

The
SHIP THAT SAILED
and the
KEEL THAT NEVER
KISSED THE SEA



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**Board of Domestic Missions
Reformed Church in America**



The Ship that Sailed and The Keel that Never Kissed the Sea



THE story of Domestic Missions has its romance no less than that of Foreign Missions. ¶ Much of it, however, is hidden in musty files of correspondence or in family annals, rescued from some attic in an old manse. ¶ “This year,” writes Dr. James S. Kittell, “our Board celebrates its centennial. We would appreciate very greatly an article regarding Domestic Missions.” ¶ As the Arabs say, to hear is to obey, and although my memory does not go back to the earliest

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chapters of a great centenary record, I would paint a picture and draw a lesson from events of prophetic significance in the middle years of the past century, as I find them recorded in the memoirs of my sainted father Adrian Zwemer.

It is not a landscape, but a seascape, and it is still true that “they that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep ¶ They mount up to the heavens, they go down again to the depths, their soul melteth away because of trouble.

¶ They reel to and fro and stagger like a drunken man and are at their wits end. ¶ Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble ¶ He maketh the storm a calm

¶ He bringeth them into their desired haven!” ¶ “For His way is in the sea and His paths are in the deep waters, and his footsteps are not known.”

These words of the Psalmist tell the story of the Pilgrim Fathers of the West, who crossed the Atlantic in 1847 and 1849, and

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laid the foundations of the Reformed Churches in Michigan, Wisconsin and Iowa. ¶ The sailing ship on which my father and mother crossed was called "The Leyla" and from its name one might conclude she had been on East Indian cruises before leaving Rotterdam for New York.

Dr. van Raalte and his company had sailed in 1847 and were already settled in Michigan. ¶ Those who came in 1849 and later followed in their footsteps and the cause of their emigration was the same, namely, a desire for political and religious liberty, together with the hope for material advancement in a new environment. ¶ At present we can scarcely realize the hardships of the early immigrants on the long voyage, and the price they paid as exiles from home to our shores. ¶ "On the fifth of July, 1849," so I read in my father's diary, "everything was ready and we went on board. ¶ Everything included our personal baggage in boxes and bundles and also enough food and clothing for sixty days, if need be. ¶ A com-

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mittee had been appointed and their restrictions regarding food supply were strictly followed. ¶ A sort of cabin and kitchen had been arranged on the poop deck where the immigrants cooked their food and every day they received an allowance of fire-wood; water was handed out to each passenger by measure. ¶ By patiently waiting and standing in line, everybody received his share, and the work in the kitchen went forward, but the water supply was very meager, and everyone carefully husbanded his store. ¶ There were one hundred twenty-eight Hollanders in our party, all from the Island of Zeeland, and fifty Germans.” ¶ Trouble began early when they discovered a thief among their company, who had been robbing his fellow passengers until *he* was discovered and placed in confinement for the rest of the voyage. ¶ After four weeks of calm weather a storm broke loose which lasted for many days. ¶ Waves dashed over the ship, and carried away the open hearth scattering fire-brands which caused an

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alarm of fire. ¶ “The ship continued to toss from side to side on the waves. Although we were below deck, the water leaked in profusely. ¶ There was no danger, but it was disagreeable. ¶ When night came we were forbidden to light the four or five lanterns which were under the poop-decks. This was to prevent the danger of fire. ¶ Most of the immigrants spent the night in prayer. ¶ When morning came we had only the light through one of the portholes near the gangway. ¶ So much water leaked in through the portholes that on the lea side of the ship in the hold, the water stood as high as the lower bunks. ¶ Some said the ship was sinking.” Storm at sea, however, was not the only hardship. ¶ “It was easy for us to put a guard against thieves, but not against death. ¶ Seven little children of the Dutch emigrants of the voyagers died during the voyage and were buried at sea. ¶ Sickness, death and burial of dear children are always some of the bitterest domestic trials, but burial at sea means increase of

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sorrow, and the cry of the mothers when their treasures were consigned to the deep was sometimes too pitiful for our ears.

¶ Most of the children were between one and three years of age, but one was seven.

¶ The funeral was conducted in silence and the usual work on board the ship ceased.

¶ The body properly weighted, lay on a broad plank which rested on the bulwarks of the ship, and was held in balance by one of the sails. ¶ After a short service the plank was lifted and the body slipped into the sea.

¶ Besides those already mentioned of our company there was Elder Lankester, and a school teacher named Huyssoon who were married shortly before we set out from Rotterdam. ¶ Most of the emigrants were from the Province of Zeeland and represented the families of Kotvis, De Pree, Moerdyk, Kolyn and others.” ¶ Concerning this company the Rev. J. Van der Meulen wrote some years later in “De Hope”—“No other ship of emigrants sailed which had so many future ministers of the Gospel as this ship, the

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Leyla.” ¶ One of them was already in the ministry and seven of those who crossed over, served the Gospel later on. ¶ On the thirty-seventh day of the long voyage, toward evening a sailor cried from the top mast, “land, land.”

In this one ship carrying a small company of Dutch emigrants were represented the future ministry at home and abroad of four members of the De Pree family; four Moerdyks; Reverend Kolyn and eight Zwemers, who served at home and abroad, the descendants of these early pioneers. ¶ The total number of years of service of those mentioned is five hundred and forty. ¶ They labored in every part of the Middle West where our denominational heritage was cast, the fathers, the children and the grand-children all descendants of that one little boatload of faith and bold adventure. ¶ What a debt Hope College, the Academy at Orange City and the various Boards and agencies of the Dutch Reformed Church owe to the unknown Captain of the Leyla!

