

IN THE DAYS OF WOODEN SHIPS AND IRON MEN

"MY home town, a Danish seaport, was known all over Denmark for its fine ships and good skippers; and, like all Danish boys, I loved the ocean. I loved the ships, and wanted to become a sailor.

"It was in the days of 'wooden ships and iron men,' and I determined I would be an iron man. I thought that in order to be a good skipper one should stay with his ship when it went down — and he should be able to drink lots of whisky. My time to go to sea came sooner than I expected because of the death of my parents and grandparents.

"I remember so well standing with my three little sisters looking down into the open grave of my mother. Three months later my father was buried in the same little churchyard. Then my grandparents died when I was 14, and I was left a homeless boy for whom nobody cared. So I went to sea.



Sailing on Square-riggers

"I started as a cabin boy. I thought it was smart to drink, and it didn't take me long to become a drunken sailor.

"As the years went by, I sailed among the hardest men on the ships in the North Atlantic, sailed before the mast in square-rigged ships. I served on German, English, Norwegian and Danish ships, and for a short time was captain on a French-Canadian ship.

"It was a hard life — not at all what I had expected. We sailed up in the Artic Circle where the icebergs are as big as a city block. Sometimes I didn't have a blanket to lie on in my bunk — just the bare boards — and no coat.

"I used to plead with the captain, 'If you will only trust me with a pound, I will go uptown and buy clothes, and I'll do what I should do as a good sailor.' But instead of that, as soon as we hopped over the railing and got to town, we found a saloon — and we had to have "just one' drink. Then we had to have another, and before I knew it, I had forgotten about the clothing store and all the promises I had made to the captain. And I was out to sea again with few clothes, no sea boots. It was the same old round of defeat. Many a night I just crawled into a canvas bag to keep warm.

Memories of Grandmother

"I used to think of the days when I would take my grandmother's hand back in Denmark, and go to church with her. I knew Scriptures by heart, and could sing the old songs such as 'A Mighty Fortress Is Our God' and 'Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus.' As I thought of those things, I would promise God that if I ever made port again I would not drink up my money, but would go home and go to school.

Life Spared

"There were times in my career when I narrowly escaped death — only by God's mercy. Early in the spring of 1909, when trying to make our first port of call in a heavy sea on the North Atlantic coast, we struck the bar. Our propeller went. When we struck the second time, our rudder went, and we were helpless. As the ship began to break up, we could see a little white church on a hillside. How I wished I had been a better boy!

"The church bell was ringing, gathering people together to pray for us. Even though we were sinners, God was merciful and answered prayer — and our ship was saved.

"When I was on another ship, we had a bad crew. Though I was only 19, I was the best man aboard before the mast, and many of the crew were jealous. The ship's carpenter had determined to do away with me and it was just God's mercy that my life was spared.

Opportunity Refused

"I once asked one of my shipmates to go to a mission with me. I was tired of being a drunken sailor. We put on clean clothes and started for the little mission. Outside the door we hesitated and wondered if we should go in. George turned abruptly and said, 'I'm going to sail one more trip.' So I left with him. But George never came back. He fell overboard and drowned while under the influence of liquor. How God did talk to me through that!

"Later I joined the United States revenue cutters, and became a petty officer. When I got my discharge, I came to Portland, Oregon, to try to settle down and quit drinking. But I was helpless; and finally I went back to the old topmast schooners.

A New Story Heard

"Years later, after coming from the Hawaiian Islands on a big American sailing ship, I stood down on Second and Burnside Streets in Portland, Oregon, miserable and discouraged, homeless and friendless. While I stood there, some Apostolic Faith people came out to hold a street meeting. They told me what God had done for them, and I couldn't help but believe what they said.

"At the close of the meeting, they looked into the crowd where I stood — there were longshoremen, loggers, sailors and people of all kinds and classes — and one man said, 'If there is anyone among you who desires the prayers of God's people, raise your hand.' Those people wanted to pray for a man like me! I raised my hand. I couldn't afford not to. They took me in their Gospel car to their meeting place, and prayed for me. I prayed, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner.'

Sobered in a Moment

"God came down that night and sobered me up and transformed my life. I knew I was born again — and the world knew it, too.

"I went back and told my shipmates what the Lord had done for me. Often they would tempt me to have a drink with them, but there was no desire for the liquor. I was never tempted to go into the saloons and taverns again. I could live a Christian life before the world.

Restitution

"I always believed that before a man died he should have a clean slate. I had restitutions to make all over the world. Some were not small things either. I wrote one letter after another to one company and another, to officers under whom I had worked. I wrote home, and I wrote to the Danish government. I also made restitution to the United States government; they forgave me — and later gave me my citizenship papers.

"For 40 years I wrote month after month to my sisters, telling them that God had saved me, and I wasn't a drunken seaman anymore; but they thought I had gotten into some strange American religious sect. Finally some of my friends from the church in Portland visited my people in Denmark and told them what God had done for me. They could hardly believe it.

"My youngest sister decided to come and see for herself ; and after attending our church services for about two months, she went away saying as the Queen of Sheba: 'The half has not been told me.'

"I have enjoyed being a Christian through the years. It is my heart's delight to see other seafaring men find the old-time religion. I know it satisfies, and can keep in all circumstances. I have proved it." — M. Hansen.

