

The Veiled Picture

Lady Hope

A large man-of-war ship stood in the northern harbour of Hull. I happened to be staying at the time with some friends, near the town, and received with them an invitation to spend an afternoon on board the ship.

Our visit was full of interest, for the Captain was kindness itself, and showed us everything. He then took us over his own cabin, which was full of all sorts of knick-knacks and treasures that could remind him of home – pictures, photographs and tiny ornaments.

I immediately noticed one picture, with a crimson silk curtain thrown across it, and, yielding to the impulse of the moment, I made a remark to this effect: “What is that picture which has the curtain drawn across it?”

A moment's consideration might have told me that such a question ought not to have been asked. However, the sequel proved that I had done wisely in making the enquiry. The Captain took not the slightest notice of what I had said, and in a few minutes took us out of the cabin. We went to tea, after which he came up to me, and began speaking in a low voice: “You noticed just now a covered picture in my cabin – I do not, as a rule, show it to strangers; but if you will return with me, we can lift aside the curtain, and you shall hear its history.”

I made apologies for the inadvertent remark; but when we entered his cabin, and he removed the curtain this was the sight I saw: a ship enveloped in flames, not far from a rocky shore. At its stern there hung a rope, and on that rope a figure. The Captain, who was a very grave, thoughtful-looking man, well-known in the Service for his bravery and long-distinguished acts, simply pointed to the figure with the words:

“That was me!” He said. “My ship caught fire as we were nearing the shore, and all the crew left in boats. For a short time I stood there alone.”

“Then I felt the flames drawing nearer to me, and I knew that any moment might be my last, so I made my way to the stern of the ship, uncoiling a rope which I fastened round my waist, and then flung myself overboard. I hung suspended as you see, between fire and water for a short time. I cannot tell you how long. It might have been a few minutes; but in that short space

of time the whole of my life came before me. The most trifling details of my early years came vividly before me. I felt as if I was hanging between Time and Eternity!

“At that moment I saw life in a new light: and then I knew nothing more. I must have dropped into the water as the rope burned away, for I can only say that three weeks after this occurrence, I came to my senses, and found myself in a small room of a coastguard’s house on the shore.

“I looked round, for everything was strange to me, and I asked the question – ‘Where am I?’ “The answer was – ‘You are saved, sir.’ “And then I was told the history of that strange night. It all came back to me as I lay there. I requested to be left alone. I turned my face to the wall and fervently prayed there and then that God would save me through His mercy in Christ Jesus.

“I confessed the past, and vowed that from that hour my life and time should be His. I also vowed that as soon as I was able to do so, I would have a picture painted from my own description of the occurrence of that fearful night, that I might always have it by my bedside and look at it morning and evening in order to help me keep in mind my resolutions and the never-to-be-forgotten events of that night.”

The expression of my friend’s countenance as he told me this story, the solemn, intense gravity with which he looked at that picture, imprinted itself on my heart, and I have never forgotten it. It was all such a tremendous reality to him.

Only a very few years afterwards, he was coming home with his ship from Halifax and suddenly and strangely the ship disappeared. This is all that is known. No portions of wreck were ever found, nor the faintest news heard of the noble commander and his magnificent vessel. It was lost on the high seas.

For months his friends refused to believe that he had really gone from them; but now many years have elapsed since the day of that mysterious catastrophe when that ship, with all on board, perished in the Atlantic.

When I think of that little picture, I would remind my friends to be ready, for we all stand today between Time and Eternity! Are you prepared? Do you know where you are going? Have you ever given your whole hearts, your very selves to the Divine Redeemer, that you may experience the free salvation which God has given, and devote your lives in service to the Lord Jesus Christ?