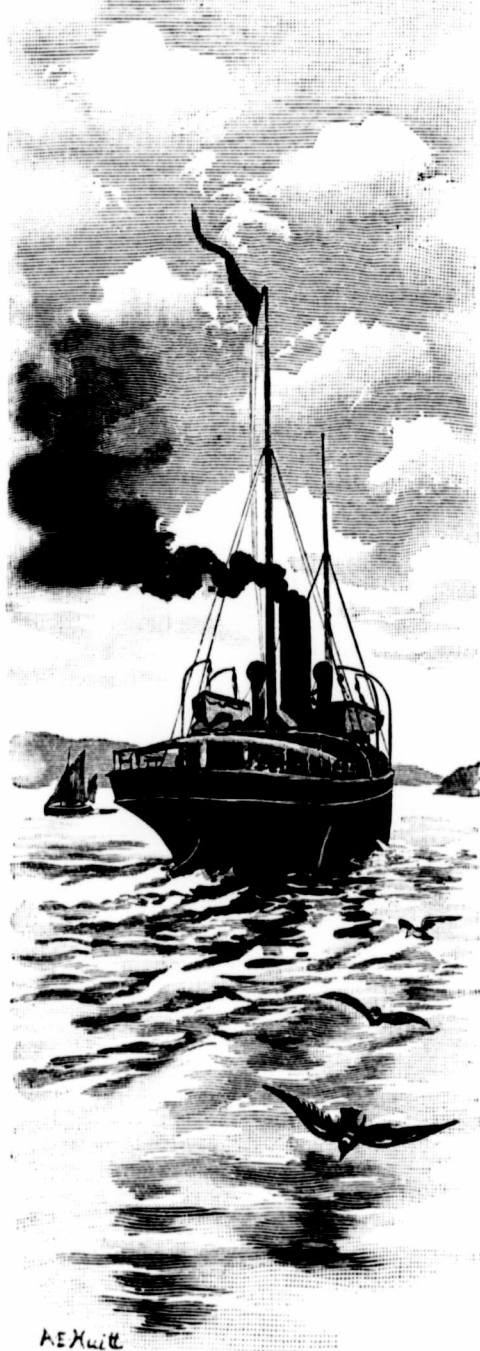




ON THE MERSEY.

Specially drawn for THE CHURCH MONTHLY by A. E. HUITT.

Punctually at four o'clock (the visitors being already seated) the children come filing in, two and two, the boys first, and the *tallest* leading. A good deal of management is required to pack three hundred and fifty children into the space allotted to them; but it is done to a nicety—each child has room enough, but there is no room over.

All being seated, and the governors having taken their places, a boy advances to the desk and gives out a hymn. This having been sung, a number of collects are read, after which an anthem generally follows.

The next part of the proceedings is of special interest. A mixed class of boys and girls stands forward, and a lad gravely examines them in a portion of the Church Catechism from an excellent exposition thereof. The questions are asked from a book, and answered *memoriter* with the utmost precision. The examination ended, the class retires, while the youthful catechist, with a deferential bow, takes his place in front of the governors, having a girl and boy on either side of him. These two then repeat from memory a chapter, the one from the Old and the other from the New Testament. Some more collects follow, and then the service is concluded with a hymn and the "Benedictory Prayer." Finally, the children retire in solemn order, the girls curtsying and the boys bowing to the governors as they file from their places. The collects are compiled from the prayer-book, but with some special clauses introduced. Thus: "What we know not, do Thou teach us: instruct us in all the particulars of our duty, both towards Thee and towards men. . . . Bless this and all other schools for religious and truly Christian education, and direct and prosper all pious endeavours for the propagation of Thy Gospel in the world."

Arthur Hopley had several times been chosen to "read prayers," chiefly, perhaps, because he was a handsome lad with a self-possessed manner, and a clear, sonorous voice, which could be well heard—and heard with pleasure—in every part of the crowded room. He had also acquitted himself fairly well as catechist. But these distinctions did not satisfy him. His ambition was to be selected to give the recitation, and thus to win the position of "gate-boy" for the ensuing week. This was his ambition; but, greatly to his mortification and surprise, it was not realised till after he had been a considerable time in the school.

The custom was, and is, for a number of the boys and girls to volunteer to learn passages for recitation. From these a selection is made, and the master, having heard the several competitors, finally settles who shall occupy the place of honour on the following Sunday.

That he should have been passed over in these competitions again and again was a great blow to poor Arthur's pride. The fact was that the boy, with all his brightness and quickness, was apt to be inaccurate and careless; and even when under his brother's patient "coaching" he resolutely set himself to learn, he found that verbal memory was by no means his forte. He made mistakes and hesitated where Ernest had, without effort, become quite familiar with the whole passage. Thus the younger brother could easily have supplanted the elder;