

ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE

LAYING OF THE CORNER-STONE

OF THE

NEW CHAPEL

For the Use of the Inmates of the

SAILORS' SNUG HARBOR,

ON STATEN ISLAND.

BY W. W. PHILLIPS, D.D.

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ADDRESS.

THE Institution in whose behalf we are assembled is one of the ornaments of our State—one for whose success and prosperous condition we have reason to feel thankful to an all-wise Providence. A comfortable home has been here provided for a most interesting class of our fellow-citizens—a class to whom we are indebted, under God, for our commerce and its attendant benefits—for our intercourse with foreign nations—and for our accretion and accumulation of knowledge, and of wealth derived from that source. They also carry for us the Bible and our mission-

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aries to the destitute and heathen of other lands, and constitute an arm of our defence in time of war. What would our State or Nation have been without commerce? A common symbol of national prosperity is the representation of a ship with swelled sails. But of what use are ships, however strong and beautiful, without sailors?

No men expose themselves to greater risks—endure more privations and hardships than weather-beaten mariners. They leave home and country, and land, to brave the storms, exposures, and dangers of the ocean in every latitude. Surely if any members of the body politic deserve at the close of life, or when prematurely disabled and worn out, a quiet haven—a

peaceful retreat—a comfortable home—they are those who have been preserved and permitted to return from the perils of the sea, who have made the voyage of life to bring to our shores the products of the arts and sciences, of the manufactures and of the agriculture of other lands—to increase the wealth, the comfort, and luxuries of their fellow-men.

Such an asylum has been provided, not by the munificence of the State—she has been saved the outlay which would have been necessary to provide it—but by the bequest of a benevolent individual, who had himself had experience of the toils of the war with the elements, of the privations and sufferings, and at the same time possessed

the large, free, and generous heart, with the warm sympathy of a seaman.

Captain Robert Richard Randall, of the city of New York, did, by his last will and testament, bearing date the first day of June, 1801, after leaving certain specific legacies, bequeath all the residue of his estate, real and personal, to the Chancellor of the State, the Mayor and Recorder of the city of New York, the President of the Chamber of Commerce, the President and Vice-President of the Marine Society, the Senior Minister of the Episcopal Church, and the Senior Minister of the Presbyterian Church in the said city, and their successors in office respectively, to be received by them in trust,

and applied to the erection of an Asylum or Marine Hospital, to be called "The Sailors' Snug Harbor," for the maintenance and support of decrepit, aged, and worn-out sailors.

The same was to be opened as soon as the income of the estate should, in the judgment of the Trustees, be sufficient to support fifty seamen. The persons thus designated being also the appointed executors of the will of Captain Randall, and finding inconvenience in the management of the estate from the changes which took place in the ordinary course of elections and appointment to those offices, applied for, and received in February, 1806, an Act of Incorporation. The first Trustees were John Lansing, jun.,

Chancellor of this State; De Witt Clinton, Mayor; Maturin Livingston, Recorder of the city of New York; John Murray, President of the Chamber of Commerce; James Farquar, President of the Marine Society; Thomas Farmar, President of the same; Benjamin Moore, Senior Minister of the Episcopal Church; and John Rodgers, Senior Minister of the Presbyterian Church. At their first meeting they elected officers, adopted by-laws, and appointed a committee to prepare a seal for the Corporation, the device of which, when subsequently adopted, represented a harbor formed by two points of land projecting into the sea, in which a ship appears riding safely at anchor, and on the

shore a view of the Hospital, with the motto, "Portum petimus fessi."

In October, 1806, the reported income of the whole estate was \$4,243. Subsequently it became less, some of the tenements having been vacated. By the Act of Incorporation, the presence of five of the Trustees was declared necessary to constitute a quorum for the transaction of business; owing to the difficulty of securing the attendance of that number of the Trustees, who had other public and pressing duties to perform, several meetings occurred at which no business was transacted for the want of a quorum. From November, 1809, no meeting was held until February, 1814; at that meeting the Trustees adopted a memorial to the

Legislature, in which they state that the income then amounted to \$6,000 a year ; that the Chancellor resided at Albany, and declined acting as a Trustee from scruples of official delicacy ; that the Senior Minister of the Episcopal Church had, for a long time, been prevented by sickness from attending their meetings ; that doubts existed who is, in the contemplation of the law, the Senior Minister of the Presbyterian Church ; that the same doubts would soon arise in determining who was the Senior Minister of the Episcopal Church ; that their difficulties in obtaining a meeting had been increased from the circumstance of the Chamber of Commerce having discontinued its meetings and elections of

officers. They, therefore, petitioned the Legislature to pass a law declaring that three of their number should constitute a quorum, and also a law designating the persons contemplated in the Act of Incorporation as Trustees of the Episcopal and Presbyterian Churches.

