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Rev. Dr. HOWARD DUFFIELD'S  
SERMON AT THE SIXTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE  
AMERICAN SEAMEN'S FRIEND SOCIETY.

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# SHIPS:

A DISCOURSE BEFORE THE

American Seamen's Friend Society,

AT ITS

SIXTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY,

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BY

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IN THE

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AMERICAN SEAMEN'S FRIEND SOCIETY,  
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## SERMON.

“There go the ships.”—Psalm civ: 26.

Well, nothing else can go there, and they can go nowhere else. Sea-water is not a good roadway for craft that have no keel. Turnpike and railway make poor cruising ground for boats. The tenants of the earth must leave by far the largest part of their present residence unvisited, unless they are willing to go a-sailing; a fact not wholly pleasurable. Seafaring is not altogether inviting. The bigness of the ocean makes man feel very little and very lonesome. Listen to the log of an old voyager. “Forty days in the great desert of the sea, forty nights camped under cloud canopies with the salt dust of the waves drifting over us. Sometimes a Bedouin sail flashed for an hour upon the distant horizon, and then faded, and we were alone again; sometimes the West at sunset looked like a city with towers and we bore down upon its glorified walls seeking a haven; but a cold grey morning dispelled the illusion, and our hearts sank back into the illimitable sea, breathing a long prayer for deliverance.” The situation is somewhat singular. If we were world-making, we would not use so much fluid. The planet seems more like an aquarium, than a stopping place for land-loving animals. It is a decidedly wet globe that man has been given the care of, only one-tenth of it soil, nine-tenths of it brine. Not quite so many leagues of inhospitable and sterile waste, and much more of meadow and garden; fewer schools of fish, and more communities of men; a little less sea-weed and a little more corn crop; less foam and more loam would seem to be an improved formula for globe-making.

“The sea is His. He made it.” And whatever He makes is a servant of good. The mighty wall of sea which He has builded about the dwelling places of the nations is the condition of the race’s finest growth.

The sea is the creator of national character. It endows each of the peoples of the earth with personality. It equips each member of the household of nations for that peculiar function which it must play in achieving the mission of the race. The brightest and the bravest nationalities are those which breathe the most sea salt.

The lands which grow the hardiest and most helpful of men are those which lie open-breasted to the embrace of the sea.

“Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay.”

China with its oceans of land is a fossil nationality. England girt with sea, as with a tightened girdle, sweeps unrestingly along the pathway of mastery. China perpetually petrifies. England perennially fructifies.

The sea is the creator of international communication. It seems to isolate. It really furnishes the best medium of national communication. It not only bars, it beckons. It is a barrier to hate, but it is the thoroughfare of peace. The merchant-man can cross it more easily than the war-ship. The commerce of the world is the child of the sea and “the sails of commerce are the wings of truth.” Knowledge, the social refinements, the arts of culture, the fruits of power, the factors of expanding manhood, all follow in its wake. The interchange of material products is accompanied with a traffic in ideas, a barter of truths, a marketing of character forces that determine the advancement of the race. All that ministers to largest development of society, of government, of science, and of religion travels by sea. The highway of man, and the pathway of the Lord, is in the great waters. The progress of the planet is across the wave.

“There go the ships.” How many there are! Long ago there was but one ship in the world, and everything in the world that was worth saving was aboard that single ship. The squadron of exhibition that came sweeping up the Narrows yesterday, breasting the waves like a flock of sea-gulls, was the last division in a mighty naval parade that has been cruising round the globe ever since the launching of Noah’s Ark, the flag-ship of the world’s flotilla. Arithmetic is helpless to number the vessels that have been floated since it anchored at Ararat. Amid the foremost files of the great maritime procession that famous life-boat of bulrushes went drifting down the Nile. Through the mists of the morning of time are discerned the strange ships of the Mediterranean service, that made their haven in the coasts of Zebulun. Following them swarm craft innumerable, the great merchant ships of Solomon, with their cargoes of apes, and ivory, and peacocks; Hiram’s cedar rafts for the Temple building; the brazen-beaked war-ships of Greece and Rome, with their terraces of oars; the rough-hewn, oaken-prowed ships of the Vikings, that vaunted a royal sway over the sea. There are the Argonauts, who sailed Eastward for the Golden Fleece, and the Phenicians, who sailed Westward for Cornish tin. There is the proud Armada that menaced the liberties of the

