

# The LOOKOUT

## *To the Crew of the Tusitala:*

On leaving this hospitable country where the cream is excellent and the milk of human kindness apparently never ceases to flow, I assume an ancient mariner's privilege of sending to the Owners and the Ship's company of the *Tusitala* my brotherly good wishes for fair winds and clear skies on all their voyages. And may they be many!

And I would recommend to them to watch the weather, to keep the halliards clear for running, to remember that "any fool can carry on but only the wise man knows how to shorten sail in time" . . . and so on, in the manner of ancient mariners all the world over. But the vital truth of sea-life is to be found in the ancient saying that it is "the stout hearts that make the ship safe."

Having been brought up on it I pass it on to them in all confidence and affection.

*Joseph Conrad*

2nd June, 1923

Tusitala — Writer of Tales (See Page 4)

SEAMEN'S CHURCH INSTITUTE OF NEW YORK

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SEPTEMBER, 1936



THIS MONTH'S COVER is from a photograph loaned through the courtesy of Rear Admiral Reginald R. Belknap, U.S.N. Retired, a member of the *Institute's* Board of Managers. The original Joseph Conrad letter is now in the marine collection at India House, a gift of Mr. James Farrell, owner of the TUSITALA.

# The LOOKOUT

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SEAMEN'S CHURCH INSTITUTE  
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## LEGACIES TO THE INSTITUTE

You are asked to remember this Institute in your will, that it may properly carry on its important work for seamen. While it is advisable to consult your lawyer as to the drawing of your will, we submit nevertheless the following as a clause that may be used:

I give and bequeath to "Seamen's Church Institute Of New York," incorporated under the laws of the State of New York, located at 25 South Street, New York City, the sum of..... Dollars.

Note that the words "Of New York" are a part of our title.

# The Lookout

VOL. XXVII

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## Famous Ships' Bells \*



Rostrum and Lutine Bell at Lloyd's

EVERY one whose business connects him with the insurance of ships and cargoes at sea has heard of the famous Lutine bell that hangs in the underwriting room at Lloyd's in London and tolls forth the good news when a ship believed lost comes safely to port. But few know that Manhattan has a ship's bell that rings out every hour and half hour in the service of humanity and not of cargoes.

New York's bell hangs outside the entrance to the *Seamen's Church Institute* at 25 South Street, just by *Coenties Slip*. It tells the time of day and night in the language of the sea to the seamen who make the institute their headquarters when in port.

Lloyd's famous bell came from a thirty-two gun frigate the British captured from the French and which was incorporated in the Royal Navy. On October 7, 1799, she was wrecked off the



The Atlantic Bell at 25 South Street

coast of Holland with a cargo of specie worth more than \$5,500,000, and her bell was one of the objects salvaged.

This bell now plays a significant part in the daily life of the great London insurance house. One stroke calls for silence for any announcement from the committee that controls the organization; two strokes is the signal for good news of an overdue ship.

New York's bell also was taken from a wreck. It came from the steamship *Atlantic*, which was wrecked off Fisher's Island on Thanksgiving Day in 1846 with seventy-eight souls aboard. The *Atlantic* was the pride of her day, having cost about \$140,000. The captain, Isaac Kip Dustan, perished with his ship, though his body was recovered and buried near his home on Staten Island. The bell was found, said a newspaper of the day, tolling a solemn requiem as the waves dashed against the wreck and shook the timbers.

The bell was then hung in the belfry of the old *floating Church* of the Holy Comforter, which for years on the water

\*By Gault Macgowan, Reprinted from *The New York Sun*, July 16, 1936



front ministered to the spiritual needs of sailors. In 1883 the bell came *ashore* to hang in the belfry of the new Chapel of the Holy Comforter, which was at that time made part of the North River station of the Seamen's Church Institute. For over seventy-six years it sounded a summons to worship.

In 1923, the North River station was abandoned, and until 1926, the bell hung mute in the tower. In 1927 it was rescued and taken to the present Institute and was afterward raised into position to tell off the hours in its own tongue—ship's time.

