



5239

THE CLAIMS OF SEAMEN,



A

S E R M O N,

PREACHED NOVEMBER 7, 1819, IN THE BRICK CHURCH,

NEW-YORK,

FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE

MARINE MISSIONARY SOCIETY

OF THAT CITY.

BY EDWARD D. GRIFFIN, D. D.

Published by Request.



NEW-YORK:

PRINTED BY J. SEYMOUR, 49 JOHN-STREET.

.....

1819.



## SERMON.



LUKE x. 37.

THEN SAID JESUS UNTO HIM, GO AND DO THOU LIKEWISE.

THE Pharisees placed all their love to God in obedience to the ceremonial law, and all their love to men in outward expressions of regard for their own sect and nation. All other nations they counted for foes, and taught the people to hate their enemies. So long as they observed the Mosaic ritual, and showed the exterior of good will to their own people, they deemed their obedience perfect, and had no other calculation than to be justified by such a legal righteousness. But their love to God was grossly insincere, and they withheld the tokens of their charity from those whom they acknowledged to be their neighbours. While they made long and many prayers, and boasted loudly of their devotions, they rancorously hated those who differed from them in opinions, and would even suffer their poor brethren to pine and die by their side without an effort to relieve them. One of these hypocrites came to Jesus to tempt him, that is, to draw from him something in disparagement of the law of Moses. "Master," said he, "what shall I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus said unto him, What is written in the law? How readest thou?" He answered, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,—and thy neighbour

as thyself." Jesus said unto him, "Thou hast answered right: this do and thou shalt live." The Pharisee, conscious of hating many of his fellow-men, and "willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?" It was his opinion that the heathen, and especially the Samaritans, were excluded from the claims of this relation. Our Saviour was willing to convince him that every man was his neighbour whom he had an opportunity to serve, though of a different party or nation. But how is this to be done? If a *Samaritan* is represented in distress, and a Jew is brought where he is, the Pharisee will say that the sufferer ought to be neglected as an alien and an enemy. Our Saviour therefore had the wisdom to present a *Jew* in a suffering condition, neglected by his brethren, and relieved by a Samaritan. This kindness the Pharisee could not but approve. And when he had justified a Samaritan in relieving a Jew, he could not avoid the conclusion that a Jew ought to relieve a Samaritan. Having extorted from him the confession that the Samaritan had acted a neighbourly part, the divine Teacher pressed upon him the inference, that he ought to treat the Samaritans as neighbours. "Go and do thou likewise." Go, relieve a suffering alien, a suffering enemy; and no longer trumpet forth your devotions while you can stand by and see a brother perish.

The chief object of this parable was to reprove the hypocrisy of a sect, who, while they boasted of their zeal for God, had no active charity towards men, but in point of sordid selfishness and hardness of heart were sunk below the Samaritans. The case presented was this. A Jew, an inhabitant of Jerusa-

lem, in a journey to Jericho fell among thieves; who stript him, and wounded him, and left him half dead. And by chance there came that way a certain priest, one of the ministers of the altar; and when he saw his suffering brother, his mind was so intent upon the divine law, which peradventure he was reading, that he passed by on the other side. A Levite also, another minister of the altar, when at the place came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. Of what avail then were all their devotions? By this single trait our Saviour evidently intended to prove all their religion vain. No one doubts that he meant to hold them up as hypocrites. Certainly then he meant to exhibit *infallible proof* of hypocrisy. But the only proof exhibited was their unfeeling neglect of a suffering brother. This then was enough; and the parable is a standing witness before all the world, that no amount of zeal or devotion can raise a man above the character of a hypocrite, if his hand is habitually closed against his suffering brethren. Be he a member of the church, be he a minister of religion, and though no other spot appears upon him, yet this alone removes him further from the divine favour than a heathen whose heart glows with active benevolence.

