Rev. Dr. J. Ross Stevenson's

Sermon at the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary

of the

American Seamen's Friend Society.

ANNUAL SERMON

BEFORE THE

American Seamen's Friend Society,

AT ITS

SEVENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY,

Sunday, May 3, 1903,

BY THE

Rev. J. ROSS STEVENSON, D.D.

IN THE

FIFTH AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

AMERICAN SEAMEN'S FRIEND SOCIETY,
76 WALL STREET, NEW YORK.

1903.

SERMON.

For we are saved by hope.—Romans viii: 24.

The Apostle is speaking of the sufferings of the present time. They often bear down upon the Christian like the wild, relentless waves of the sea. The tempest beats against him, the billows roll over him, and it looks at times as if he would be swallowed up by the great deep, or driven upon the rocks and shipwrecked. Yet he looks forward with calm certainty, knowing that he will enter the desired haven, and safe at home all the perils of the rude, imperious surge will be forgotten. We so often speak of being saved by faith, that we forget the part hope has in the Christian's redemption. Faith and hope as Christian graces are closely allied, and yet should be distinguished from each other. The object of both is something unseen. Faith has regard equally to past, present or future. Hope concerns itself only with the future, and is the desire for promised good. It has been defined as "faith in its prospective attitude." It is the sight of comfort and pleasure in the invisible future. When the vessel which carried Paul to Rome was exceedingly tossed with a tempest, and all hope that he and those who were with him should be saved was taken away, a vision assured the apostle that all of them would be brought to land. He believed the angel which spoke to him, he trusted God who had sent the message, and his hope seized upon the promised rescue. He was saved by hope. These are terms which every sailor can understand. He knows what it is to be in great peril, even to be given up for lost, only to be rescued, and the hope which springs eternal in the human breast is not a stranger to him. He looks forward to the desired haven, which means all danger passed and a safe home-coming to kindred and friends. The Society whose anniversary we observe to-day is an agency of hope which seeks to bring salvation to men often regarded as hopeless, that they may apprehend not only future joys but present blessings. So that the *saving power of Christian hope* furnishes us a very appropriate theme for this occasion.

Every man lives in hope. He looks forward to something better than he has yet known or experienced. His hopes often deceive him, and he is lured onward to disappointment and failure. The hope of the ungodly is said to be like a spider's web, and this gives us three characteristics of such a hope which we ought to think about. It is something very *beautiful.* The spider's web with its silky threads, arranged in perfect symmetry, glistening in the sunlight and covered over with diamond drops of dew, attracts and pleases the eye. Its main purpose is to charm the unwary insect and allure it on to certain destruction. So it is with the false hopes of mankind. They appear beautiful enough, but they mean dangerous entanglements which make the soul a forlorn prisoner. The web of the spider is spun from its own body; the delicate filaments woven together so skillfully come from within. And this is particularly true of the hopes which men cherish apart from Christ. They are *self-spun.* They come from their false notions, or vain imaginings, or are born of selfish desires. They are entirely subjective, and do not have objective reality. And consequently, they have the other characteristic of the spider's web; they are fragile, unsubstantial, and soon destroyed in the time of storm. So men's earthly hopes fail them in the hour of trial. They are like the foolish virgins who lived in expectation of banqueting with the bridegroom, but when the midnight cry sounded, there was no oil in their lamps. The sudden emergency found them unprepared, so that they were compelled to turn to the wise for relief, which, however, could not be communicated in the moment of crisis. In the hour of sore extremity men want the believer's hope. It is no uncommon thing for scoffers when at sea and there is danger of shipwreck, to pray to the God whom they profess to despise. They want the Christian's hope, and this because it is as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast. An anchor needs to be firm in its inherent character. The most ancient anchors consisted merely of large stones—baskets full of stones—sacks filled with sand, or logs of wood loaded with lead. Iron was afterward introduced for the construction of anchors, and they were further improved by the use of teeth or flukes so that they could catch and hold to the bottom of the deep. To ensure safety, anchors are now not only made of the strongest material, they are thoroughly tested. So it is with the Christian's hope. It is formed of truth, of the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever. It has been forged together in the furnace of affliction, in the fire of suffering. It has been tested over and over

