

Bottles in the Briny

DON'T IGNORE THAT half-buried bottle on the beach. It could contain a message that might help solve a mystery of the sea, win you a wife or husband, save a shipwrecked sailor or make you rich.

One winter day in 1955, Aarke Wiking of Goteburg, Sweden, tossed a bottle off his ship into the Mediterranean. The bottle contained a note which asked "all girls aged 16 to 20" if they wanted to marry a "handsome, blond Swede." Last May, Sebastiano Puzzo, factory worker and father of many girls, found the sealed bottle on a lonely Sicilian beach. Smashing it open, he saw the Swedish sailor's message, had it translated and promptly sent him a picture of his 18-year-old daughter, Paolina. She soon started corresponding with the 24-year-old sailor, and married him not long ago in Syracuse, Sicily.

A farm boy in the Azores discovered a sealed bottle containing a note which promised to pay the finder \$1,000—if the note were forwarded to a

New York address. The boy duly collected his reward from a radio-program sponsor who had cast the bottle into New York harbor as a publicity stunt. Such "money-bottles" are often tossed into the sea by wealthy cruise passengers.

Recently a scrawled S.O.S. sealed in a bottle, supposedly signed by two shipwrecked German pilots 15 years ago, washed up on the island of Majorca. Written on the back of an instruction that told how to inflate a life raft, the message said: "August 1943, shipwrecked south of Espiritu Santo Island, S.O.S. Heil Hitler." It carried two signatures — of men who were never found.

Twenty-five years ago, Doyle Branscum sealed a picture of himself in a basketball uniform inside a bottle and tossed it into a river in Arkansas. Last winter the bottle washed up on a beach near Largo, Florida. Bill Headstream of Largo found the photo and, using the return address on the back, mailed it to Branscum. Headstream and Branscum were boyhood friends when Headstream lived in Ar-

kansas. They hadn't heard from each other until the bottle incident.

Some years ago, a Soviet fisherman plucked a small watertight container from sea ice in the Russian Arctic. Inside was a note, written in Norwegian and English, which read: "Five ponies and 150 dogs remaining. Desire hay, fish and 30 sledges. Must return early in August. Baffled."

THE MESSAGE HAD been released by the polar explorer, Evelyn Baldwin, and had drifted in the Arctic Ocean for 45 years. (The expedition came through safely anyway, and Baldwin died a natural death in 1933.)

Scientists for many years have been using bottle-mail to study ocean currents and winds. Such studies enabled Benjamin Franklin to chart the Gulf Stream.

Perhaps the busiest bottle-mailers are members of the U.S. Navy Hydrographic Office, Washington, D.C. Each year, they throw thousands of corked bottles, containing forms printed in eight languages, including Esperanto, into waters around the world. Finders are asked to take or mail the enclosed forms to any U.S. consul for forwarding to Washington, where the information is used to study ocean currents.

Some time ago one such bottle was dropped into the Indian Ocean. It was subsequently picked up off the coast of British Somaliland by a Moslem named Mohammed Mustapha. Unable to read any of the printed languages, he jumped on his camel and raced to the nearest British agent, who filled out the form and mailed it to Washington.

About two months later, the native rushed back to the agent's office waving a large pilot chart of his native waters and a letter from the hydrographer thanking him for his services. The chart, Mohammed insisted, was a draft on the U.S. Government, and he demanded to know why the local bank would not cash it.

Bottle messages are also used to help spread the word of God. A West Coast preacher collects empty liquor bottle. After cleaning them, he inserts sermons and sets them adrift on the seas.

There are, of course, the bottle-message practical jokers. Once in a while bottle-mail washes up a message such as "Ship sinking! Help!" These are readily recognized as hoaxes because the alleged ship's given position usually plots atop a mountain or miles inland.

Beer bottles, ketchup bottles, whisky bottles, champagne bot-

bles, Chianti bottles — all kinds of bottles are bobbing up and down on the waters of the world. What messages to they

contain? S.O.S.? Lonelyhearts? Money-mail? Not even the winds and the ocean waves know the answers.

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Try Again

OFF THE COAST of Newfoundland, a ship collided with a fishing boat in a heavy fog. No real damage was done, but as the offending ship tried to back off, it banged into the boat again. The captain was afraid he might have done some damage with the second blow. "Can you stay afloat?" he shouted through a megaphone to the floundering victim.

"I guess so," called back the skipper of the boat. "Do you want to try again?"

Young Logic

FIVE-YEAR-OLD Jimmy's mother was seldom surprised by anything she found in her offspring's pockets. However, she was a little more than curious when she found a wad of grass in his pocket one day. She called him in from play and asked why it was there.

Answered Jimmy with firm logic, "That worm I have in there had to eat, didn't he?"