



September 1973



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## Feedback

### Thanks to Allen E. Bergin

Congratulations and a million thanks to Allen E. Bergin. His much needed article on human agency was fantastic, the best I've ever read. It's the kind of article my nonmember friends will be interested in. I hope he writes another article for the *New Era*. If he does, I'll be the first to read it.

JANINE GRAY  
 Alhambra, California

### Fantastic Tidbits

I would like to thank you for the July *New Era*. The "Conference Tidbits" were fantastic. They hit some of the highlights of each speaker. Good show!

Also, the fashion specials were great. They not only had some good ideas for what to do and what not to do, but the interview with Mr. Blackwell was good too. I agree with his idea that when a woman is more feminine, a man tends to be more masculine. Keep up the good work.  
 ABBE SMITH  
 Orem, Utah

### Every member should

Thank you for your June publication on missionary work. It was wonderful. Two articles especially struck home: "What to Send to a Missionary" and "Every Member Can Do It," the second being most outstanding. The more time we as missionaries can



# Voyage on the Ship INTERNATIONAL

by William G. Hartley

Illustrated by Howard Post

September  
1973



It was a calm night in the North Atlantic, but Captain David Brown awoke with a start. What a strange dream! His ship's crew, the mates, and even he himself, all were being baptized into the Mormon faith! What did it mean? And why had the dream occurred right after he had fallen asleep while kneeling in prayer? He arose and got into bed, pondering both this strange experience and the singular spirit of the Mormon company then aboard his ship the *International*.

When the large sailing vessel was tugged oceanward into the River Mersey from Liverpool on February 25, 1853, she carried on board a Latter-day Saint emigrant company of 425, including a number of unbaptized friends and relatives, plus a crew of twenty-six. Hail and snow pelted the ship as it anchored in the Mersey awaiting fair winds. Below deck Christopher Arthur, the fifty-six-year-old president of the company, divided the passengers into eight wards, each with a presiding elder assisted by a priest or teacher. Of the identifiable passengers there were 309 adults, 100 children, and 9 infants.

Three days later Captain Brown decided to set sail into the Irish Channel and begin the 5,000-mile

voyage despite strong gales, heavy seas, sightings of storm-wrecked vessels, and spreading seasickness. The Saints steeled themselves for the long and hazardous venture, hoping that in five or six weeks they would safely disembark in New Orleans. By September they should reach Utah.

During the first Sabbath at sea three Mormon meetings were held, open to everyone on board. Captain Brown, his mates, and the entire *International* crew attended the afternoon sacrament meeting. The captain, congenial and God-fearing, won the respect of the emigrants early in the journey.

Later in the week violent Atlantic storms threatened to capsize the wooden vessel. One diarist noted that on March 10 a "strong gale [blew] from the east for five hours—ship rolling tremendously—sea like mountains on each side of the ship. Most of the luggage on the larboard side broke their lashing and rolled to the centre of the steerage."

This crisis caused the priesthood to gather below deck where they supplicated God to still the waves. Almost immediately Captain Brown came down to announce a sudden improvement in the weather. The

hatches were again opened. But that night the *International* sailed into an even worse tempest. "Again our boxes were knocked about," wrote one, "and many of our pots and tins were smashed, and many articles lost." The scene was even more terrifying than on the preceding night. No cooking fires were allowed, and women and children could not leave their berths. For nearly fifteen hours the storm raged. Finally, about mid-afternoon the next day, the weather had eased enough so that the hatches could be reopened. It was on that night, after having seen his ship safely through two days of near disaster, that the exhausted Captain fell asleep while praying and had his remarkable dream.

The voyage progressed. Despite the difficult beginning, the emigrant company retained a continuing good spirit, particularly evident in their nightly and Sabbath day meetings. Speaking in tongues and prophesying were not uncommon. After four weeks at sea the presiding elders reported all in their wards "to be in good standing, no sickness, quarreling, nor complaints of any kind." But they knew the ship was not making proper progress, averaging less than eighty miles per









day against the troublesome headwinds. On Easter Sunday, March 27, the Mormons fasted until late afternoon in thanksgiving to God for their preservation and in prayer for fair winds and smooth seas.

Captain Brown was likewise concerned about the turbulent sailing conditions. In four weeks only one-third of the distance to New Orleans had been covered; there were 2,900 miles yet to go. He therefore ordered an inventory of food reserves, which showed them adequate unless the unfavorable winds continued. In the midst of the company's anxiety, however, the Spirit brought them reassurance on March 29: "a tongue interpreted that we should have a speedier voyage than was anticipated, as the Lord was well pleased with our fasting and had heard our prayers."

Events of the next few days and nights, however, seemed to negate that prophecy. Storms struck again: "strong gale; great swell on the water; ship rolling very much; many of the passengers sick. . . . Things rolling about." Outside the elements were at war, but within the Spirit was at work. After one preaching meeting where "Brother Finch gave a brief and lucid explanation of the first principles," five converts were baptized. On April 1, the unfavorable winds continued, but at a

testimony meeting, which many sailors attended, three more baptisms occurred, including the ship's carpenter, the first crew member to convert. The next day found food rations reduced. But that evening three more sailors and one passenger were baptized at the testimony meeting.

