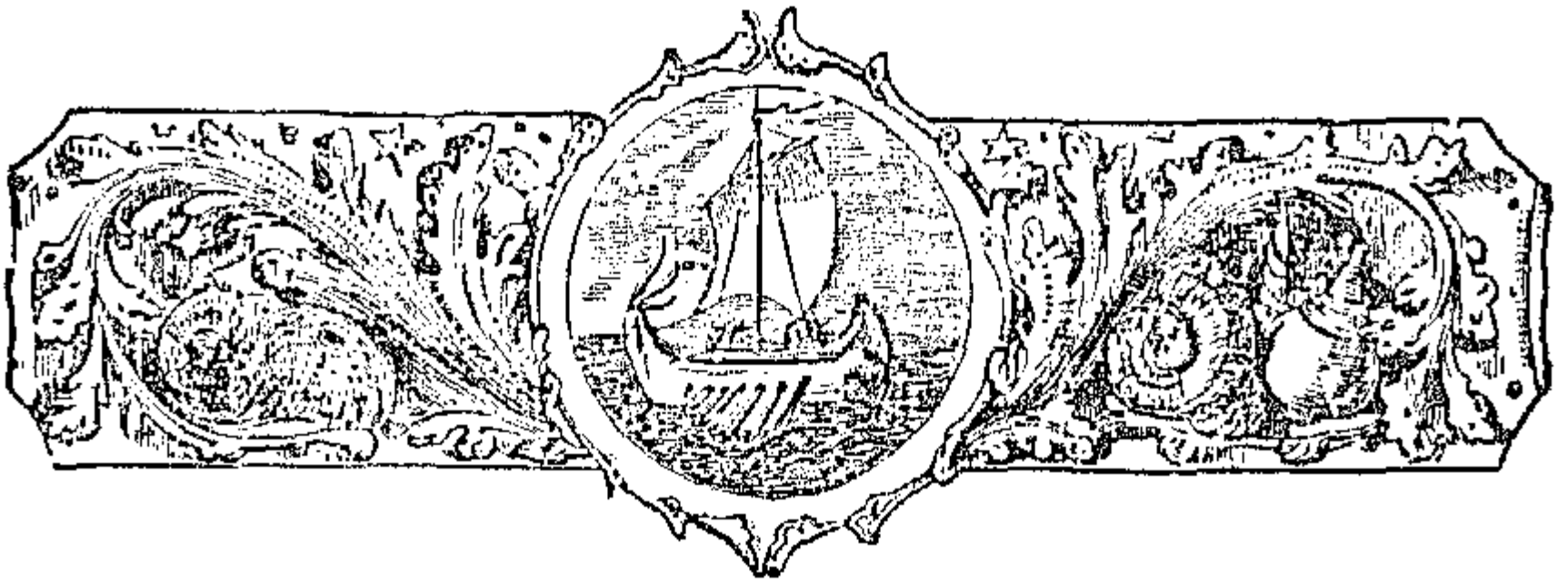


a community called ...

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A CHRISTIAN SAILOR'S EXPERIENCE.

BY E. WENTWORTH, D.D.

RELIGIOUS sailors are not common, yet there is now and then one who lives a consistent Christian life, even amid the profanity and wickedness so usual in the fore-castle. Such a one was H., a young Dane, with whose honest expression, childlike trust in Christ, oneness of purpose, labors among his mess-mates, earnest experience, devout prayers, and hearty songs of praise, we were greatly edified during a long voyage. He was one of the best sailors on board, and when on duty would often greet us with a nod and a smile, and was

delighted, when his "watch was below," to have us spend as much time as was convenient or agreeable talking about Jesus. At parting I asked for a written account of his experience, which he gave as follows :

I was born in Copenhagen. From my earliest recollection I always had a respect for religion. My native country regards every one born and baptized there as a member of the Church. My parents were Lutherans, and I was born and reared in that faith. At the age of ten I was sent, for three years, to a school some twenty miles away. It was there that I first learned any thing about God, heaven, hell, faith, and a future existence. My teacher was not only a State Christian, but, I think, a real one, and he often urged upon me the necessity of being a Christian, even at that tender age. When I had returned home he sent me a letter, accompanied with a Danish translation of Abbott's *Young Christian*. I read the book. Its truths took hold upon my mind. I often felt the Spirit of God striving with me, but with no permanent effect. At thirteen I left