The Legislature declared that the Rector of Trinity Church, or in case of his absence or sickness, the Assistant Rector, and the Minister of the Presbyterian Church then in Wall street, or of the First Presbyterian Church, were the Trustees of said Corporation.

They also appended an act requiring the Trustees to make an annual report of the state of their funds to the Legislature of the State, and to

the Common Council of the city. Thus, the State and the City were constituted the guardians of the trust. From May, 1814, to January, 1817, no regular meeting of the Trustees was held. At that meeting, which was summoned by a resolution of the Common Council, calling for a report of the state of their funds, as by law required, only four Trustees were present. They, however, made a report, from which it appeared that the annual income had increased to \$6,659 92. In that year, 1817, the Trustees petitioned the Legislature for permission to change the site of the Hospital. Instead of erecting it on the 21 acres in the upper part of the city, as had been contemplated by the testa-

tor, which would absorb a large portion of their revenue, depreciate the value of the adjoining lots, and necessarily confine the inmates to narrow limits, they asked to be authorized to purchase ground for the Hospital at the entrance or in sight of the harbor of New York—in the view of all the seamen navigating the ships and the vessels which pass in and out of this port. They urged that, by such an arrangement, the whole estate devised might be appropriated to the purposes of revenue, to support the Hospital; whilst the health, morals, and comfort of the seamen would be greatly promoted. Such a situation would be most animating to the enterprising sailor, who is about to ex-

pose himself to the dangers of the sea, or the increased danger of fighting the battles of his country on the ocean ; and would also be most gratifying and consoling to those who have passed through such scenes, and found this asylum, from which they might daily witness the extensive navigation in which they were once engaged, or hail the flag of their country, which they had once defended. Such a situation would be most pleasing to the aged, decrepit, or worn-out sailor, and contribute to gladden, if not to protract, the remnant of his days. They also mentioned that, in consequence of the opinion which they had found generally to prevail in favor of erecting the said Hospital at the entrance

of this harbor, and to further this object, they were tendered the liberal offer of having conveyed to them gratuitously a lot of land, not less than ten acres, on Staten Island, for the accommodation of such a Hospital, situated on the Bay, between Point Diamond and the Quarantine ground. The person who made this offer was the late Daniel D. Tompkins.

Reasonable as was this petition, great and acknowledged as would be the advantages to the Institution of such an arrangement, it was not granted until 1828, eleven years after—the request having, in the meantime, been renewed and urged on successive Legislatures. This delay was doubtless occasioned by the numerous suits at law which

were brought for wresting the whole property out of the hands of the Trustees, by persons claiming to be heirs of Captain Randall, and by a fear lest any change or modification of the will might prejudice, if not forfeit the trust. The law-officer of the State having investigated the question of forfeiture, and satisfied the Legislature as to their competency to grant the request—inasmuch as the design of the testator would be more effectually accomplished by a change of site—they authorized the purchase of a suitable and convenient tract of land, either on the island of New York or adjacent thereto, the purchase being subject to the approval of the Chancellor.

Such were the small beginnings, and

some of the difficulties of this Trust in the early part of its history, and will explain why the income from the estate did not increase more rapidly. The litigation was varied, multiform, and protracted, involving considerable expense, and at the same time impairing the revenue of the estate. During its continuance no permanent disposition could be made of the property, nor could the rents be collected. It was not until March, 1830, that the final decision in favor of the Trust was obtained from the Supreme Court of the United States. It is probable, however, that if the decision had been earlier obtained, some of the lots would have been disposed of at lower rates than were realized afterwards, and in

a manner to interfere with the subsequent extension and improvements of the city, by which the value of the property was so greatly enhanced.

