

THE ANSWER

—Jimmy Platt

On a hot summer Sunday afternoon several men of the town were sitting around discussing various subjects in which they were interested at that time.

No one noticed Reverend Bates as he walked into the group to listen to the men tell of the adventures of their younger days.

"I've often wanted to be a sailor," came the words from one of the men who was leading the discussion.

"Yep," he went on, "I've always felt that I would like to be master of the sea. The life of a sailor must be the life of a loafer—just riding around on the sea for weeks at a time, a yearly vacation!"

"No one can master the sea," the Reverend said.

The men turned to see who was talking and for the first time noticed the Reverend.

"You may sail it; you may live from it; but you cannot conquer it!" the Reverend concluded.

"You've never been a sailor, have you, Preacher?" one of the men asked with a cheerful jest.

"Only once," the Reverend replied. "I, too, wanted to lead the life of a sailor, but an incident on my first voyage made me decide to become a preacher."

"What was it?" someone asked eagerly.

"Well, boys," the Reverend started, "I had just finished my high school education and was longing to be a sailor—but, perhaps, I should start at the first."

"It was a beautiful summer morning that greeted me when I opened my eyes. Birds were singing to the top of their voices and the sun with its golden rays blinded me when I tried to look around.

"Hurriedly, I dressed and went through my regular morning habits before I went downstairs to breakfast. I was surprised to see my mom, father, and little brother, Jim, sitting at the table waiting for me. It wasn't often that the four of us were together at one time.

"Though the day was beautiful and my heart was light and I felt like a king, I could only see grief on my mom's face and fear in my father's eyes. Jim, who was only eleven, only sat and looked. He was too young to realize what was taking place.

"'Mom,' I said, 'there isn't any need to worry! I'll only be gone a couple of weeks. Besides, what's a little trip out on the sea going to harm me?'

"Seeing that I was only making things worse, I turned to my father to try to comfort him.

"'Gee, Dad! The way you look you'd think I was going away forever! Captain Gibb, the captain of the Lucie Belle, promised me a job this summer and now I've decided to take it. You've always known I wanted to go to sea! Both of you said it would be all right to go; both—' but I stopped. All this talking was making a bad matter worse.

"After I finished my breakfast, I went upstairs to get my bags I had packed the night before. In them were some of my old clothes and a Bible. My mother had given the Bible to me the day before. When she gave it to me she said, 'Take this Bible and when you're lonesome and sad it will bring you comfort!'

"As I came downstairs, my mother was standing at the foot of them with tears streaming down her face.

"'Gosh!' I said. 'Don't cry, mother! I'll only be gone about a month.'

"'Bill,' she said, 'be good.'

Though I knew what she wanted to say, she only said these three words. But these words meant more to me than if she would have talked forever!

Slowly I walked into the living room to say good-bye to my father. I knew it wouldn't be hard after talking to mom, because father was very understanding.

"'Good-bye, Dad,' I said, 'see you

soon.' As I turned to leave my father spoke for the first time since last night when we had discussed the trip.

"'Son,' my father began, his voice tender but firm, 'you're a grown man now. The world is opening its doors to you. Your future is up to you. If—'

"'Good-bye!' I broke in before he could finish what he wanted to say. 'See you soon.'

"Quickly I turned to go to the door, but as I turned around I hit something. When I looked, I saw it was Jim.

"'So long,' Jim said.

"'Bye and take care of yourself,' I replied. Then I turned and walked past my mom and out the door.

"As I turned and started down the steps, I felt as though the world had been lifted off my shoulders. I knew that saying good-bye to my family would be the hardest part of the whole voyage. However, little did I realize what lay ahead of me on the voyage that I thought would be a pleasure trip!

"About eight-thirty I came to the dock. After looking for some time, I found the Lucie Belle. Though I had seen her many times before, she seemed different now. I stood looking at her tall mast, which seemingly reached the sky. Her body was shaped like a devil of the sea—unconquered and unafraid—a ship that feared nothing—that was always challenging the power of the sea!

"'Come on, Bill!'

"A shout sounded from the ship, and I turned to see Captain Gibb leaning against the rail.

"'Aye, me lad, we're ready to set sail, so come aboard quickly.' The captain's voice was full of power. It was a voice to be obeyed.

"Going aboard the Lucie Belle, I noticed the crew going about their duties. I didn't know the names of any of the crew, so I asked Captain Gibb why he had such a large crew.

"'Aye, it is a large crew, me lad. We're expecting to catch all the fishes in the ocean on this trip,' the captain proudly told me.

"With this lodged in my mind I went below to put up my belongings.

"After I had unpacked most of my clothes, I felt to see if I had days. Everything quickly came back to my mind. I could almost trace my life from the day I cut my foot at the age of five to my present condition of trying to live.

"All of this must have happened in a few seconds, because on opening my eyes, I saw the mainmast fall and two of the crew who were clinging to it were killed instantly.

"I closed my eyes to shut out this ghastly sight, but nothing I could do

made me forget the stinging pains in my arm. The pain grew so strong I missed anything in my bags. In the bottom of my smallest bag I found the Bible that mom had given me.

"'A Bible!' I thought. 'What did I need with a Bible?'

