

For a few minutes some of the water is allowed to pour off, and then the rope is loosed that closes the net, and down comes the mass of kicking, struggling fish at your feet. Quickly the skipper picks out the prime (i.e., turbot and sole) from the offal (haddock, cod, plaice, etc.), and the watch begin the work of cleaning, while the rest of the "hands" go below, unless the admiral signals "down trawl" again.

On turning out for our tub on deck next morning, we see that the fish has all been securely packed in wooden boxes or trunks, and we are running down towards the steam fish carrier, which lies to leeward, ready to rush off to the London market, as soon as her load of 2,000 to 3,000 or so trunks of fish is aboard.

On every side, and from every quarter, other smacks are bearing down also towards the carrier. Soon our small boat is drawn alongside, two of the hands tumble into her, and as she rises, nearly level with our bulwarks, on the crest of a roller, a trunk of fish is handed down by one of the crew aboard the smack. This process is repeated till all the trunks, perhaps twenty if the haul has been a good one, are safe in the boat, then the painter is loosed, as we pass somewhere near the carrier, and off she goes, dashing wildly on the waves.

The two men rowing stand facing one another, and, dipping their heavy cumbersome oars in the water, slowly advance towards the carrier. Let us imagine ourselves with them.

Several other boats are also making for the steamer, and round it there is already a fringe of some twenty similar boats. When close alongside, one of the hands, holding the painter in his teeth, seizes the bulwarks of the steamer, while our boat rises on the crest of a wave, and half vaults, half tumbles on to her deck. Quickly the painter is secured, and the work of unloading commences, being similar to the process of getting the trunks from the smack to the boat.

From the deck the trunks are handed down below by the crew of the carrier, and there packed by others between layers of ice. It is a busy scene where all is noise and hard work, and one we are not likely to forget.

But the fish is nearly all aboard, and we must get back to the *Edward Birkbeck*, which has now dropped leeward of the carrier, so as to make our rowing as easy as possible. We get back to the smack about 9 or 10 a.m., and can understand that a smackman has a hearty appetite for breakfast, for he has been at work since 6 or 7 in the fresh North Sea air.

Now for another side of our life out there, the religious side. Spiritual work is roughly divided into two sorts: one when your congregation comes to you, and the other when you go to your congregation.

The former is only possible on Sundays, or on week days when there is not breeze enough for fishing. For nearly a week it was so calm that we were able to have a service almost daily, often two. A score or more men might have come aboard the *Birkbeck*, for one reason or another, and we would all go below to the fo'c'stle, and there, sitting on empty fish trunks, have as hearty a service as anywhere ashore.

A few bright hymns, followed by a prayer or two, and then a short talk of the Saviour's love. A more simple or informal service it would be hard to find, but it was one in which the smackman could, and did join with heart and voice.

As regards going to find your congregation, this was also only possible when it was too calm for the fleet to trawl. Taking a dozen copies of Sankey's hymn-books, we would tumble into our little boat and row off to the nearest smack, hail the watch, and ask if we might come aboard and have a short service. Permission granted, we climb aboard, and perhaps go below, and find the hands just finishing dinner.

Soon we gather at the stern, and sing a hymn or two, followed by prayer and a short talk, founded on some simple Scripture story or parable. Another hymn and prayer, and the service is over: and after a few minutes' chatting, we get into our boat again, and row off to another smack.

When the fleet is trawling, or sailing from one fishing ground to another, this sort of work is impossible, and thus for several days together we are unable to leave the *Edward Birkbeck*, but still many opportunities were offered of speaking to these rough smackmen of the King's message of pardon and peace. And many there are who thank God for the difference in their lives, through what the Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen has done.

It is a fearfully rough life, out on the North Sea for eight weeks, winter and summer, with, perhaps, only a few Sundays ashore in the year, with little to help and much to hinder. Yet, many a smackman loves the Lord Jesus as his Saviour, and finds, as one old skipper said, "He holds a man up better than any brick wall," and as another was fond of saying, "Everyone who knows the Lord Jesus speaks well of Him." - Rev. A. G. Clarke, in "Our Boys' Magazine."