again by Christian experience, and will endure any strain that can be put upon it. Thus it secures stability when the water is not too deep, nor the ground too rocky or loose with sand. The common impression is that the anchor may be used during a storm out in mid-ocean; but under such circumstances it is of no value, and if it should be fastened to a rock it is likely to break. The anchor can only be used near shore, and even then it does not furnish absolute security. But not so the Christian's anchor. The hope of the gospel fastens itself to the shore of eternity; it enters "within the vail," and the cable of faith which ties the believing soul thereto reaches far out to sea, and never suffers the ship to be lost. Just as the anchor goes into and lays hold of that which is firm and secure, so the expectation and desire of the disciple of the Lord attaches itself to the unseen, but the truly real and eternal,—into the enjoyment of which the hopeful Christian will come at last and see his Pilot face to face. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself as He is pure. The expectation of being with Christ is the strongest incentive to become like Him. As the vessel comes nearer home, the sailors are set to work to arrange and cleanse and polish in order that everything may be in ship shape by the time the harbor is reached. The voyagers, too, forgetting the things that are behind, look eagerly forward, shading their eyes with their hands in the hope of seeing land, ready to disembark, to greet the loved ones who await their coming, and experience the joy, the peace and the plenty of home. And when the spiritual voyager begins to realize that the long midnight of earth's tempestuous sea is over, that soon he will descry "the towers of the New Jerusalem, lights gleaming in the harbor, the Sabbath bells of glory ringing, loved and lost ones lining the heavenly shore waiting to conduct him hand in hand up the streets of the celestial city," and present him to Christ of all his hopes the ground, Christ the spring of all his joy, he feels the necessity of casting aside the stained, grimy, hard-worn garments of ocean life, and of putting on the raiment of light, of following after holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. He is saved by hope.

Though seamen live constantly under the power of earthly hopes, from a religious point of view they have often been regarded as a hopeless class. Seventy-five years ago their moral condition was indeed appalling. As one has described it, "It would be difficult to conceive of a deeper moral night than that which for centuries had

settled down upon the sea. Wickedness of every kind abounded. Officers and men, with a few honorable exceptions, appear to have thrown off all moral restraint and abandoned themselves to work iniquity with greediness. From the admiral to the after-guard, from the captain to the cook, from the lieutenant to the landsman, all, all as a rule were in the same condemnation. The exceptions were few and far between. The ships of Christian England, the great naval power of that day, were moral pest-houses—Sodoms in iniquity, Gomorrahs in crime. They were designated by those who were familiar with their condition as "hells afloat." Drunkenness abounded; blasphemy, impurity and insubordination were prevalent. It was almost as much as a man's life was worth to be found engaged in any religious service, or to be suspected even of having regard for his soul's welfare. Religion was to many only another name for cowardice and lubberly character. It was not believed that a man could be a Christian and a sailor at the same time. Thus they were in that condition of which Paul speaks, "dead in trespasses and sins, without Christ and without God in the world, having no hope." We hear of those to-day, not only at sea but in foreign ports, who, though they had their birth and training in civilized lands, are fulfilling the lusts of the flesh and the mind, and showing that they are by nature the children of wrath; and it reveals to us what human nature is capable of, what it is inclined to when the restraints of home, of Christian society, or of Church vows are no longer felt. We see the same thing illustrated in people of our own acquaintance, whose piety will not bear transportation; it cannot be carried across the Atlantic, it will not endure the slight change of climate involved in spending a few summer weeks at a watering-place, and is commonly left at home. Dr. S. Hall Young, in writing of the degenerates who are to be found in Alaska, states that he knows personally three men who were Presbyterian elders, who were active in church work in the States and respected, but are now desperate, drunken, seemingly irreclaimable gamblers. Ought we not then to examine ourselves, and make sure that we are anchored by a stedfast hope which will not allow us to drift out to sea or in upon the rocks when adverse gales beat upon us?

