narrated in a volume of thrilling interest, "Norad of the Dogger," published in 1888. The movement, which is now firmly established, has the patronage of Her Majesty the Queen, and the hearty recognition of the Board of Trade.

A steady flow of sympathy has been evoked for a toiling class who bear at the present time a good name for honesty, industry, frugality, and kindheartedness. By the labors of the Deep Sea Mission the ocean had become for the majority of the fishermen the school of a better life. Light had shone in upon the darkened souls of fathers and sons, and dear ones putting out to sea indifferent to the claims of salvation had returned new creatures in Christ Jesus. So, at the hour of launching forth on their last voyage, numbers of these may humbly exclaim,

"I hope to see my Pilot face to face,

When I have crossed the bar."

and reach the eternal ocean.—*Rev. James Johnson, of Bolton, Lancashire, England, in S. S. Times.*