

"Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil."

– HEBREWS vi. 19.

On the margin of the ocean that surrounds and laves our island home, an object of absorbing interest may often be observed, – a ship riding at anchor near a lee shore in an angry sea. She has drifted, ere she was aware, too near a rock-bound coast: the wind is blowing direct on shore: there is not room to tack: whether she should point her prow north or south, she will strike a projecting headland ere she can escape from the bay. One resource remains, – to anchor where she is till the wind change.

There she lies. Stand on this height and look down upon her through the drifting spray. I scarcely know in nature a more interesting or more suggestive sight. The ship is dancing on the waves: she appears to be in their power and at their mercy. Wind and water combine to make her their sport. Destruction seems near; for if the vessel's hull is dashed by these waves upon the rocks of the coast, it will be broken into a thousand pieces. But you have stood and looked on the scene a while, and the ship still holds her own. Although at first sight she seemed the helpless plaything of the elements, they have not overcome – they have not gained upon her yet. She is no nearer destruction than when you first began to gaze in anticipation of her fate.

The ship seems to have no power to resist the onset of wind and wave. She yields to every blast and every billow. This moment she is tossed aloft on the crest of a wave, and the next she sinks heavily into the hollow. Now her prow goes down beneath an advancing breaker, and she is lost to view in the spray; but anon she emerges, like a sea-fowl shaking the water from her wings and rejoicing in the tumult. As she quivered and nodded giddily at each assault, you thought, when first you arrived in sight, that every moment would prove her last; but now that you have watched the conflict long, it begins to assume in your mind another aspect, and promise another end. These motions of the ship now, instead of appearing the sickly movements of the dying, seem to indicate the calm, confident perseverance of conscious strength and expected victory. Let winds and waves do their worst, that ship will meet them fearless, will hold her head to the blast, and maintain her place in defiance of their power.

What is the secret of that ship's safety? No other ship is in sight to which she may cling: no pillar stands within reach

to which she may be moored. The bond of her security is a line that is unseen. The ship is at anchor. The line on which she hangs does not depend on the waters, or anything that floats there; it goes through the waters, and fastens on a sure ground beyond them.

Thus, though the ship cannot escape from the wild waters, she is safe on their surface. She cannot, indeed, take the wings of a dove and fly away so as to be at rest (cf. Psalm 55:6); but the sea cannot cover her, and the wind cannot drive her on the beach. She must, indeed, bear a while the tempest's buffetings; but she is not for a moment abandoned to the tempest's will. The motto of that ship is the motto once held aloft in triumph by a tempted but heroic soul: **"We are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed"** (2 Cor. iv. 8, 9).

An immortal creature on this changeful life is like a ship upon the ocean. On the strength of that obvious analogy the apostle intimates, by a bold yet perspicuous figure, that we have "an anchor of the soul." The soul, considered as a passenger on the treacherous sea of Time, needs an anchor; and an anchor "sure and steadfast" is provided for the needy soul.

In many respects the world, and human life on it, are like the sea. Itself restless, it cannot permit to rest any of the pilgrims that tread its heaving, shifting surface. At some times, and in some places, great tempests rise; but even in its ordinary condition it is always and everywhere uncertain, deceptive, dangerous. Currents of air and currents of ocean intermingle with and cross each other in endless and unknown complications, bringing even the most skilful mariner to his wit's end – making him afraid either to stand still or to advance. On this heaving sea we must all lie. Even our Father in heaven does not lift up his own, and Christ the Son does not ask him so to do: **"I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world; but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."**(John 17:15) The best that can be done for them, in this world, is to preserve them from sinking or striking on the shore. The soul is tossed by many temptations; but the anchor of the soul is sure and steadfast within the veil. **Without are fightings, within are fears** (2 Cor 7:5), – all these are against us; but one thing will over-balance and overcome them – **"Our life is hid with Christ in God."** (Col 3:3)