world, and the humble *Mayflower* that saved the freedom of mankind from wreck. There are galleys, argosies, caravels, and galleons; canoes, yachts, junks and dahabeeyahs. There are the old time fighters with their piled up clouds of canvas and their Olympic thundings of artillery; and there are the modern and modest-looking monitors that are floating volcanoes, sheathed with iron. Yesterday the three pinnacles of the explorer came groping across the sea. Today an unbroken procession of splendid vessels goes sweeping forth upon the trackless waste of waters, with the careless confidence of a boy running along a country lane.

Not only in secular history, but in the story of religion ships are conspicuous for multitude. The background of gospel incident is beautiful with the shimmer of Gennesaret water. An overshadowing percentage of the scanty time that Jesus spent upon the earth is associated with the Galilean Lake. He wrought miracles upon its shores. He used one of its fishing smacks as a pulpit. He slept in its boats. He breathed its air. He drank its beauty. He commanded its tempests into calm. He trod its chafing waters beneath His feet. He cheered the heart of its discouraged fishermen. He recruited His discipleship from their sturdy ranks. After His resurrection, upon a never-to-be-forgotten morning, He held tryst with them upon these much loved shores, as He shall one day banquet with the redeemed upon the shores of eternity, when all shadows have flown and at last day has come.

When an apostolic vacancy was to be filled, one who was no stranger to the sea was chosen. The Mediterranean was to Paul, what Gennesaret was to the sons of Zebedee. He was born within sound of its waves. He was continually crossing its waters. He touched repeatedly at its prominent ports. Its winds and currents were familiar acquaintances. The tackle of its shipping he could handle as well as the weaver's shuttle. Thrice he suffered shipwreck. A day and a night he was in the deep. The man chosen to preach to the Gentiles was a good sailor. In fact, a world-wide gospel meant ships. Without them Christianity would be a hermit religion, the teaching of Jesus have died like an echo in a corner, and Old and New Testaments alike have only gathered dust upon the shelves of oblivion. When the Master said "Go into all the world and gospel creation," his syllables meant dockyards, and shipbuilders, and the myriad host of maritime folk. Within the compass of that sentence lay the voyage of Augustine to Britain to outdo the conquest of Cæsar, with the peaceful victories of the cross. It implied the passage of the Puritan beyond the then undiscovered seas, to achieve in fact what Columbus performed in

symbol, to rear the banners of Calvary in the New World, and to make its wilderness to sing the praises of Christ. It forecast the invasion of India by Carey, of China by Morrison, of the Dark Continent by Livingston? Christians of the earliest times emblemed the Church as a ship battling its triumphant passage over hostile billows. But Christians of the nineteenth century can better feel the thrilling significance of the symbol as they behold the marvels of maritime skill whereby the world is girdled with gospel.

“There go the ships.” How wonderful they are! “The leviathan that plays therein,” is forced to defend his laurels against the leviathan that nowadays is disporting himself thereon. The legendary sea serpent is an insignificant affair in comparison with the matter-of-fact ocean grey-hound. Mind is mightier than ocean; more measureless; more fathomless. The voyaging of a modern steamship is a victory of mentality before which one may well bare the brow. Most marvellous was it, when a keen astronomer urged a brother student of the skies to aim his lens toward a given point in the dark, and at a certain hour a new world swam into view. But more matchless the marvel, as has been justly noted, is the every-day occurrence of the captain of an ocean liner, after he has been driving his ship over the unquiet sea by day and darkness, through fog and clear, without landmark or guide post, saying, “This evening, just over yonder, Fastnet Light will flash you out a greeting.”