my native country in a ship, of which my uncle was owner and captain, bound for Boston. He was a member of a Congregational Church in Massachusetts. He taught me the commandments in English, and sometimes talked to me very earnestly about my soul's salvation. On our arrival in America I went home with my uncle, and was there introduced to what was entirely new to me—family prayers. All the family were gathered, and the doors closed. I cast my eyes around the room, and wondered what was to come next. My uncle took the Bible, read a chapter, and then all fell on their knees, when he offered prayer. All this was strange to me. In August our ship was ready for sea again. We were bound for Cronstadt: made a quick passage, and by the last of November were back again. The ship was to lie over until February, and I improved the leisure by attending school, and learning the elements of the English language, and was soon able to read and write with ease. Daily prayers, reading the Scriptures, and repeating verses from Holy Writ, were new and puzzling to

my foreign ideas. I also went regularly to Sabbath-school. My teacher was a pious man, and the first whose conversation produced any really serious impressions upon my mind. The pastor, too, was a spiritually-minded man, whose zeal for saving souls often affected me to tears, and made me feel that I was not what I ought to be. But I would soon lose these feelings, and the devil would tempt me to think, "You are near enough a Christian now; you swear but seldom; you do not lie, you do not steal, you do not commit adultery; what can God require more?" Thank God that he opened my eyes, and showed me the wickedness of my heart. In February our ship was ready again, and we sailed for New Orleans, and thence to Cronstadt. I embarked, not without some serious feelings, and with a great many good books. In contact with a wicked crew I soon lost all my good feelings and desires. On the first of March we arrived at New Orleans. My uncle took me to church on Sabbath, and I shall never forget what I there heard about God's mercy and long suf-

fering to sinners. We arrived at Cronstadt in the latter part of May. My uncle as usual took me to church, but my heart seemed steeled to all sense of the Divine mercy. Where should I now be if God had called me then to my final account? I pass over several succeeding voyages, in which my religious state remained similar to what I have already related. Meanwhile, my father had migrated to Massachusetts, and on my next return from sea, it was to greet my family at their home in the New World. I stayed at home a fortnight, made another voyage, and returned to spend another winter in attendance at school, perfecting my knowledge of the language of the country of my adoption. I often made resolutions that I would serve the Lord, but they were made in my own strength, and failed as rapidly as made. The minister of the place, since gone to his reward, was very faithful, and took great interest in me. I started for sea in the spring with another captain and in another ship. During the two voyages I made with this captain and ship I again lost all re-

ligious impressions, as there was not one on board who loved the Lord Jesus Christ. I returned home in December, just as my uncle, who had arrived in October, was ready for another voyage. By this time my father was converted. This had its effect upon me. I had no doubt that daily prayers were offered for my salvation. In January we sailed, as in previous years, the usual round for the South, and thence to Cronstadt, and back to Boston; and still I was without God and an interest in Christ! O, how great the mercy of God! who can fathom it? Arriving at home early the ensuing November, I recommenced school with the prospect of spending another winter in personal improvement. One day my uncle came to see us, told me he had sold his old ship, but that his brother-in-law had got a new clipper ready for California, and he had come to see if I would go in her before the mast. After some reflection I concluded to go, and on the twentieth of December left home and parents again for San Francisco. The ship sailed from New York. The voyage out was

pleasant, but that home still more so. It was during our homeward-bound passage that, through the instrumentality of a pious Norwegian sailor, I was converted to God. This trip was the turning point of my life. This devoted man of God used to talk to me so pointedly about my sinfulness, and to show me so affectionately and plainly what I was by nature, and how I could be saved, that I came soon to a tearful knowledge of my deep need of a Saviour. I felt that I was a sinner, and must be saved by grace. I commenced to pray earnestly for pardon, and one day felt, while praying, that Christ was my Saviour; that for his sake my sins were all forgiven. I did not feel that crushing weight and burden of sin, before conversion, that some tell of; nor was I made 'unspeakably' happy afterward. I had sincere penitence for sin, peace in pardon, and joy in the Holy Ghost, when I realized the witness of my acceptance. When I arrived at home my parents were glad, as usual, to see me, but when I told them what God had done for my soul, they 'rejoiced with

exceeding great joy.' I united with the Church immediately, in company with my dear friend and spiritual adviser, the Norwegian sailor. O what a day was that, of my baptism and union with the Church militant! I did not realize then, as I have since done, the greatness, the solemnity, of that glorious day; the day that united me with the visible Church, and made me an heir, through Jesus Christ, to an 'inheritance that is incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.' Since my conversion I have made several voyages, and regard the last two or three years as the happiest of my life. I know if I live near to Christ it always will be so. I am determined to live for Christ. Time, talents, influence, and money shall all be spent in his service, and to his honor and glory."

The writer has only to add, that his young sailor friend still lives up to his glorious resolution.