Hope sometimes signifies the act of a human spirit laying hold of an unseen object, and sometimes the object unseen whereon the human spirit in its need lays hold. These two significations may be combined together: they are so combined here. "The Hope set before us," is Christ entered for us now within the veil; and the hope that "we have," is the exercise of a believing soul when it trusts in the risen Redeemer. These two cannot be separated. The one is the grasp which a believing soul takes of Christ, and the other is the Christ whom a believing soul is grasping. These two run so close together that you cannot perceive where the joining is. **"I am the vine, ye are the branches."** (John 15:5) Even so, Lord;

and what human eye can tell the very line which marks where the branch ends and the vine begins? Christians are members of Christ, – of his flesh and of his bones. “As he is, so are we in this world.” (1 John 4:17) “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” (Acts 9:4) “Which Hope we have.” If you ask me, Whether does he mean, by hope, the Christ on whom his soul is leaning, or his own act of leaning on Christ? I answer, Both. You cannot have one of these without having both. The branch has the vine; but it has also its own living growth into the vine. And if it had not that living growth into the vine, it would not have the vine. So the soul has Christ, and also its own living faith in Christ, wanting which it would have no Christ.

Mark well here what it is that renders a disciple safe and firm as he floats on the rushing tide of Time. It is not terror of the Lord in his conscience. Such terror may awaken a slumberer, and make him flee to that which will keep him; but the terror itself cannot keep him. Fear repels; it is hope that holds; – blessed hope!

The anchor must not be cast on anything that floats on the water, however large and solid it may seem. The largest thing that floats is an iceberg. But although an iceberg does not shake like a ship, but seems to receive the waves and permit them to break on its sides as they break on the shore, it would be ruin to anchor the ship to it. The larger and the less would drift the same way, and perish together. Ah! this stately Church – this high-seeming and high-sounding ecclesiastical organization, woe to the human spirit that is tempted in the tossing to make fast to that great imposing mass! It is not sure and steadfast. It is floating: it moves with the current of the world: it moves to an awful shore! Not there, not there! Your hope, when you stretch it out and up for eternal life, must enter “into that within the veil, whither the Forerunner is for us entered.”

Nor will it avail a drifting ship to fix its anchor on itself. It would be very childish to try this method; but I have seen full-grown people betake themselves with great energy to this foolish shift. When a boat on a stream broke adrift with a few unskilful people on board, I have seen them in their alarm grasp the gunwale and bend themselves and draw with all their might in the direction of the shore! In spite of their drawing, the boat glided with them down the stream. In the concerns of the soul such childishness is even more common. Faith in one's own faith or charity is a common exercise among men. Beware! Hope must go out for a hold; even as the ship's anchor must be flung away from the ship. The eye is made for looking with, not for looking at. Away from all in ourselves, and out through all that floats like ourselves on this shifting sea, we must throw the anchor of the soul through the shifting waters into Him who holds them in the hollow of his hand.

Mark, further, that hope in Christ is specifically the anchor of the soul. Here, like draws to like: spirit to spirit. God

is a Spirit, and they that worship him worship him in spirit. There is no anchor that will make our temporal, possessions fast. Wealth, and friends, and even life; may drift away any day on the flood; and no power on earth can arrest the movement. These bodily things may or may not abide with a Christian; but his anchor does not hold them. It is only an anchor of the soul, not an anchor of the body. We must not expect from the Lord what he never promised.

There are contrivances not a few in our day for fixing material property, so that it shall not drift away in the currents of time. The system of assurances both on life and property has reached an enormous magnitude. Amidst its great and manifold branches, the wicked have of late years, like wild beasts in a forest, found cover for various crimes. Things are now made fast which our forefathers thought essentially uncertain, like the currents of the ocean. Treasures are insured while they cross the sea in ships, so that, though the vessel go to the bottom, the importer gets his own. The food and clothing of a wife and children, which formerly were left to float on the uncertain waters of the husband and father's life, are made fast by insurance to an anchor which holds them, although that life should glide away. Taking up the obvious analogy employed in this scripture, one of the insurance societies has adopted the anchor as its name.

