

Shell-Backs and Beachcombers.  
Smith, Cicely Fox, Miss.  
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## SHELL-BACKS AND BEACHCOMBERS

SHELL-BACKS AND BEACHCOMBERS. By S. BRADFORD, R.N. (retired). (Skeffington. 18s. net.)

There are, of course, padres and padres. Probably the well-intentioned efforts of port missionaries of the tract-dispensing, back-clapping, "are-you-saved" type have been largely responsible for the undeniable suspicion with which a good many sailors, more especially those of the old "hardshell" school, have always been inclined to regard anything in the nature of a mission. Mr. Bradford calls to mind also a firm of Welsh owners who

provided a Bible for every man who joined one of their ships; yet in their vessels' foc's'les Jack had to live in quarters that the owners would not deem fit for the stabling of their carriage horses; quarters where—if the ship were at anchor in a roadstead—through the hawse-pipes water gushed, as the laden vessel, snubbed by the cable, dipped to the short seas. Quarters that at all times were uncomfortable, ill-lit and rocking. Readings of the Holy Writ in these circumstances were accompanied, I am sure, by many a "deep-water blessing" on the donors.

"Practical Christianity," he adds, "appeals to the men of the sea"; and a padre of the right sort, as Admiral Gordon Campbell puts it in the preface which he contributes to Mr. Bradford's book, "is in a position to get nearer to the sailor's inner self than any other person possibly can." What sailorman does not speak with the deepest respect and admiration of the work of such men as "Fell of 'Frisco," or—in more recent times—of Canon Brady in the ports of South America?

The author of this book has been a "sailors' parson"—an American skipper once called him "the magazine bumboat guy"—for many years; and his work in peace and war at Queenstown, Belfast, Marseilles, Liverpool and elsewhere has afforded him plenty of opportunities of the kind to which Admiral Campbell refers. Brought up in a seaport town, to which such famous ships as Nicol's Romanoff, the Lochs, Banks and Falls, and the beautiful white Sierras, were still frequent visitors, he has the genuine feeling for ships and the sea which is an unerring passport to the seaman's confidence. Not the least interesting of his reminiscences refer to the "Vieux Port" of Marseilles, with its sailors' church from whose roof

floats a miniature fleet suspended on almost invisible cords; old-time frigates and corvettes, Indiamen, quaint junks and catamarans of the East, the lateen-sailed fishing craft or little tartans of the coast, and all the work of rough sailor hands, given in recognition of the protecting hand of God.

He has much to tell of the work of the crews of transports and patrol vessels in time of war, of whom he has many good yarns, both grave and gay; and he reserves a specially warm corner in his heart for the real "shell-back" of the old type. The element of pathos and tragedy is present in many of his recollections; but the lighter side is by no means forgotten. "Man and his Maker" is the title of an interesting chapter; and in one headed "Long and Short Splices" Mr. Bradford demolishes the cherished popular superstition, as widespread and as unfounded as that which asserts that people born at sea belong to the parish of Stepney, regarding the legality of marriage by the captain on board ship.

There are a number of good photographic illustrations; but an error should be noted in the title of that representing the figurehead of the Medway. That vessel was not, as stated, the White Star training ship. The name of the latter was the Mersey, and the Medway was one of the two operated by Messrs. Devitt and Moore in connexion with the ocean training ship scheme, her sister ship being the better-known Port Jackson. She was originally foreign-owned, a reversal of the usual order of things; hence the figurehead, shown in the picture, of the Madonna and Child.