In olden time the conquerors of the world smoothed down a mountain side and chiselled the record of their renown upon the broad flanks of the rock. By the magic of modern mechanics, “the mountains are cast into the midst of the sea.” Their forests are rigged with canvas. Their coal beds are stored in capacious bunkers, and transformed into Titanic energy. Their iron is smelted and made to swim. The villages that cluster upon their sides are launched and float across unstable oceans with scarcely less security when they are bottomed upon the unmoving rock. Exaggeration seems impossible. The ocean steamer is a man-made microcosm. Between decks is the population of a good sized town. Its crew numbers four hundred men. Its furnaces eat four hundred and sixty pounds of coal a minute; three hundred tons a day. To build it costs three millions. To sail it from shore to shore costs eighty thousand. To create it and to manage it demands an expenditure of intellectual force that baffles figures. The brain work that devised its plan, the skilled handicraft that fashioned its form, the disciplined energy, the acute calculation, the masterful array and combination of every material energy and mental potency that can drive such a planetary construction across

a trackless waste, in face of tempest, tide and current, on an orbit fine as a hair line, and drop anchor on schedule time, has a right to our astonished admiration. The old warrior wept for a world to conquer. In this marvellous and ever-expanding realm of maritime invention the Church has it. We speak of the merchant marine. When the shipping of the world becomes the Christian marine, dispersing over the earth the benedictions of the cross, the hour will be near, when the Saviour "shall be satisfied."

"There go the ships." How beautiful they are! Like the starry squadrons of God that swim through the waters that are above the firmament, they voyage in stately beauty across the waters that are beneath the firmament. The passage of the ship casts a spell over every onlooker. From the moment of the launch, when feeling first

"The thrill of life along her keel  
And spurning with her foot the ground,  
With one exulting, joyous bound  
She leaps into the ocean's arms,"

until the hour of the final cruise has come, and with prow turned seaward for the last time, like *La Temeraire* and *Old Ironsides*, they

"Nail to the mast her holy flag,  
Set every threadbare sail,  
And give her to the God of storms,  
The lightning and the gale,"

under every aspect of her life, the ship wears a mystery of beauty that weaves a resistless charm.

There are such graceful lines, such tapering masts, such branching spars, such buoyant ease, wedded to irresistible power, such a serene swing of triumph in the quiet, steady, onward glide, that the gracefulness of the ship and the charm of the sea surcharges literature and fascinates thought. A fire of driftwood sends out a sparkle of many-colored lights, tinged with the salt spray of strange and distant seas, and is ever telling, with its tongues of flame, stories of adventure in remote coasts, in curious climcs, under alien skies. So the glow of intellect is ever flashing with some reminiscence of the sea. There falls across the pages of the great writers the frequent gleam of snow-white sails. The utterance of the deepest thinkers has a constant smack of sea-salt.

In common speech we say, "What blessing shall be ours when our ships come in." With what tears and heartbreak have we stood shorebound, and watched our treasure ships depart,

"And love is silent gazing on the lessening sail."

When the monitions of the end, like the signs of nearing land, begin to thicken around us, we echo the cry of the Hebrew poet, "My days are passed away as the swift ships." When the spirit comes to be companionless and tosses harborless upon the billowing mystery of life, we make the plaint of the laureate our own, and say :

"The stately ships go on to their haven under the hill,  
 But oh for the touch of a vanished hand,  
 And the sound of a voice that is still."

The instinct of immortality strikingly clothes itself in this guise of the sea. In all thought, death has been unerringly depicted, not as an end, but as a voyage to another shore. No figure stands out more prominently in pagan legend than old Charon, the ferryman of souls. In the early dawn of Saxon legend the bards who sung the idyl of Arthur, used to tell of a mysterious vessel that was in waiting for the dying king, to convey his passing spirit,

"To the island valley of Avilion  
 Where falls not rain, nor hail, nor any snow,  
 Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies  
 Deep meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns,  
 And bowery hollows crowned with summer sea."

The latest, richest gems of English song have come from the two poets whose passing has left the earth bereft of much of its sweetest utterance. Each alike, the simple singer of New England, and the stately rhymer of Old England, expressed the drawing of his nature toward eternity under the image of a mystic summons from the sea. Whittier sang comfortingly to those who shiver at the approach of the barque of death,

"They know not that its sails are filled  
 With pity's tender breath,  
 Nor see the angel at the helm  
 Who steers the ship of death."