But the action of these anchors is limited to things seen and temporal. They cannot be constructed so as to catch and keep any spiritual thing. They may hold fast a wife's fortune, when the life of the bread-winner falls in; but they cannot maintain joy in her heart, or kindle light in her eye. Far less can they insure against the shipwreck of the soul. With these things they do not intermeddle. All the world may be gained for a man, and kept for him too, and yet he is a loser, if he lose his own soul. Only one anchor can grasp and hold the better part of man – and that is the hope which enters into the heavens, and fastens there in Jesus. The anchor – in as far as it indicates the object which hope grasps – the anchor is “sure and steadfast.” The expressions are exact and full. The words are tried words. They are given in order that we might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to the hope set before us.

There are two cases in which one's hope may be disappointed: the support you lean on may be unwilling or unable to sustain you. In the one case it is deception; in the other, weakness. A Christian's hope is not exposed to either flaw: it is both “sure and steadfast;” that is, the Redeemer, who holds them, is willing and able. He will not falsely let you go, nor feebly faint beneath your weight. He is true and strong – for these are the words. He both will and can keep that which we commit to him against that day.

With the same meaning, but by means of another analogy, Christ is represented elsewhere in Scripture as a foundation; and it is intimated that the foundation is a tried one. It has been put to the strain, and has stood the test.

In modern practice great importance attaches to the trying of an anchor. Many ships have been lost through accident or fraud in the manufacture. The instrument had a good appearance, but there was a flaw in its heart; and when the strain came, it snapped, and all was lost. For the security of the subject, the Government have erected an apparatus for testing anchors; and the royal seal is stamped on those that have been approved. When the merchantman purchases an anchor so certified, he has confidence that it will not fail him in his need. It is interesting, and even solemn work, to test anchors, and stamp them as approved. Beware! set not the seal on one that is doubtful, for many precious lives will yet be intrusted to its keeping.

He who is now the anchor of the soul within the veil, was "made perfect through suffering." (cf. Hebrews 5:8-9)

The safety of which this text speaks, is safety such as an anchor affords. This is different from the safety of a ship on a stormless sea, and different from the safety of a ship that is moored fore and aft within the walls of a harbour. Both these positions are safe; but they differ both from each other and from safety by an anchor. Man unfallen enjoyed the first kind of safety, and the ransomed in rest enjoy the second; but the place of a believer in the body is neither like that of a ship on a calm sea, nor like, that of a ship within the harbour, – it is like a ship exposed to raging winds above, and deceitful currents below. Such a soul may be abundantly safe; but its safety is of the kind that a ship enjoys while it is exposed to the storms, and before it reaches the haven – the safety that an exposed ship enjoys through an anchor that is sure and steadfast.

Take now a series of practical lessons.

1. The ship that is kept by an anchor, although safe, is not at ease. It does not, on the one hand, dread destruction; but neither, on the other hand, does it enjoy rest. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you." (1 Peter 4:12) Those who have entered the harbour do not need an anchor; and those who are drifting with the stream do not cast one out. The hope which holds is neither for the world without nor the glorified within, but for Christ's people as they pass through life – rejoicing with trembling; faint, yet pursuing. "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

2. But further: the ship that is held by an anchor is not only tossed in the tempest like other ships, – it is tossed more than other ships. The ship that rides at anchor experiences rackings and heavings that ships which drift with the tide do not know. So, souls who have no hold of Christ seem to lie softer on the surface of a heaving world than souls that are anchored on his power and love. The drifting ship, before she strikes, is more smooth and more comfortable than the

anchored one; but when she strikes, the smoothness is all over. The pleasures of sin are sweet to those who taste them; but the sweetness is only for a season. **"The wicked shall be driven away in his iniquity; but the righteous hath hope in his death."** (Prov 14:32)

3. When the anchor has been cast into a good ground, the heavier the strain that comes on it, the deeper and firmer grows its hold. As winds and currents increase in violence, the anchor bites more deeply into the solid, and so increases its preserving power. It is thus with a trusting soul: temptations, instead of driving him away from his Saviour, only fix his affections firmer on the Rock of Ages. **"When I am weak, then am I strong;"** (2 Cor 13:9) when I am most exposed, then am I safest, in the hollow of my Redeemer's hand. If you have hold, it is in a time of temptation that you will increase the intensity of your grasp. Accordingly you find, as a general rule, that those Christians who have passed through a great fight of afflictions are stronger in the faith than others who have always sailed on a smooth sea.