The sailor divides his day into watches beginning at 8 P. M. and ending twenty-four hours later. The watches are named as follows: First watch (8 P. M. to midnight); middle watch (midnight to 4 A. M.); morning watch (4 A. M. to 8 A. M.); forenoon watch (8 A. M. to noon); afternoon watch (noon to 4 P. M.); first dog watch (4 to 6 P. M.); second dog (6 to 8 P. M.). The end of each watch and the beginning of the next is marked by eight bells except in between the dog watches. At 6 P. M. four bells are chimed.

The dog watches were designed to shift the order of the watch so that the same men would not have the same watch every night. No one, of course, has to do any watches at the Seamen's Institute, but they like to tell the hour of the day in the familiar way. The ritual of the

bells is carefully preserved.

According to Capt. Robert Huntington, principal of the Merchant Marine School at 25 South Street, seven bells in the second dog watch is never struck in the British navy or Mercantile Marine. Capt. Huntington says this is because a mutiny was fixed one evening to take place in a British ship at seven bells in the second dog watch.

"Never since that day," he says, "have the British struck seven bells in the evening. Afterward the dog watch bells were changed to run: 1-2-3-4 and 1-2-3-8. Such was the tradition of the sea when I was first in sailing ships way back at the end of last century. Many British sailors have forgotten the reason of the change today, and do not know why the Americans go on with the dog watch bells in the old way—1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8."

Those unfamiliar with the striking of bells may not be able to count them easily the first time. The bells are always rung in twos. They do not go "dong-dong-dong-gong." But "do-dong, do-gong." That is four bells. "Do-dong, dong" would be three bells. And that is the way the bell at the institute tolls, linked up with a master clock in the social service department.

The only riddle of the Institute bell that has not been cleared up is the time between 4 and 8 P. M. is referred to as dog watches. It is no use asking a sailor. The reason is unrecorded.

We keep open bookcases in the Officers' Room, the Seamen's Reading Room and the Apprentices' Room well stocked with fiction and encourage the men to take as many of these books as they like with them when they ship out.

Recently great gaps have been left on the shelves in the Apprentices' Room because of the demands of voracious readers among the apprentices and officers from several British ships which have been in port. The wireless operator on one of these ships was delighted to find that we could give him some copies of Galsworthy's later novels.

He had read the "*Forsyte Saga*" years ago and had begun "*A Modern Comedy*" just before leaving England. Another officer found Walpole's "*Hans Frost*", also begun several months before at home. Similarly, the cadets and officers from several Belgian ships look hopefully for new French novels each time they come into port.

A gift of some beautifully bound translations into Danish were sent in to the Library not long ago. The donor would be pleased if he could see a young Danish towhead, just out of hospital, poring over a huge volume describing the adventures of the Martin Johnsons in Africa—translated into the best Danish, and bound in red morocco!

As I write I am interrupted by an American radio operator who came in for "*The Last Puritan*", reserved to read while he is at the Institute on a short holiday between voyages. You may wonder, perhaps, that such requests come to us from the waterfront. It has been enlightening to me to see how catholic is the taste of the men who patronize our Library. There is, of course, a constant demand for the popular type of "*Western*" or adventure story, with the detective story as "runner-up". Books on travel and exploration, particularly in the personal narrative style are frequently requested. As to sea-stories, I have found that seamen much prefer the Robinson "*Voyage to Galapagos*" type of book, where an account of actual exploits is interestingly told, backed up by convincing charts and other data, to the purely fictitious "sea-story". This latter they are inclined to read with a critical and often sceptical eye, and sometimes put down with an audible grunt of derision.

As to non-fiction, the main interest here naturally lies in books

on Seamanship, Navigation and Marine Engineering. We have an excellent reference collection and every day we fill requests from men who are studying for their licenses. For several weeks last winter two ambitious Marine Engineers spent the greater part of each day in the Library, preparing for special licenses. One of them recently reported, with considerable satisfaction and appreciation, a very high average in the examination and a splendid job as the result.