Tennyson brooded over the mystery of the life beyond until his yearning soul began to tug at its tether, and was eager to slip the irksome anchor chain and set forth upon the ocean voyage of eternity,

"For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place  
 The flood may bear me far,  
 I hope to see my Pilot face to face  
 When I have crossed the bar."

The Bible itself, like our own Continental home, lies between stormy Atlantic and calm Pacific. In its opening chapter is heard



the roll of mighty waters that sink with majestic cadence at its closing pages into a sea of glass mingled with fire. A sea of glass unvisited by storm. A sea of glory unshadowed by cloud. There the ships do *not go*. Their sails are furled. They ride at anchor. The weary voyagers have reached the havens of eternal rest.

"There go the ships." What cargoes they carry! Some one pithily says that every visible product of our civilization was once a thought under a man's hat. It is almost equally true that everything which we possess was once in the hold of some ship. There is scarcely an article of wearing apparel, or dish upon the dinner table, or utensil of household use, or fruit of literary labor, or flower of artistic skill, or cog-wheel in the great machinery of trade, scarce a contribution to the complex mosaic of modern life, that has not voyaged beneath the hatches. The writer of the Book of the Revelation might seem to have been forecasting the multitudinous lading of the present day freight ship when he wrote, "Merchandise of gold and silver and precious stones, and of pearls and fine linen, and purple and silk, and scarlet and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and of iron and marble, and cinnamon and odors, and ointments and frankincense, and wine and oil, and fine flour and wheat, and beasts and sheep, and horses and chariots, and slaves, and the souls of men."

"The souls of men!" That last item outvalues all the rest and yet does not appear on the manifests of earthly commerce. It is entered carefully in the ledgers of eternity. God is the Consignor of the manhood that makes the ships go. His Church is the Consignee.

It is manhood that makes the ships go. We express the power of mechanism in terms of horse power simply because no engine can ever be constructed which can generate a force equal to *one* man power. These mighty and myriad and wonderful and beautiful ships are all of them motored by manhood.

"There go the ships!" Where go the sailors? Down at Fire Island there is a sleepless eye behind the telescope lens. At every shipping port there is a tireless finger on the telegraph key. Each issue of the daily paper has its column of marine intelligence. All this, concerning the going of the ships. But here is a mighty brotherhood of men, more than three million of them, that travel the lonely Sahara of the sea, that are braving the surging temptations that seethe along every shore, that amid the shoals and perils of time are outward bound, heading toward eternity. We post ourselves minutely as to ships. Where are the sailors going? Have *you* ever asked the question? Have you ever given it a thought? Does any one care?

Yes. There is a society of caretakers for the sailor called the AMERICAN SEAMEN'S FRIEND SOCIETY. Its animating principle is that ships are cargoed with character. It was cradled amid the patriotic enthusiasms and naval excitements of 1812. It has prayed itself and toiled itself along, patiently, hopefully, amid reverse and vicissitude, until it comes to-day to exhibit a splendid record of rescue work. High on the roll of those who gave it their earnest thought and open handed contribution are names that are inscribed with imperishable recollection upon the roster of our own venerable church.\* That Society plants its beacons along the world's seaboard. Its chaplains sentinel the edges of every continent. It has its handshake ready for Jack Tar whenever he comes ashore. Down in old Nantucket there are houses with curious balustrades upon the roof. They were intended to furnish the inhabitants of those whaling villages with a sort of observatory from which they could detect afar the returning ships that were to relink the members of the household circle that had for long been parted. All over the maritime world, as far as the benediction of this Society extends, there have been constructed just such outlooks for the sailor; from which the sharpened vision of a loving anxiety may scan the horizon for the earliest token of the incoming ships, in order that the arm of a warm and brotherly sympathy may be thrown around a brother man for whom Christ died, and for whom few but Christ seem to care.

Where can the sailors be helped to go? Three things in the sailor character will light us to the answer: Nobility, Fallibility, Possibility.