4. The ship that is anchored is sensitive to every change of wind or tide, and ever turns sharply round to meet and resist the stream, from what direction soever it may flow. A ship is safest with her head to the sea and the tempest. In great storms the safety of all often depends on the skill with which the sailors can keep her head to the rolling breakers. Life and death have sometimes hung for a day and a night in the balance, whether the weary steersman could keep her head to the storm until the storm should cease. Even a single wave allowed to strike her on the broadside might send all to the bottom. But to keep the ship in the attitude of safety, there is no effort and no art equal to the anchor. As soon as the anchor feels the ground, the vessel that had been drifting broadside, is brought up, and turns to the waves a sharp prow that cleaves them in two and sends them harmless along the sides.

Watch from a height any group of ships that may be lying in an open roadstead. At night when you retire they all point westward; in the morning, they are all looking to the east. Each ship has infallibly felt the first veering of the wind or water, and instantly veered in the requisite direction, so that neither wind nor wave has ever been able to strike her on the broadside. Thereby hangs the safety of the ship.

Ships not at anchor do not turn and face the foe. The ship that is left loose will be caught by a gust on her side, and easily thrown over.

As with ships, so with souls: those that are anchored feel sensitively the direction and strength of the temptation, and instantly turn to meet and to overcome it; whereas those that are not anchored are suddenly overcome, and their iniquities, like the wind, carry them away. **"We are saved by hope;"** (Romans 8:24) – saved not only from being outcast

in the end, but from yielding to temptation now.

It is a vain imagination that rises in ignorant minds against the gospel of Christ, that when a sinner gets a glad hope in Christ's mercy, he will not be careful to obey Christ's law. It is an old objection, and perhaps it is human and natural; but it is not real – it is not true. As certainly as the anchored ship feels every gust and current, and turns sharply round to face and fight it; so certainly a soul that has hope in Christ has a quick and sure instinct to detect influences and companionships and customs that dishonour the Lord and ensnare his people. And as the hopeful soul surely detects the danger, it also, in virtue of its hold and hope, turns round to meet, to resist, and to make the devil flee.

I suppose no youth, since Pharaoh reigned in Egypt, has been exposed to a greater strain of temptation than which Joseph overcame in Potiphar's house. But it hope that saved him, as the anchor saves the ship. If he had not been at peace with God, he would have been like a ship caught on the broadside by a hurricane. It was the anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast within the veil before the blast began, that enabled him to overcome it: "[How can I do this great evil, and sin against God?](#)" (Genesis 39:9)

5. When the ship is anchored, and the sea is running high, there is great commotion at her bows. The waves in rapid succession come on and strike. When they strike they are broken, and leap, white and angry, high up on the vessel's sides. This tumult is by no means agreeable in itself; but the mariner on board would not like to want it, for it is the sign of safety. If, while wind and waves continue to rage, he should observe that this commotion had suddenly ceased, he would not rejoice. He would look eagerly over the bulwarks, and seeing the water blue on her bows, instead of the hissing, roaring spray, he would utter a scream of terror. The smoothness at her bows indicates to him that her anchor is dragging. The ship is drifting with wind and water to the shore.

Such, too, is the experience of a soul. Brother, you hope in Christ. Do not be surprised that the currents of fashion rub sometimes rudely against you. It is explained by a text in the Bible: "[The friendship of the world is enmity with God.](#)" (James 4:4) If you are fixed, a great flood is rushing by, and it must needs cause a commotion round you. An impetuous tide of worldliness will dash disagreeably against you from time to time. Do not be too anxious to make all smooth. Peace may be bought too dear. When the mighty stream of vanity on which you float produces no ruffling at the point of contact, – when it is not disagreeable to you, and you not disagreeable to it, – suspect that your anchor is dragging, that it has lost its hold, and that you are drifting into danger.

Cast in the anchor while the sea is calm: you will need it to lean on when the last strain comes on!