Next to their own field, the seamen seem to be most interested, as far as serious reading is concerned, in philosophical writing and in biography, making only occasional requests for history or economics. We have inquiries for books on etiquette, on stamp-collecting, on chicken-raising, on play-writing, on show-card painting; we have even had a ship's cook looking for a book which would give recipes for French sauces! Our copy of the *World Almanac* is perhaps the most thumbed volume in the Library and is an invaluable source of information in the settling of arguments as to the featherweight championship in 1900 or the date of some obscure marine disaster. One boy came in every day for a week, took the *World Almanac* to the corner where he turned his back on the rest of the Library and studied it assiduously, and finally divulged the fact that he was just "cramming some facts" for use in future foc'sle discussions!

As LOOKOUT readers know, we are dependent entirely upon voluntary gifts of books to replenish the Library shelves. Since January first of this year over 5000 books have been sent to us by generous friends. We are very glad to receive duplicate copies, particularly of current fiction, in order to have

## More Books for the Conrad Library

By Anne Conrow, Librarian

ONE might travel a great distance without coming across a more interesting spot than the Joseph Conrad Library on the third floor of the Institute, overlooking the East River. During the two years which have passed since its opening on May 24th, 1934 more than 50,000 officers and seamen have used the Library for reading and for study. In addition to the 6,000 volumes available on the shelves of the Conrad Library more than 10,456 books have been distributed throughout other reading rooms in the Institute and to individual seamen on ships or in hos-



on hand a good supply of interesting material for the open shelves in the reading rooms, as well as for the Library. You may be interested in learning that we are also able to sell books which might appear to you to be valueless or out-of-date and with the proceeds buy up-to-date technical books on Marine subjects. We have, moreover, had a number of requests from individual seamen for recent books of a non-technical nature, which our limited budget will not permit us to purchase. Although we welcome, at any time, books you may be able to send us, we would particularly enlist your interest at this time in helping us to fill these definitely expressed requests of the seamen. If

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The Institute will be very glad to send a truck to collect books within the Metropolitan area. Kindly notify the Social Service Department so that arrangements can be made to have the truck call at a convenient time. Otherwise you may send books by parcel post to  
SEAMEN'S CHURCH INSTITUTE OF NEW YORK  
25 South Street, New York City



A "Bring A Book" Cruise aboard the Wilson liner "State of Delaware" on July 29th brought donations of several hundred books of modern fiction for our Conrad Library. Left to right: Miss Conrow and Mr. Kelley of the Institute and Captain Stenken of the "State of Delaware".

you do not happen to have these books yourselves, perhaps you would be willing to show this list to some of your friends who might like to send them.

**Personal Experience—Vincent Sheean**  
**I Write As I Please—Walter Duranty**  
**It Can't Happen Here—Sinclair Lewis**  
**Europa—Briffault**

**Why Keep Them Alive—Paul de Kruif**  
**Anthony Adverse—Hervey Allen**  
**Of Time and the River—**

**Thomas Wolfe**

**Appointment in Samarra—**

**John O'Hara**

**Sparkenbroke—Charles Morgan**  
**Paths of Glory—Humphrey Cobb**  
**God and My Father—Clarence Day**  
**Life With Father—Clarence Day**  
**Second House From the Corner—**

**Max Miller**

**Vein of Iron—Ellen Glasgow**

**Betty Zane—Zane Grey**

**Thunder Mountain—Zane Grey**

## "Tusitala"

ON the 23rd day of May, there appeared in Mr. Christopher Morley's column, "The Bowling Green," in "The Saturday Review of Literature," the following:

With many other readers we had gathered the impression that the Samoan name for Robert Louis Stevenson, *Tusitala*, meant "teller of tales." But Miss Marjorie Candee, of the Seamen's Institute, raises a question. She says: "Rear Admiral Elliot Snow, C.C., U.S.N., of Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, has written to us as follows in reference to the ship *Tusitala*:

As I recall what little I learned of the Samoan language some 48 years ago, the two words *afi tusi* (meaning a match) meant *fire writing*—the act of striking a match resembled the stroke of a pen or a pencil in writing. So all these years since I have rendered *Tusitala* as a *writer* of tales and not a *teller* of tales. Whence did you derive your rendering of this word?