Before the organization of the AMERICAN SEAMEN'S FRIEND SOCIETY, the general impression was that even if a sailor had a soul, he could no more be converted than the mainmast. But thanks be to God, there were even then a few devout souls, who, mourning over the

moral dissoluteness of the seafaring class, hoped for their salvation, and began laboring and praying for this end. In one of the first appeals issued in this country in the interests of seamen, a three-fold argument was introduced to prove that they can be converted: 1st, because they are men; 2nd, because their conversion is the subject of Scriptural prophecy; 3rd, from well authenticated facts. Since then a mighty work of grace has been going on with increasing volume among seamen, and they are being converted by the hundreds, in proportion to the prayers offered, the faith exercised, and the means employed. In consequence, as a class they are very different from what they were seventy-five years ago, so that not only are representatives of Christ to be found on nearly every vessel, but prayer meetings and religious services in the forecastle or on the berth deck are by no means infrequent. All this because the AMERICAN SEAMEN'S FRIEND SOCIETY began its work as an agency of hope, in the spirit of Christ, who never despaired of any man. He was condemned for associating with the hopeless outcasts of society. He did not deny their guilt nor make sentimental apologies for their sin, but He did deny that they were beyond recovery, and He hoped for those of whom the world despaired. And if the gospel is to be carried to every creature, the Church must be filled with the spirit of Christlike hopefulness, which expects great things from God, and therefore attempts great things for God. This is the spirit of Christian missions, which sees even in the most degraded and barbarous races those for whom Christ died, and believes that the gospel, being the power of God unto salvation, is able to turn wicked, depraved men from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God. Where would we be to-day had not Augustine and Boniface and Ansgar and Columba gone forth as the apostles of hope to evangelize our barbarian ancestors?

The AMERICAN SEAMEN'S FRIEND SOCIETY seeks to save men by giving them the sure hope of the gospel. It provides for their physical welfare, caring for the shipwrecked and destitute, supplying them with clothing, small sums of money and necessary comforts which would otherwise be denied them. It seeks to improve the intellectual condition of seamen, by placing loan libraries on American vessels leaving the port of New York, and distributing interesting and useful publications, providing reading rooms with instructive entertainments in the ports. It throws around the sailor a wholesome moral influence when he is on land, gives him congenial society in boarding

houses of good character, and shields him from the temptations which would work his ruin. But above all it employs chaplains and missionaries at thirty-six different ports, that seamen may have the simple message of the gospel, secure a safe anchorage for the soul and be saved by hope. Do we realize what this means? Some of you may have read that interesting and instructive book by Frank T. Bullen, "With Christ at Sea," in which he writes of his early godless days as a sailor, tossed to and fro, believing that religion was only a veneer for money-making purposes, and having no hope in Jesus. And then he describes his conversion in the sail loft at Port Chalmers, New Zealand, where, attracted to the simple gospel service by the singing, he listened to the appeal of an earnest little man and found the way that led to peace. And Christ being formed in him, the hope of glory, he experienced the happiness as of "one who after a long delirium of fever awakes one morning with cool hands and head, a delicious sensation of restfulness pervading every nerve, a consciousness of serene enjoyment of the dawn smiling in through the window, of the fresh cleanliness of the room, of healthy hunger presently to be satisfied." This is but a single instance of many that could be given to show the power of the old gospel to make men new creatures in Christ.

If anyone is inclined to doubt the transforming power of the truth as it is in Jesus, let him read the records of the American Seamen's Friend Society through the seventy-five years of its history; or let him go into one of the mariners' missions and listen to the testimony of those who have placed their lives under the direction of the divine Pilot, to be convinced that Christ is abundantly able to save. Oh that all of us might have such a confidence in the gospel that we shall be ready to take it to the man who has sunk to the lowest depths, assured that it can lift him up and set his feet upon the rock and put a new song into his mouth, even praise unto our Lord. An agency that exalts Christ and Him crucified should appeal to every redeemed heart. It is obeying the great commission to carry the gospel to every creature. When the great missionary apostle was voyaging to Rome he did not forget the sailors, nor any of those who were on board with him. Mindful of their temporal welfare, he did everything in his power—and his chief power was prayer—to bring them safely through the tempest to the desired haven; and from what we know of Paul, he certainly seized every opportunity to testify of Christ and urge His claims upon his fellow voyagers. Thus did Francis Xavier when he