The permission obtained from the Legislature to reserve the whole of the land in the city for revenue, and the favorable termination of their legal contest, enabled the Trustees to take immediate steps to carry into effect the benevolent design of the donor. In consequence of the opening of streets through the property, according to the adopted plan of the city, there were gores of land and small lots belonging to the estate left inaccessible from any street, and interlocked with gores belonging to other parties. It became necessary to purchase the latter, to

render the whole tenantable, which was done by a large outlay at the time, but to the prospective and permanent advantage of the Trust. The lots thus increased in number, and regulated, were leased at public auction.

In May, 1831, the Trustees purchased this farm, containing 130 acres of land, for \$10,000. Subsequently they purchased 21 acres, with a water privilege, which had been originally a part of this farm, but had been sold, and was used for manufacturing purposes, and was about to pass into other hands; the price paid for this was \$6,000. These two parcels of land now constitute the farm of the Sailors' Snug Harbor. Having obtained pos-

session of these premises, they commenced improving them for the purposes to which they had been devoted. In October, 1831, they laid the cornerstone of this centre building in which we are now meeting. On the 1st of August, 1833, the Institution was formally opened, with 30 men, who had been received as inmates by a committee appointed for that purpose. It was an interesting occasion, and deeply affecting to the hearts of all who were present. They saw before them a company of men, some of whom were lame, others blind, some aged, and all decrepit worn-out mariners, who had come here to spend the remnant of their days in this quiet and peaceful asylum.

Among those who have occupied this Trust and have passed away from us, there have been men distinguished for their talents, integrity, high sense of honor, and irreproachable character. All no doubt performed their duty faithfully to this Institution, yet in reviewing the record of their proceedings we may say without giving offence, as we will mention no *names*, that *some* of them appear to have taken a deeper and more lively interest in it, and to have done much more for it, than others. They seem to have been raised up and to have been continued in office to meet the very exigencies of the Trust. They were peculiarly qualified for the work which was to be done in their day, for this Institution. They have left in their

recorded acts : in the able papers prepared by them ; in their far-reaching plans and arrangements respecting it ; in the judicious By-Laws enacted by them for its government ; in their careful and economical husbanding of its resources ; in their personal attention and labor given to it gratuitously ; evidence of their superior wisdom, strict integrity, and disinterested philanthropy. The Sailors' Snug Harbor owes them, as well as its noble founder, a lasting debt of gratitude. Under their fostering care, with the blessing of Providence, the little rivulet which half a century ago furnished the small amount of \$4,000 a year, after overcoming the obstructions and passing through its many windings, fertilizing its banks during

its whole course, and producing all that we see around us here to-day, now has become a mighty river, furnishing \$75,000 a year, and instead of supporting 30 inmates now supports 300.

The Trustees have aimed to provide a home for the inmates of this Institution, in which all their wants shall be supplied and every comfort afforded them. They have good and wholesome food, suitable clothing, airy apartments, ample grounds for exercise and recreation ; a reading room, furnished with a good library, with the daily and weekly newspapers, and with some of the periodical publications ; they have also a physician and nurses to attend them when sick.

But, gentlemen, we have found,

and these inmates have found, that happiness does not consist in the enjoyment of these outward things in occupying an eligible site for our dwelling; in having spread out before us a beautiful, enlivening and enchanting prospect of harbor, and shipping, and bustling city, at a sufficient distance from us to be out of the reach of its noise and dust; of well cultivated grounds, of specimens of tasteful architecture; nor in breathing a pure air, in a participation of an abundance of the good things of this life; nor in health and ease, and quietness, and pleasant social intercourse. All these and more of the same nature may be enjoyed by the outer man, and yet the individual may not be happy. He has an

inner man, an immortal mind, a precious never dying spirit, which is the jewel in the casket ; whose wants and necessities are not reached by these outward and material appliances. It is rendered restless, dissatisfied, discontented, at times depressed and indescribably wretched by its vast and insatiable desires ; by its raging and enslaving passions ; by its inordinate, corrupt, and debasing lusts in its present state. It cannot be quieted, it cannot be filled with material things. Silver and gold, precious stones, and whatever may be procured with them, cannot feed or gratify its cravings. It seeks its kindred—communion with the source of its emanation, from which it has fallen, from which it has apostatized