Several reference books have translated

it as the *teller* of tales and I shall greatly appreciate advice from some student of Samoan so that I may be correct when I next mention the ship."

On the 20th of June the question as to the meaning of the word "Tusitala" was answered in Mr. Morley's column as follows:

Mr. Austin Strong, step-grandson of Robert Louis Stevenson, very kindly takes up the question (raised by Miss Candee in the Bowling Green, May 23) of the literal meaning of the Samoan word *Tusitala*. It is "*writer* of tales" rather than "*teller*."

Professor Henry E. Crampton of Barnard College quotes Tregear's *Maori Comparative Dictionary* where three meanings of the Samoan *tusi* are given: (a) to mark native cloth; (b) to point out, as a road; (c) to write; a writing, a letter. The Maori equivalent is *tuhi*; Malay *tulis*; Hawaiian *kuhi*; Marquesan

*tuhi*; Tongan *tohi*.

Austin Strong says:—

"*Tusi* in Samoan also means book. *Tusiloto*—prayer book. *Tusi-tusi* means a scribbler—a red sweating German clerk in white ducks and black sash poring over his ledgers in the hot beach office of the North German Lloyd.

"There is no doubt that *Tusitala* means writer of tales. The older meaning was Teller of Tales which we have always used in the family. Both are correct. Since we are on the subject, the Samoan is one of the richest of all languages. Imagine a word for the sheen of the vitreous green on the inner side of a curling wave just before it pounds itself to pieces on the reef. There is also a word for the lone cloud—that swift-moving little cloud one sees just at dawn. Flying cloud it is called and the name was given to my fleet-footed grandmother. The word is *Aulele* and we always called her that."

## Why They Follow the Sea

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A RECENT symposium taken in the Institute's officers' room on the topic: "Why Did You Follow The Sea?" resulted in the expression of some unusual opinions on why they "go down to the sea in ships." One seafarer, for example, went to sea because of a shirt, and another because of a pair of pants. But let these "toilers of the sea" tell their own story:

"I was born in Sweden," said a chief mate, as he looked up from a game of pinochle he was enjoying with a group of officers. "And as a youth I used to go sliding down snowy banks—which was very hard on my pants and also on my mother's patience. Finally, my mother forced me to wear pants with huge leather patches on them. I was the laughing stock

### Youth, Age and the Sea

of the town. I couldn't stand their sneers and jeers so I stowed away on a windjammer and have been following the sea ever since. That was over twenty years ago. All because of a patched pair of pants!"

The shirt incident was related by a ship's engineer: "I lived in a little village in Massachusetts and

(Continued on Page 8)



## Some of our Sailing Friends

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*Drawings by CHARLES GRAVES.  
Reprinted from "ALL CLEAR AFT".  
Cassell & Co., Ltd., London.*

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William McFee said recently: "Sailors are not the same as operatives in a factory for they owe allegiance to the traditions of a special service, *but they are none the less subject to the working of economic laws and technological unemployment.*"

Whether ship jobs are plentiful or scarce, the seafarer needs the INSTITUTE, and ashore, in New York, he finds friends, receives material help when necessary, entrusts his money, mail and baggage to "25 South Street." To carry on our complete program of relief, social service, recreation, etc. requires your generous help.

Kindly send contributions to the  
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## Why They Follow the Sea

(Continued  
from Page 5)

at the age of 16 I was invited to a party of high school friends. I borrowed my older brother's dress shirt to wear to the dance and spilled chocolate ice cream on it and upon my return I got such a licking from my father that in hot anger, I ran away to the nearest seaport and shipped out. That was thirty-two years ago and I have never returned home—because of a shirt!