sailed from Portugal around the Cape of Good Hope to India; and this was true of Carey, of Duff,—every real missionary, in fact, has shown a deep interest in the moral and religious welfare of seamen, and has prayed and labored for their conversion. Christ himself labored for this class of men, and from them selected some of His noblest and most efficient apostles. Surely then, the whole Church should be profoundly interested in this Christlike service, and should earnestly endeavor to bring the influences of Light and Truth and Joy upon the very men whom Jesus so much loved. It is estimated that more than three millions of men are engaged in a seafaring life. We are great debtors to these men. They are the defenders of our national life and honor; they are the servants of commerce; we trust ourselves or our loved ones to their care whenever a journey has to be made by water; without them we would be isolated from the rest of the world; without them science and art would suffer; they are the agents and heralds of civilization, and it is through them that the Church is endeavoring to carry the gospel to all nations. We owe it to them to provide every means necessary for their social and moral improvement. What they do for us costs the most vigorous self-denial, and at times life itself. This AMERICAN SEAMEN'S FRIEND SOCIETY is endeavoring to act as the right arm of the Church in reaching this large, needy and needed class of men. God forbid that this arm should be shortened or weakened. May it abide and grow in strength and skill so that the record of past years will be but the foregleams of future, greater achievements.

How many of us here this day have the sure and stedfast hope of the gospel? The certain evidence that you have it is an eager desire to communicate it to others. Matthew Arnold wrote of his illustrious father:

> "Thou wouldst not *alone*
> Be saved, my father, *alone*
> Conquer and come to the goal,
> Leaving the rest in the wild,
> Therefore to thee it was given
> Many to save with thyself."

Since the hope of every creature is the religion we profess, shall we not give ourselves more earnestly to consistent living, fervent prayer and consecrated effort, so that the time will soon come when the God of hope will fill all with peace and joy in believing, that they may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost.

American Seamen's Friend Society.

Organized in 1828. Incorporated in 1833.

76 WALL STREET, NEW YORK.

TO PASTORS AND CHURCH OFFICERS:

The AMERICAN SEAMEN'S FRIEND SOCIETY is interdenominational. The various denominations have endorsed it as the proper agency to use in sending the gospel to seamen.

American Christians who believe in home and foreign missions ought all the more to believe in missions to the millions of seamen who represent Christian countries in heathen ports, and who have abundant opportunities to propagate the faith or to retard its progress. The record of this Society for seventy-five years is a commanding motive for increasing its efforts.

Annual aid is given to chaplains in thirty-six ports; loan libraries are put on vessels, (about two for every working day in forty-five years); temporary aid is bestowed on shipwrecked and destitute seamen; the SAILORS' MAGAZINE, the LIFE BOAT and the SEAMEN'S FRIEND are published; Bibles and tracts are distributed on vessels; and many things done for seamen that cannot be tabulated or described.

Pastors are requested to present the cause of seamen to their congregations, to put in the list of their missionary topics the work of this Society, to ask their Sunday Schools to give annually $20 for a loan library, and to put this Society in the list of church collections.

The Secretary is ready to present the cause in churches or elsewhere.

The payment of Five Dollars makes an Annual Member.

The payment of Thirty Dollars at one time makes a Life Member.

The payment of One Hundred Dollars at one time makes a Life Director.

The SAILORS' MAGAZINE is mailed prepaid to subscribers for one dollar per year.

Pastors of churches taking an annual collection, and Life Members and Life Directors receive a free copy.

Checks may be drawn to the order of the AMERICAN SEAMEN'S FRIEND SOCIETY.

FORM OF A BEQUEST.

"I give and bequeath to the AMERICAN SEAMEN'S FRIEND SOCIETY, incorporated by the Legislature of New York, in the year 1833, the sum of $——, to be applied to the charitable uses and purposes of the said Society."

Nearly five hundred persons have left legacies to this Society in seventy-five years, in sums ranging from ten dollars to twenty-three thousand dollars. Among these are seamen, sea captains, and admirals; missionaries to seamen and trustees of this Society; such shipping men as Henry Trowbridge, R. P. Buck, R. W. Ropes, and many more; such business men as John C. Green, Henry P. Haven, James Brown, John C. Whitin, Frederick Marquand, Wm. E. Dodge, A. S. Barnes, and many more; and such women as Mrs. Catherine Wilkins, Mrs. A. T. Stewart, Mrs. Hannah Ireland, Mrs. Sarah Burr, Mrs. Ellen M. Gifford, Mrs. John W. Livingston, and many others.