"With this thought in mind I threw the Bible back into the bag and pushed the bag under my bunk.

"So, my belongings being put up, I looked around at the other bunks. They weren't at all like I had expected them to be. I had always read that the bunks were dirty and untidy. But these were clean and orderly. I began to realize this was only the start of my career.

"I reported to the captain, and he sent me to help the cook. Though this may seem easy, it was long and hard work. To get up before anyone else and work in a hot kitchen all day wasn't my idea of a sailor.

"Days passed quickly. Before I knew it, two weeks had passed; and we had reached our destination.

"It took only a few days to fill the boat with fish, for we had been considerably lucky.

"Though I didn't know where I was, I had a yearning inside of me to return home. The sea that I had longed to master was now my enemy.

"On our sixteenth day out at sea the yearning to return home was so great that I could no longer bear the loneliness. Now as the days grew long and dreary, I often read my Bible for comfort. Oh, how it eased my lonely soul to have something or something to take my mind off the ocean.

"Days went by slower and slower. Soon I found myself keeping a calendar of the days that were left before I finally would be home. During these slow and weary days, the only friend I had was my Bible. I had been unable to make friends with any of the crew because of my undying hate that now hung in my heart for the sea.

"On the morning when we were only seven days from home, I was awakened by the noise and rocking of the ship. Looking around me, I realized that most of the crew had dressed and were now rushing up on deck to learn what their orders were to be.

"I could tell by the action of the men that there was danger near. Quickly I slipped into my clothes and started up the stairs to the deck, where the rest of the crew had gone.

"As I started up the stairs, I felt fear gripping me. I found it hard to raise my feet from one step to the next. Slowly I climbed until I reached the top of the stairs. Although I didn't know what it was that I had to fear, I couldn't keep my body

from trembling.

"Just as I stepped on the deck, I was met by a gigantic wave! The once peaceful and calm ocean was now a force of mad water—a raging sea with no place for safety.

"Quickly I grabbed a rope. Perhaps it hadn't been for this rope, I would have been swept overboard like one of the men who had been on deck when I came up. I heard him call for help many times, but the crew seemed only interested in saving their own lives. I rushed to the side to see if there was any way I could help him, but I was too late! The man had been swept under by a gigantic wave and was no longer to be seen.

"Only then did I realize that the ship was in danger of sinking.

"I started toward the main mast to render any help I could to save the ship and my life. I never reached the mast. Half way between the mast and the rail of the ship, I was caught by a sweeping wave of my enemy, the ocean. With a loud crash I was hurled against the rail. For the second time in less than three minutes my life was again saved by clinging to the ship.

"I wasn't as lucky now as I was the first time. I realized now my left arm was filled with pain. Pain, added to my fear, made me wish I were dead. But at the same time I was clinging to the rail in order to save my life. Realizing that there wasn't anything I could do to better my position, I lay on the deck clinging to the ship, trembling with fear, and aching with pain.

"Thousands of things flashed through my mind. I thought of home, my parents, little Jim, and my school that I must have fainting, for when I awoke I was not clinging to the ship as I had thought but lying in a clean bed with my arm in a splint. My eyes failed me at first and everything looked blue; but things began to snap into their form and I saw that a man in a navy uniform, evidently an officer of some rank, was standing over me.

"'Where am I?' I asked.

"'Take it easy,' came the answer; 'you're on the U.S.S. Waltermore.'

"'But—but,' I wanted to ask about the rest of the crew.

"Before I could the officer spoke. 'I'm Lt. Comdr Kiltor, commander of this ship. You had a close call, young man! We barely got you off before your ship went down.'

"'The captain—?' I asked.

"'I'm sorry,' came the quick reply. 'You were the only one we could find. Now, perhaps you had better rest awhile.'

"I turned over and tried to go to sleep but all I could think about was the horror I had witnessed aboard the Lucie Belle.

"Finally I went to sleep, but when I awoke the same thought raced through my mind. No one on the ship mentioned the accident to me, and I tried to forget it. However, I couldn't help thinking to myself that out of fifteen men I was the only one? Why?'

"I couldn't answer this, but no happier person was there in the world than I when I walked off the gangplank of the U.S.S. Waltermore into the waiting arms of my mom and dad.

"'Gosh, Mom,' I said, 'you don't know how happy I am to be home!'

"'Thank God!' Mother said.

"Then it struck me like a bolt of lightning—her two words, 'Thank God!'

"'Yes,' I thought, 'there's my answer.'

"Then turning to my mother, I said, 'Thanks Mom, for the Bible!'

"Yes," he concluded, "I was thankful for the Bible—so thankful that I went to college and studied for the ministry. So you see, fellows, the life of a sailor may be easy for a time, but he always has to fear the sea that can never be made a slave!"

SUPREME SACRIFICE

—Don Leonard

World War II brought sorrow and grief,
But to others it brought relief;
In our own land we'll never know
The sorrow which others did not show,
God is mighty and He sees all,
For he's the one that gave the call—
The call for which America stood
To unite the world in brotherhood.
Boys came back to their native land
To find the freedom they could understand;
Other boys had fought and died
To save America and her pride,
But maybe we of this great land
Can't believe or understand
The tragedies they experienced then
That America might give "good will to men."