Many of the ships' officers interviewed left home at the age of 13, but the average age for going to sea appeared to be about 16. Asked whether sea stories by Dana, Melville, Conrad or Masefield influenced their decision, the majority answered "No." They had never read sea adventure tales in their youth. They had no near relatives who pursued seafaring as a career. They did not live close to a seaport. Then why, we persisted, and how did you happen to choose the sea as a means of earning a living?

A composite answer would be: "We lived in a small town where opportunities to advance were few. So—we just wanted to get away—and so we went to sea." The only officers who differed from this general reply were men of British, or Norwegian birth who said: "We went to sea because seafaring is recognized in our country as an important — and an attractive — career for a boy to follow. We were trained through the apprentices' system to become officers; just as boys in America go four

years to college, we studied four years on a ship."

One British captain said that his father, a lawyer, did not want him to go to sea so advised him to read Richard Henry Dana's "Two Years Before the Mast," thinking that it would make him understand the hardships he would have to endure. "It worked just the other way. It made me more determined than ever to follow the sea. So my father gave in, and I became an apprentice."

Asked if they liked the sea as a career, the majority said "No," but their eyes said "Yes." "If you don't like it," we ventured, "why do you stick to it?" They replied: "What else can we do? We've spent the better part of our lives learning how to run ships. We can't do anything else. We'd be misfits ashore. That's why it's so hard—in depressions—when ships are tied up—for a seafaring man to get shore jobs."

A number of the men said they became sailors by way of the Navy. They joined the Navy to see the world, and now they've seen enough. Others protested: "Oh, we don't feel that way. We still want to see more. We'll never tire of seeing far-off places."

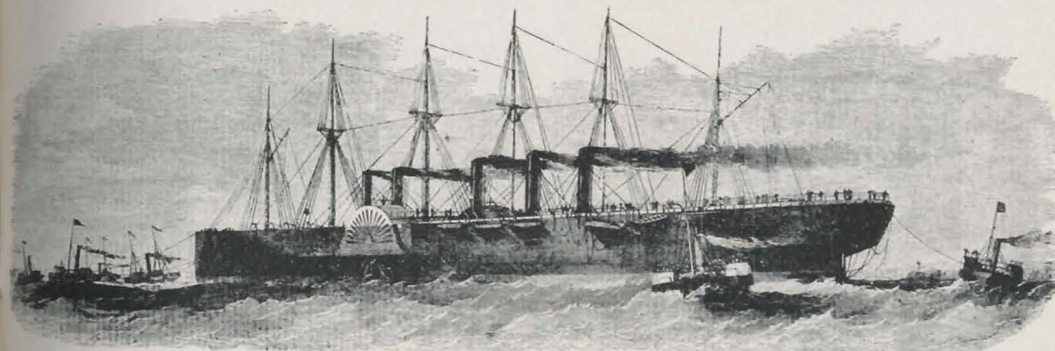
Of course, a few said they left home because their girls jilted them, but they were reluctant to discuss this reason. Revenge proved a motive in several instances: they left home, angry with parents, deter-

mined to "show 'em and lick the world."

Perhaps the strangest reason given for following the sea was that of a second mate who said his family wouldn't let him have a dog when he was a little fellow. One day he brought in a mutt and begged his parents to let him keep it. The pup was full of mud and fleas,

so he was thrown out. "If my dog goes out, I go, too," said the sixteen year old chap. His parents were adamant, so off he went to sea, with the dog in his arms. On the first trip the dog went ashore in Marseilles, got into a fight with another dog, and died. But the boy never returned home.

## The Disaster to the Great Eastern:



Reproduced from *The Illustrated London News*, Sept. 28, 1861  
Courtesy of Alfred W. Paine Bookshop

The Big Ship Being Towed Toward Cork Harbour

SEVENTY years ago this month, the dream of Cyrus W. Field was realized. After many unsuccessful attempts, the first Atlantic cable was finally laid—on Sept. 8th, 1866—by the *Great Eastern*, thus establishing telegraphic communication between the Old World and the New.