How is someone baptized aboard a sailing vessel? Sometimes large barrels filled with salt water or a platform improvised by the side of the ship were used. On the *International*, according to one who was baptized there, the ordinance was performed on deck "in a large round vat holding probably 2,000 gallons of water." Why the vat was on board we can only surmise. But filled with sea water it served well as a convenient font.

On the first Sunday in April, five weeks from Liverpool and still not halfway to New Orleans, a special Church meeting was held in the steerage. While the vessel was tossed on the heavy seas, many testimonies were borne. Then, "a proposition was made that we should pray through our president for favorable winds." Unitedly, they petitioned for divine assistance, "when, remarkable to relate, the Lord almost immediately answered our prayers." Christopher Arthur, Jr., twenty-two years old

and not yet a Mormon, later recalled the moment: "Prayer was offered on the 3rd of April for a fair wind which was answered while we were on our knees." There was one more squall that night, but from then on ideal weather sped the vessel toward Florida. During the next three days, as the Saints rejoiced "that our prayer was heard," the *International* sailed as far as it had during the previous two weeks. Frequently the stretched sails carried the ship 220 miles per day.

The new turn of events made the Saints extra joyous as they celebrated the birthday of the Church in a day-long festival on April 6. A sacrament service and four marriages occupied the morning. Afternoon festivities included "prayer and praise," songs, speeches, recitations, and instrumental music. Next came a specially prepared meal, "a repast of every delicacy the ship could afford or pastry cooking could invent." Evening merriment included national dances, singing, recitations, and "skipping the light fantastic toe until a late hour." The day produced fellowship and delight for all on board, including the crew and their captain.

While the *International* sped west toward port, the Mormon ranks continued to grow as predicted in Captain Brown's dream. Just be-



fore the April 6 festival, the captain's cook was baptized. On April 8 President Arthur's sixteen-year-old daughter, Mary Ann, and a Negro crewman were baptized. The second mate, three sailors, and Christopher Arthur, Jr., were baptized the next day. As the *International* slipped between Cuba and Florida a week later the first mate joined the Church, as did three sailors and one emigrant the next day. Even 110° heat on April 17 did not squelch the Spirit, for the Saints held "first-rate meetings during the whole day; in the evening the ship's carpenter, captain's cook, and two sailors bore testimony to the truth of the work."

Captain Brown's spirit was troubled as the conversions continued. Some of his feelings were revealed when he gave landing instructions on April 18 and confessed his attraction to Mormonism: "He had crossed the seas many times," one diarist reported in quoting him, "but never felt so happy with any people as he had with the Latter-day Saints." He added that "his pride prevented him from immediately becoming a saint but he felt he soon should join us and come to Great Salt Lake City." Following his remarks two more passengers were baptized. At testimony meeting the next evening

six sailors bore testimony and afterwards one sailor was baptized.

Three days before the voyage ended, and as the blackness of night was just starting to lighten along the eastern horizon at 4:30 A.M., Captain David Brown was baptized by President Arthur. That evening he and two others were confirmed members of the Church. Then, as a fitting climax to the *International's* conversion story, the captain and ship's carpenter were ordained as elders, the first and second mates became priests, and the cook a teacher. As part of this service, at which the captain, the carpenter, and several crewmen bore testimony, a Swede and a Negro crewman were the final baptisms aboard ship.

At 5:00 P.M. on April 23 the *International* docked in New Orleans, completing a fifty-four-day trip. President Arthur was pleased with the conduct both of the Saints and of the ship's crew. In his official report to President Samuel W. Richards of the British Mission, Arthur particularly praised the captain:

"To his honor I can say that no man ever left Liverpool with a company of saints, more beloved by them, or who has been more friendly and social than he has been with us."

The report credited the workings of the Spirit coupled with the Saints exemplary conduct for the remarkable number of conversions made on the high seas. He proudly wrote:

"I am glad to inform you, that we have baptized all on board except three persons [the steward and his wife, both staunch Catholics, and the third mate, 'a very wicked fellow'—]. We can number the captain, first and second mates, with eighteen of the crew, most of whom intend going right through to the valley. . . . The carpenter and eight of the seamen are Swedish, German, and Dutch. There are two negroes. . . . The others baptized were friends of the brethren. The number baptized in all is forty-eight, since we left our native shores."

Captain David Brown's prophetic dream of six weeks earlier had been 94 percent accurate. ■

Sources: A printed copy of the "Diary of a Voyage from Liverpool to New Orleans on Board the Ship *International* . . ." probably written by Elder John Lyon, is in the Church Archives as are the "International: Ship Journal, Feb 21, 1853 to Oct 9, 1853," a small handwritten diary probably kept by Elder George Sims, the company's clerk; and a handwritten passenger list for the ship. Elder Arthur's report on the voyage is in the *Contributor* 13 (August 1892) 463-65. Also informative about the trip are the typed autobiographies of Christopher Arthur, Jr., at the Utah State Historical Society. Two interesting books discussing Mormon emigration from England, including passenger life aboard ships like the *International*, are P.A.M. Taylor's *Expectations Westward* (1965) and Gustive O. Larson's *Prelude to the Kingdom* (1947).