(1) Nobility. It used to be said, you could as well preach to the mainmast as to preach to a common sailor. But at the crust even a diamond is worthless and homely earth; at the core is its priceless flame. The sailor is rough in the shell, he is rich in the heart. Bravery is an axiom with the sailor. "No coward takes a second voyage," is a sea proverb. He may ship other vices, but meanness he throws overboard. Discipline is the atmosphere of his life. He recognizes and bows to proper authority. Loyalty is a germ-force in his character. Patience and skill share his watch. Strength and friendliness are his messmates. Every dollar that comes from the hand of commerce is mined in hardship and minted with heroism. The sailor nature is veined with nobility waiting to be worked.

(2) Fallibility. When the sailor comes ashore, he is almost certain to lose his bearings. A resourceful landsman is apt to develop help-

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\* Among the early friends of the seamen who by their labors and contributions did much to place the cause upon its present basis were, Robert Lenox, James Lenox, and Aaron B. Belknap. (See Report of AMERICAN SEAMEN'S FRIEND SOCIETY, 1883, page 9).

lessness when afloat. Certain weaknesses have become characteristic. There seems to be a chemical affinity between liquor and the sailor. But that is no new thing. Noah, the navigator, got drunk. There seems to be a proneness to impurity on the part of the sailor. But that is no phenomenal thing. Solomon, the great shipbuilder, was not conspicuously free from this taint. There seems to be a ready fluency of profanity in the case of the sailor. But not of the nineteenth century sailor alone, for poor Peter of the Galilean lake dropped oaths very naturally when his emotions slipped their anchor. Sailors are men. That is all. They are not the worst of men. Brownstone does not build out sin. It sometimes is a citadel of iniquity. Silks and velvets are not non-conductors for transgression. They sometimes cloak a black heart. Jewels and gold are not the tokens of purity and peace alone. They sometimes flash with a baleful, lurid fire that tells of lost souls, and of wasted lives, and of shipwrecked possibilities. Hypocrisy is not extinct. Much respectability is on the upper side of the cuticle. Decency, many a time, is only another name for ethical whitewash. If the true story of Morality Row as well as of Marine Alley could be read, you would not be quick to say that sailors are the worst inhabitants of a great modern city. They are certainly weak. It is just possible not as weak as we would be, if the supports which prop up our wobbling virtue were struck away and we attempted uprightness, unbuttressed. Friends, if we had taken from us the daily incense of family prayer, if we ceased to hear the sweet calling of the church bell, if the breezy sympathy of Christian friends, if the strong tonic of a general and average respectability ministered no vital elements to our piety, what sort of a record would we promptly proceed to make? Let him that is without sin among us cast the first stone at the sailor, and if he waits until he is pelted, he will miss his ship. "If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?"

The sailor weaknesses plead pathetically for sympathetic safeguard. Better the sail-cloth shroud and the cannon shot to the feet, and the sloping plank and the solemn plunge over the ship's side, to sleep in the great sepulchre of the sea, beneath the eye of God, and waiting the morning call of God, than the drop into a city dive. "The dead are there," and the poor fellows do not know that the guests of those dwellings "make their bed in hell." There is always a committee of reception in waiting for the sailor when he comes ashore. We call them land sharks. It is a libel on the sea shark. The greedy ravin of their appetite, the insatiable magnitude of their maw, the fierceness of their fang and the hardness of their heart, make a sea shark's

instinctive ferocity seem gentleness. Why not land saviours as well as land sharks?

(3) Possibility. It is said that the very best Bible paper is made out of shreds of canvas. It is certain that admirable Christianity is producible from sailor experience. The fibre of their character lends itself readily to the manufacture of living epistles.