When this mammoth ship first visited New York she caused as much excitement as a couple of *Normandie's* or *Queen Mary's*. Thousands visited her when she lay on exhibition at the foot of Hammond Street. She was the largest vessel ever built up to that time and she retained her title of "largest steamer" until 1890. Her tonnage was 22,500. She could be

propelled by engine or sail, or both. She had a double hull and watertight compartment system which made her the safest vessel afloat.

One of New York's oldest residents, Mrs. William M. Polk, and one of the Institute's devoted friends, recalls making a trip on the *Great Eastern* in 1862, with her father, Theodore Dehon, a member of the Institute's Board of Managers until his death in that year. Mrs. Polk was three years old at the time and still remembers how whenever the ship stopped it trembled from stem to stern, even the chickens and other livestock carried on board becoming vocal on such occasions.

She was an unlucky ship, for

Rocking  
Chair  
Sailors



Courtesy,  
Western  
Union  
Telegraph  
Company

THE LOOKOUT

SEPTEMBER



from the very first she had a number of accidents. Her original owners became bankrupt, so she was put in the New York service, but as a passenger and cargo steamer she could not be made to pay. She was a triumph for engineering, however; her successful laying of the Atlantic cable in 1866 fully justifying the assertion that there was no other vessel which could have so successfully laid the long submarine telegraph cables which linked the nations together.

One of the most ludicrous accidents which occurred to the *Great Eastern* was on a voyage in 1861, and letters from several passengers on that voyage, have recently been brought to light. From a Mr. Hayward comes a lively account of the short but perilous voyage of the vessel. Thus he describes the scene in the grand saloon during the height of the storm:

"From side to side the people were being swayed to and fro, along with the settees and sofas, tables and sideboards, sliding or rolling on the floor in an undistinguished mass . . . Three or four gentlemen were dashed with violence against the great mirror, and actually burst through it—the glass falling about them in slices. The lower mirror was 'stove in' by a monster stove which had tumbled over, whilst the pianoforte was thrown down in the ladies' saloon, and began to play an entirely new tune, and to dance to its own sweet music. The howling of three poor cows on the deck added to the horrors of the time, till at last they were swept down altogether, and the chief part of their house and its contents precipitated through the skylights, one poor animal hanging its head down and inquiring in a mournful manner what all the row was about. At last, to our astonishment, a swan—*rara avis in saloonis*—came flying down, and added to the picturesque and ludicrous but at the same time really awful catastrophe.

Indeed, many of the victims themselves, before the danger was well over, and while still smarting from their bruises, laughed heartily at the comical positions in which we had been placed."

A letter from a Mr. P. de Corvin, appearing in the London Times after the accident who "thought it much better to die comfortably" went to his cabin, tying his arm to the bedpost. He writes as follows:

"My cabin was close to the first dining-saloon where a horrible noise was going on. Attracted by curiosity, I peeped through the windows and saw the most curious sight I ever saw. Tables and chairs were dancing a hornpipe; the stove joined most heartily in the fun, and the dancers seemed determined to break down all the nicely turned mahogany columns and banisters which snapped like glass. A marble slab joined a high-nosed gentleman in the enterprise of smashing the largest mirror; of course, nose and mirror had the worst of it."

The accompanying illustration shows the condition of the *Great Eastern* as she was being towed towards Cork harbour. The whole of the ironwork of both paddle-wheels was carried away; the ship's boats at the starboard side were all gone, and those at the port side were hanging loosely about, whilst the ladder from the landing-place on the paddle-wheel was twisted in the extraordinary way represented in our engraving.

In 1887 the *Great Eastern* was sold to ship-breakers and was broken up in the Mersey. When the sealed double bottom was opened the skeleton of a man (a riveter who was reported missing during her building) was found in one of the compartments, and superstitious sailors explained her bad luck by recalling that it was always unlucky to carry a corpse on board ship!