and become alienated. It was created in the image of God, fitted to enjoy his favor, in which consisted its life, its true happiness. Both these have been lost through its default, and the Divine displeasure against it has been incurred. It is still entirely dependent, in the hands and at the disposal of the Creator, as its Lawgiver and Judge ; it cannot escape from his presence, nor cast off its responsibility to Him. It is conscious of its guilt and just condemnation by his law. It knows that He is holy, and just, and true ; that He will execute the penalty it has incurred ; and that the day of righteous retribution must come. How can it ever be quieted ? How can it ever be delivered from fear, and obtain peace and

rest? How can it be brought to the enjoyment of a happiness worthy of itself, except by having the image of God restored in it, and by being reinstated in the Divine favor? There must be a reconciliation effected between it and its offended God, and an entire regeneration of all its faculties and powers, of all its tastes, desires, affections, and passions. The only way in which this can be done is through the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, manifest in the flesh, who has put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, and is a merciful and faithful High Priest to make intercession for us at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

For these precious truths, which reveal to us the great secret of human

happiness, we are indebted to the gospel of the grace of God, and which is the true and efficacious panacea for all our ills and woes. It may be neglected by multitudes, ridiculed by some, despised and rejected by others, but to all who believe, it is the wisdom of God and the power of God, unto salvation. It alone teaches the way of peace, of holiness, and of eternal life. Where do we find hospitals like this, and kindred institutions for the amelioration of the condition of men? Where the influence of the gospel has reached, and is felt. Where do we find unbending integrity, uniform and universal uprightness and probity—adherence to high and honorable principles—staid, consistent, and re-

liable character? Where a sense of responsibility to God is felt, where His authority is revered, and His law is acknowledged as the ultimate standard of duty. Where do we find industry, enterprise, thrift, a pure morality, intelligence, subjection to the powers that be, contentment, charity, benevolence? Where the gospel is faithfully taught, believed and obeyed. Where do we find men solemn, thoughtful, tranquil, hopeful, and joyful in the immediate prospect of death, reconciled to their approaching dissolution, and willing to depart? Where the consolations of the gospel are ministered and received; where men's souls have been sanctified under its influence, and are inspired with its hopes. And, permit

me to add, that when all of us, who are now present, shall come to the closing scene of our life on earth—to the last parting scene—however we may now differ in station, in religious names, creeds, and professions ; in our pursuits and sentiments on other subjects, we shall then feel that one thing is needful ; it is an interest in Him who is the resurrection and the life. To be able to say, according to truth, in that hour, “I know in whom I have believed, and that my Redeemer liveth,” will be worth infinitely more than all that earth can give.

Believing these truths, we have, from the opening of this Institution, provided religious instruction for the inmates, with a view of promoting

their best and highest interests, but without any desire or attempt to infringe the liberty of conscience. We have treated them as men who have *souls* as well as bodies. We would not undertake to manage the affairs of the Institution—we could not hope successfully to govern its inmates, without a recognition of the principles of the gospel. Our hearts' desire and prayer to God for them has been, and is still, that they may be saved, from toil and care, and pain, and penury not only, but from their sins and from the wrath to come ; that they may improve their time and privileges here by making preparation for another and a better world.

We come to-day to lay the corner-

stone of a more commodious and appropriate house of worship than the place which has been hitherto used for that purpose, in the hope that those who shall occupy it, by taking heed to their ways according to the word of God, which shall here be ministered to them, may find rest to their souls, and have this earthly temple made to them, through grace, the vestibule of that spiritual, heavenly, and glorious temple above, the light of which shall be the Lord God, and the Lamb forever.

In the acknowledgment of our dependence on our God, by way of seeking his protection and blessing in rearing this structure to the honor of his name; in allusion to the fundamen-

tal doctrine, " that we are built upon the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the Chief Corner-Stone, that he is the elect, tried, precious stone, the rock upon which the Church is built," and on which all our hopes for time and for eternity rest, we lay the corner-stone of this building, which is to be dedicated to the worship of the One only living and true God, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.