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When we recall those days of hardship and such faith of the fathers it surely is not trivial or irreverent to quote the writer to the Hebrews: "So to say, through Abraham, even Levi who receiveth tithes hath paid tithes; for he was yet in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him." ¶ The hope of future years was in the hearts of the pioneers. *All* the churches founded by them and by their sons, without exception, received needed aid from the Board of Domestic Missions. The strong congregations of the Middle West were not always strong; they grew strong by degrees, because they were nurtured by the prayers and gifts of the older churches in New Jersey and New York. ¶ All of the sons of the West, or nearly all of those trained for the ministry, at Hope College and New Brunswick, received aid from the Board of Education. And is this not a branch of the Home Mission work of the church? Today those churches and pastors are only repaying their debt when they offer liberally to Domestic Missions; for now, as in the days of

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old, “the strong should bear the infirmity of the weak, and not please themselves.” ¶ The Centennial Fund does not merely celebrate a date on the calendar, but the faith and hope and love of those who carried the enterprise forward — *Noblesse oblige*. Let us pay our debt to our predecessors by a Centennial offering of gratitude to Home Missions—which are the basis and the hope of the foreign missionary enterprise. It was so then.

For Van Raalte, Van der Meulen and the rest left a large legacy of high ideals and missionary vision to those who followed after.

¶ It is good to recall one particular episode of those early days, for it links together the winning of the West with the winning of the world for Christ. ¶ It is the story of a ship’s keel that never kissed the sea, but was left to lie and rot where it had been hewn from the forest giants. Truth is stranger than fiction.

¶ About the year 1850 the Dutch Colony on the shores of Black Lake purchased a sailboat which they named “The Knickerbocker.” ¶ It carried supplies from

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Chicago to Holland, Michigan. ¶ They secured an appropriation from Congress for their harbor. ¶ And then their missionary enthusiasm suggested the building of a ship to carry the Gospel beyond the seas! ¶ As early as 1851 they had resolved “to use fifteen per cent of Church money for Foreign Missions and fifty per cent for Home Missions,” and this while they were also establishing a college for the training of preachers!

The London Missionary Society had its “Morning Star” carrying the good tidings in the South Seas, and the American Board also used this agency. ¶ The idea therefore of the immigrants, among whom were artisans and sailors to build a ship, was not unique. ¶ Their faith was. ¶ They planned the very route for the ship that was to carry missionaries and missionary supplies to all parts of the world. ¶ On June 24, 1864 the keel was laid with elaborate exercises as shown by the following program. We give it verbatim, except for the omission of the ode:

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“PUBLIC EXERCISES

at the

Laying of the Keel

of the

NEW MISSIONARY SHIP

at Holland, Black Lake, Michigan

FRIDAY, JUNE 24, 1864

- I. Voorgebed—Rev. A. C. Van Raalte, D.D., President for the occasion.
- II. Psalmgezag, Ps. 72:3, 4.
- III. Reading Scripture, (Isaiah 60:) by Rev. T. Romeyn Beck.
- IV. Address by Rev. Philip Peltz, Cor. Sec. of the Board of Foreign Missions.
- V. Vertaling van Ds. Peltz's rede.
- VI. Singing of a Missionary hymn, by the children under the leadership of Mr Cs. Doesburg.
- VII. Address by Rev. J. V. N. Talmage, Missionary at Amoy, China.
- VIII. Vertaling van Ds. Talmage's rede.
- IX. General Singing—“From Greenland's Icy Mountains.”
- X. Gebed.—Ds. P. J. Oggel.
- XI. Aanspraken door Ds. S. Bolks, Ds. Joh. Van der Meulen en anderen van de Klassis Wisconsin.

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- XII. Psalmgezang, Ps. 98:1, 2.
- XIII. Aanspraken door Ds. C. Van Der Meulen, Ds. J. H. Karsten en anderen van de Klassis Holland.
- XIV. Missionary Ode. (Tune, Rockvale) by the Academy Choir under the leadership of Mr. Wm. B. Gilmore.
(*written for the occasion by Rev. Philip Phelps, Jr.*)
- XV. Laying of the Keel. (Het Leggen der Kiel).
- XVI. Concluding Prayer — Rev. Philip Phelps, Jr.
- XVII. Singing by the Academy Choir—Ps. 117—Tune, Creation.
- XVIII. Slotzang.
Dat's Heeren zegen op u daal,
Zijn gunst uit Sion u bestraal;
Hij schiep 't Heelal zijn' naam ter eer
Loof, loof, nu aller Heeren Heer!
- XXI. Benediction.

The exercises will commence at 3 o'clock, P. M.

A. ZWEMER, Sec'y for the occasion."

The exercises began at 3 P. M. June 24, 1864, but the ships that sailed from Hope College after the Keel had decayed are still

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leaving port every year. More than sixty graduates of this one institution went out for service abroad, and many times that number to the Churches of our denomination, East and West, and on the frontier.

When we call to mind those days of yore, the faith of our fathers not only, but their faithfulness and sacrificial obedience to the call of God, we are reminded of Longfellow's poem on the Building of the Ship:

“We know what Master laid Thy keel
What workmen wrought those ribs of steel
Who made each mast and sail and rope,
What anvils rang, what hammers beat,
In what a forge and what a heat
Were shaped the anchors of Thy hope . . .”

which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, for the work of missions at home and abroad. ¶ For the whole enterprise is anchored fast to the unfailing promise and presence of Christ until the Kingdoms of the world are His and our own land is Immanuel's land.