## The Corinthians: Amateur Sailors



Drawing by Gordon Grant

FOR those who yearn to sail the seven seas, but whose business confines them to their desks throughout the week, here is a satisfactory solution. A new organization, called The Corinthians, organized two summers ago, is proving a boon to amateur sailors who can't afford to own boats of their own, and to boat-owners who occasionally need a few extra hands for week-ends, cruising, ocean racing or class boat racing.

We journeyed from the waterfront to the office of The Corinthians, on the fourth floor of the Chanin Building (122 East 42nd Street) and there talked with Mr. F. M. Delano, the executive officer. The organization is entirely non-commercial, and all members are strictly amateur sailors. About 180 young men belong, most of them graduates of our big colleges, and during the summer months they are kept busy every week-end. Sometimes they work on a boat for nothing; sometimes they share expense with the boat-owner (about 75 of the members are boat-owners); sometimes they pay for the privilege of going on a certain cruise. Usually their expenses cost them about \$10.00 a week-end. The members are accepted on the basis of their

personality, character and experience. The most important activity of The Corinthians is to act as a clearing house for boat-owners and non-boat owners. During the winter months the club conducts a series of dinners where marine experts like Capt. Bob Bartlett, Capt. Felix Reisenberg, Alan J. Villiers, William Robinson, and Gordon Grant tell of their experiences, and classes on such subjects as seamanship, piloting, navigation, etc. During its first two seasons, the Corinthians filled over 300 amateur berths and there have been some excitement for some members: for instance, one member, Edward Foster, was sent to Gibraltar to sail back the old German ketch "Sturdebaker." Another member sailed with Carleton Cooke (the club's new chairman) in his schooner, "Eight Bells," which won the blue water medal for trans-oceanic races. Still another member, Harry Adams, Jr. sailed on an 85 foot schooner, "Pilgrim," for a three months' treasure hunt in the West Indies (he didn't bring back any gold, but only a golden coat of tan). Several Corinthian members participated in the recent Bermuda races and in Long Island Sound class boat racing.

Of course, if you own a boat and require professional hands, the proper place to call is the Institute's employment bureau, 25 South Street, Bowling Green 9-2710, where Captain A. O. Morasso or George Menz can fix you up with a professional crew of experienced sailors. But if you are an amateur and hanker to "go down to the sea in ships," file your application with The Corinthians.



## Messages in Bottles \*

**Editor's Note:** The recent loss of the British motor ship "Nunoca" off the coast of Florida, brought to the attention of the world the curious disappearances of ships at sea. Readers of THE LOOKOUT are referred to an article on this subject in the March issue (entitled "Ships That Disappear"). Talking with Captain Robert Huntington, Principal of the Institute's Merchant Marine School, we learned that the principal reasons for delayed ships were: possibly the rudder was carried away, or the ship sprung a leak, or there was a shortage of fuel, or engine trouble, or explosions, or the shifting of cargo, or propellers lost and, in rare cases, mutiny. The U. S. Coast Guard reported finding a bottle at Miami Beach containing a penciled message believed to be from the "Nunoca." The message read: "Tuesday, July 21. Please give to Coast Guard. Help. Crashed on reef at Matecumbe. Please send help. Wireless broken." As we go to press word comes that the note asking for help was possibly a hoax.

The old-time flotsam of the sea, the bottle carrying a message scrawled with the blood of some castaway on a tropic isle, has a lineal successor today despite the advent of surer methods of message transmission.

Bottles containing cryptic messages are still found, but they seldom now signify such dramatic events as a message from a maroon, a mutiny or a fire at sea. The messages in the modern bottles are not signals of distress. They are scientific experiments.

Every now and then some lighthouse keeper, fisherman or yachtsman fishes a sealed bottle out of the water. Within he finds a message from the Hydrographic Office at Washington requesting that whoever finds it communicate the date of its discovery and the latitude and longitude to the dispatcher. This aids officials in making scientific studies of the directions of ocean currents.