“They that go down to the sea in ships, and occupy their business in great waters; these men see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep.” Unschooled in the doctrines of men, they learn theology from the ever open text book of the creation. They feast continually upon the “wayside sacraments” which nature is ceaselessly celebrating. Above them stretches not merely a narrow ribbon of blue hemmed in between walls of brick and stone, but they are ever canopied with the unbroken sweep of the sky, that “roof majestic, fretted with golden fire.” Beneath them is not the dull, hard, lustreless flagstone and cobble, but that pavement of emerald and amethyst trodden by Him whose footsteps are in the great waters. They are not forever dazed with the deafening clamors of traffic, but their ears are continually saluted with the sound of those majestic harmonies which the voice of the floods lifts adoringly to the praise of the great Creator. They are in constant contact with Almightyness. They imbreath a sense of the infinite. Their life is one long dependence upon a higher power. The untwisting of a rope, the snap of a rivet, the starting of a plank, means the end of a life voyage. The atheist is a land animal. The sailor may not think much about God. He rarely denies Him. The ocean is not a good place in which to trifle with primal instincts. He who sang false so often, struck a true note when he wrote,

“Thou glorious mirror, where the Almighty’s form  
Glasses itself in tempests; in all time,—  
Calm or convulsed, in breeze, or gale, or storm,  
Icing the pole, or in the torrid clime  
Dark heaving—boundless, endless, and sublime,  
The image of eternity, the throne  
Of the Invisible.”

So the gospel is not unnatural to the sailor. He is vaguely sensitive to the very influences which it defines and brings clearly home to him. Its truths are a transcript of his experience. His being, needle-like swings towards the cross. When a sailor becomes a believer, the heartiness of the change makes apparent at least one reason why the Lord saw apostle stuff in Galilean ’longshoremen. His faith is simple, genuine, intense. A marine Christian is all Christ’s. He consigns

the whole cargo. He keeps nothing back. He sails on another course. He takes orders from a new captain. He's not ashamed of it. He's forever trying to get others to ship for the same voyage. To quote a sample instance, one captain tells of a sailor who had been converted and became so interested in reading the Bible aloud to his messmates and in spinning gospel yarns in the fore-castle, and in pertinaciously persuading every one else into the same blessedness which he had won, that, to quote the narrator's language, "it seemed as if God Himself had come aboard my ship."

There are limitless possibilities in the sailor. They are well worth the saving. Do you remember the storm at Samoa, in the South Pacific, a year or two ago? There, in a narrow island harbor, was crowded a mighty fleet of war ships. As the storm increased those iron-clads began to grind against each other like monster mill-stones. Fearful was the grist they ground. That death mill ran for hours. From midnight until morning, from morning until midday, those awful mill-stones ceased not in the grinding of that grist, whereof the grain was men. Pitiabie was the plight of the American flag-ship, the *Trenton*. Great seas flooded her gun deck. Rudder and rigging went by the board. Her engines failed to work. Then the whole crew sprang to the spars, and the wind that had rent the sail-cloth into ribbons, struck upon the sturdy bosoms of men that were woven into a human sail, and the old flag-ship righted. The giant gale then sought to drive that gallant vessel straight into the jaws of destruction, and when it seemed that all hope of escape had vanished, for the first time that day the stars and stripes was run to the peak. There was no other flag flown in that fateful storm. The battle waxed yet more furious. The shades of evening fell. The tides seemed to lift her in their giant arms, and strove to hurl her on the *Vandalia*, that lay, a wrecked hulk, right across her path. As she went bearing down upon the shattered fragments of her sister vessel, the four hundred and fifty men of her crew mustered on the deck, and saluted with a ringing cheer the brave fellows who had been clinging to masts and spars through weary hours, only, as it seemed, to go in company with them down the dreadful gulf of death. Just then the throngs that were upon the surge-beaten shore, lining it, as the spectators in the olden time circled the arena where gladiators fought, were held spell-bound. Above the awful riot of the tempest came the sound of music. On their march to death, the band of the *Trenton* had struck up "The Star Spangled Banner." The newspaper report reads like an epic. The barest recital of the facts ring like an Iliad. Balaklava was not more superb. Sublimity slumbered beneath

those blue jackets. The tars of the *Trenton* have enriched the world with their heroism. That's the precise sort of character stuff that ought to be enlisted under the ensign of Christ. Can it be saved? *Can* it be? There are no interrogation points in the grammar of Divine grace. The love that climbed the cross is backed by Omnipotence. He that holds the sea in the hollow of His hand, yearns to feel the sailor's head pillowed on His heart. Be a friend of the American seaman. God is.

