

# SENDING BOOKS TO SEA

By Milton Raison

SAILORS, a half million of whom are in the employ of the American merchant marine, have been almost totally neglected in the past as far as library service is concerned.

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The sailor after all has more leisure for reading than the landsman: under the new seaman's acts he works eight hours a day, which, after sleep is deducted, leaves him about eight hours for diversion. But there are very few means of diversion at sea. The passenger has his deck games, his gambling and flirting, and his rôle as tourist and spectator to keep him amused. The sailor, however, has gone over the territory many times before. He is too poor to provide himself with really worth while reading matter and spends what little money he does earn in gambling, his only escape from the monotony of his leisure.

As a rule, sailors are also extraordinarily curious. They are ingenuous in the sense of being ignorant. In spite of their exposure to it, they are remarkably unappreciative of beauty. When a port is reached, only the young tar goes sightseeing. The rest of the crew make a round of the brothels and saloons. At sea, they are restless and continually dissatisfied. There is obviously a missing factor in their lives.

I don't pretend that books would be the panacea for this discontent. Men go to sea, in the first place, because they are discontented with conditions on land. The sea, as William McFee so admirably pointed out, has all the conveniences of suicide with none of its disadvantages. But books would go a great way toward educating seamen and guiding them to the appreciation of beauty.

An interesting library service has been started for this purpose. This organization, called the American Merchant Marine Library Association, with headquarters in New York City, is supplying books to American seamen free of charge. As the dispatch

agent of this organization, I was able to witness the reaction of sailors to books. On the whole, it is very favorable. At the present time a crew's library, which contains about eighty volumes and goes on board the vessel in a convenient case, is selected with a thought to its popular appeal. In other words, sailors are asked to suggest books they would like to read. Most of the suggestions are ordinary, but some are startling.

I found, through these suggestions, that seamen crave for the very books landsmen devour. Harold Bell Wright, Ethel M. Dell, Zane Grey, Rex Beach, Peter B. Kyne, Mary Roberts Rinehart, James Oliver Curwood, Robert W. Chambers, Clarence Mulford, and Meredith Nicholson are some of the authors preferred. Detective and western stories have the widest vogue. Sea writers, save for Captain Marryat, are unknown and unwanted. It is the policy of the Association to supply the books so favored to the seamen, but gradually to introduce a better class of fiction.

One of the captains with whom I talked told me his interesting method of educating the crew. He started his men with Mary Roberts Rinehart and Rex Beach, and led them up through Winston Churchill, William J. Locke, Dickens, and Hugo to H. G. Wells, Shaw, and Butler. This method, he claimed, was not in the least painful to the crew. He worked on the theory that one can render himself immune to poison by taking small doses and gradually increasing the proportion. This is exactly the method the Association wants to use. Though of course there are stagnant souls at sea as everywhere else who would shy clear of this process of inoculation.

As for the unusual requests, I have had seamen (pray remember their

status) ask me for Robert Ingersoll's works, H. G. Wells's "Outline of History", and books on agriculture! One chap wanted a rhyming dictionary very badly. I instantly accused him of writing verse, which he bashfully denied. However, when I persisted in my accusation he confessed that he did dabble in rhymes to while the time away.

"One has to do something to keep amused at sea," was his apology.

The job of supplying ships with these libraries has its own thrills. A ship sends out a hurry call for a library as it would for a doctor. Usually I would hear a voice over the phone (a voice, incidentally, unaccustomed to the intricacies of the telephone and either too loud or too soft) commanding me to rush at once to the Tietjen and Lang Dry Dock with a case of books for the S. S. "Cattegus", sailing on the morrow. Then the connection would be cut off and I would have only that clue on which to work. To appreciate the technical difficulties of such a call, the reader must pause for a moment to ask himself several questions. Where, for one, is the Tietjen and Lang Dry Dock? It may be in the telephone directory and it may not. Remember that the Port of New York embraces Hoboken, Staten Island, Bayonne, Constable Hook, and Yonkers. Then again, what sort of ship is the "Cattegus"? How much of a crew has it, and what per cent read English?

But somehow the case is packed and the ship is located. The books are carried up a long, rickety ladder to the deck, where the dispatch agent, after having successfully navigated the ladder, steps into tar, oil, or some other messy substance which usually floods the area near the gangway. The ship is then discovered to have a Chi-

nese crew which doesn't speak English, much less read it. But since the vessel is under the American flag, and the officers are American, the books are left on board.