The bottles are taken out to sea at various points and there released. Some of them may be picked up within a few weeks; some float for six years; some are still on voyages about the world. Bottles released in the Gulf stream have been picked up in places as far apart as the Gulf of Mexico and Scotland.

Many have drifted into the locality of the Sargasso Sea, long believed a repository of all the lost ships in the Atlantic. The bottles have proved that it is merely an expanse of dead water beyond the Gulf stream, where ocean weed and other debris is apt to collect. But it has never attained the significance depicted by imaginative writers of the last century.

One of the most dramatic messages ever found in a bottle was that written in 1887 by John Lee, master mariner of

Halifax. Forty years later a German officer found the bottle on the Island of Bockum in the Baltic. It was of curious looking glass encrusted with salt and shells from the action of the salt water.

This was the message it contained: "May 17, 1887. To whom it may concern. Tell mother I died fighting. John Lee, master mariner, Halifax."

Capt. Lee's mother had died after five years of watching and waiting for the son who never returned. She never knew that her son had stood on his bridge in the midst of a mutiny courageous to the last.

Another interesting message in a bottle was sent by Seaman Larry Kimmons back in 1928 when he was aboard a freighter, bound for Brazil. The crew was a mixture of Filipinos, Rumanians and Japanese. Apparently the three nationalities did not mix well, or perhaps they mixed too vehemently, for there was constant fighting aboard. Feeling ran so high that Kimmons feared he might never see land again.

About six days out of Santos he took an empty shampoo oil bottle and wrote a brief message, giving his name, the name of the ship and his address as care of the *Seamen's Church Institute of New York*, and stated that the ship was in trouble with her crew. Then he sealed the bottle with its cap and tossed it overboard.

The bottle made its way up the coast of South America and into the Caribbean, reached the Gulf stream and was rushed northward at about three knots. In June, 1930, two years later, it was picked up by Douglas H. Shepard, keeper of the Wood End Lighthouse, Provincetown, Mass.

He wrote to Kimmons at the Institute and some time later Kimmons, who had safely finished his voyage and was back in New York, called for his mail and learned that his message had arrived home almost as soon as he had.

The most recent bottle with a message was from the yacht *North Star*. It was on Memorial Day, this year, when Capt. Robert Huntington, principal of the *Merchant Marine School at 25 South Street*, attached a bottle to a floral wreath and threw it into the water off Sandy Hook.

He inclosed a paper with a stamped self-addressed envelope, with instructions to the finder to mail it to him. To date the bottle has not been returned.

\*By Gault Macgorean. Reprinted from *The New York Sun*, July 15, 1936



The Institute's Place on the East River Waterfront

Photo by P. L. Sperr

## PRINCIPAL FACTS ABOUT THE SEAMEN'S CHURCH INSTITUTE OF NEW YORK

- It is the largest institution for merchant seamen in the world.
- It is 102 years old, founded in 1834, built a floating church in 1843, and now occupies its own modern 13-story headquarters.
- It is a partially self-supporting welfare organization for active seamen who need friendship, guidance, recreation and emergency financial help.
- It provides a complete shore community for thousands of self-respecting seamen each day. It is home, post office, school, library, employment bureau, clinic, club and church combined.
- It is open to active seamen of all nationalities. Eighty percent of the men served are American citizens from every state in the Union.
- It befriends ship apprentice boys from foreign countries and hundreds of American cadets every year.
- It instituted free radio medical service for ships at sea, thereby saving hundreds of seamen's lives in emergencies.
- It initiated legislation requiring first-aid examinations for every ship's officer obtaining a license.
- It has trained over 4,000 seamen in its Merchant Marine School and helped them to better positions.
- It cooperates fully with other seamen's welfare agencies, but should not be confused, e.g. with Sailors' Snug Harbor, which is an endowed home for retired seafarers.



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