On the whole, however, the work is more interesting and adventurous than anything outside a newspaper office. The sailors, too, are quick to appreciate and respond to the service.

Here is a list, picked at random, of the general type of books included in a library.

## FICTION

<i>Mrs. Essington</i> .....	Chamberlain
<i>Mr. Isaacs</i> .....	Crawford
<i>The Garden of Resurrection</i> .....	Thurston
<i>The Pillar of Sand</i> .....	Castle
<i>His Official Fiancée</i> .....	Ruck
<i>Jim Davis</i> .....	Masefield
<i>The Making of Bobby Burnit</i> .....	Chester
<i>The Trail of Ninety-Eight</i> .....	Service
<i>Red Pottage</i> .....	Cholmondeley
<i>The Calling of Dan Matthews</i> .....	Wright
<i>Gordon Keith</i> .....	Page
<i>The Lion and the Unicorn</i> .....	Davis
<i>Penrod</i> .....	Tarkington
<i>More Short Stories</i> .....	Bunner
<i>The Port of Missing Men</i> .....	Nicholson
<i>Cease Firing</i> .....	Johnston
<i>The Gilded Age</i> .....	Twain
<i>Stories</i> .....	Poe
<i>The Sea Wolf</i> .....	London
<i>The Black Bag</i> .....	Vance
<i>The Voice of the City</i> .....	O. Henry
<i>The Foreigner</i> .....	Connor
<i>Miss Fingal</i> .....	Clifford
<i>Head Winds</i> .....	Connolly
<i>"K"</i> .....	Rinchart
<i>The Californians</i> .....	Atherton
<i>The Wonderful Year</i> .....	Locke
<i>The Gateless Barrier</i> .....	Malet
<i>Mrs. Galer's Business</i> .....	Ridge
<i>Johnstone of the Border</i> .....	Bindloss
<i>Emma McChesney &amp; Co.</i> .....	Ferber
<i>The Mystery of the Downs</i> .....	Rees
<i>The Moonstone</i> .....	Collins
<i>The Hollow of Her Hand</i> .....	McCutcheon
<i>Uncle William</i> .....	Lee
<i>Watchers of the Plains</i> .....	Cullum
<i>Hugh Wynne</i> .....	Mitchell
<i>White Motley</i> .....	Pemberton
<i>The Marriage of William Ashe</i> .....	Ward
<i>Clay and Rainbows</i> .....	Calthrop
<i>Tales</i> .....	Scott
<i>The Luck of the Vails</i> .....	Benson
<i>Their Yesterday</i> .....	Wright
<i>Harry Lorrequer</i> .....	Lever
<i>A Knight of the Cumberland</i> .....	Fox

*His Family* ..... Poole  
*An Errant Wooing* ..... Harrison  
*My Japanese Prince* ..... Gunter  
*Peg Woffington* ..... Reade  
*The King's Own* ..... Marryat  
*For the Honor of the School* ..... Barbour  
*Stories of the Foot-Hills* ..... Graham  
*The End of a Song* ..... Marks  
*The Pembroke Mason Affair* ..... Barton  
*The Cresting Wave* ..... Morris  
*Little Sir Galahad* ..... Gray

## GENERAL

*Holy Bible*  
*The Spanish Pioneers* ..... Lummis  
*The Young Man and the World* . Beveridge  
*The Rights and Duties of American*  
     *Citizenship* ..... Willoughby  
*Life of William Lloyd Garrison* ... Grimké  
*George Washington* ..... Abbott  
*Messages* ..... Roosevelt

*The First Hundred Thousand* ..... Hay  
*The Peace Negotiations* ..... Lansing  
*The War Lords* ..... Gardiner  
*On Hazardous Service* ..... Beymer  
*History of Andrew Jackson* ..... Buel  
*The American Merchant Marine* .. Marvin  
*Economic History of the United States*  
     ..... Bogart  
*The Shipbuilding Industry* ..... Kelly  
*Letters and Poems* ..... Keats  
*Spanish Papers* ..... Irving  
*Persian Life and Customs* ..... Wilson  
*From Sea to Sea* ..... Kipling  
*Geographical Manual* ..... Mawson

## TECHNICAL

*Navigation* ..... Coffin  
*Seaman's Handbook for Shore Leave*  
*I. C. S. Handbook*  
*Practical Ship Production* .... Carmichael  
*Notes on Stowage* ..... Hillecoat