But the parable presents another aspect. Ye who are delighted with the displays of moral worth, turn your eyes to the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. There lies a naked, wounded man in his blood. In this condition he is espied by a traveller. Though a stranger and an enemy, the benevolent man knows him only as a brother. He considers that he may have a wife and children at home, to whom he is as

dear and as necessary as he himself is to his own family. He feels a commotion of pity rising up in his soul. He goes to him and binds up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine. He sets him upon his own beast, and brings him to an inn, and watches over him all that day and night. In the morning he commits him to the host, leaving a sum of money, and promising to pay all other expenses at his return.

The direct command of the Saviour to each one of us is, "Go and do thou likewise." Here in five words we have our whole path laid out to the grave. "Go and do thou likewise," is the grand chart of our journey. The character here drawn by Christ is perfect; and this character, brought out in the several relations of life, is all that is demanded of us in reference to our fellow-men. But it is demanded of each one of us that we be good Samaritans.

It is the will of God that we should individually co-operate, to the full extent of our means, in the great plans of Christian benevolence which are brought forward at the present day. And it becomes us often and earnestly to inquire, what new projects can be devised,—what plan to fill up some remaining deficiency,—to serve some class of men hitherto overlooked. From the shape and novelty of various institutions which have arisen in the present age, it is evident that such inquiries have been often made, and with no inconsiderable effect. To some such effort of benevolent invention may be traced the project for the moral improvement of seamen. And when the peculiar necessities of this class of men are considered, and the vast influence which they are to have on the reformation of the world, we are rea-

dy to wonder that the mighty plan did not occur before.

As ruined and immortal beings, seamen are certainly the proper objects of Christian compassion: and when the shortness of a sailor's life is considered, their claims are peculiarly urgent. Why then should they be overlooked in the great plans of the present day? They were not overlooked by Christ. On the shores of Tiberias he often wandered to gather the straying seamen to his arms. The waves of Gennesaret often heard his voice. And from among the watermen of the lake he selected the chief ministers of his kingdom, to whom we are so deeply indebted for the extension of the Christian Church, and for the completion of the canon of Scripture.

That vast republic of men who have their dwellings on the sea, constitutes in many respects a world by itself; governed by different laws, connected by a different language, and not likely to fall under the influence of any of those plans which are set on foot for the reformation of landsmen. This republic is sufficiently large to be entitled to particular attention. No less than 14 or 15,000 are said to belong to this port, and 500 to the neighbouring port of New-Haven. 63,000 were employed in the commerce of the United States in 1810, and some have since swelled the number to 100,000. 45,000 are reckoned for the port of London, and 120,000 at least for the merchant ships of Great-Britain, to say nothing of her navy. Passing by all the other powers of Europe and America, some idea may be formed of the great marine world of Asia, when it is stated that, according to a late return, 3,130 sail from the single port of Bombay.



How many hundreds of thousands then must swarm in the numberless ports with which the whole circumference of the ocean is fringed.

This great marine republic has drawn its manners from ages far remote, reaching back to times of pagan darkness, and has never to any considerable degree fallen under the reforming influence of the Gospel. While Christianity has reigned on shore, and spread her triumphs over Europe and America, the ocean has never been brought under her sway. This has been owing chiefly to the want of a sabbath and public worship at sea, and to that distinctness of manners and dress, and roving way of life, which have kept seamen from the house of God when on shore. To this separation from the means of grace, added to habits already established in that community, and not to any peculiar perverseness of nature, is to be ascribed the uncommon depravity of seamen.

Nor is there any thing in their character or manner of life which ought to discourage us from attempts to reclaim them. Some of the most generous principles of our nature still beat vigorously in their hearts. Warm in their attachments, quick to feel for others, easily melted by sympathy, and at the same time strangers to avarice, and liberal even to a fault, their charity is always active, and they are ready to hazard life itself to rescue or relieve a stranger. On such natures the power of God may easily ingraft his grace. The only special obstacles growing out of their manner of life, are the want of the means of grace at sea, the temptations which cluster around them as they approach the shore, and

the habits which have long governed their community. To remove the first, let every vessel be supplied with Bibles and tracts, and as fast as you can, scatter praying men among the crew. To obviate the second, instead of suffering all the temptations of hell to surround them when they reach the land, meet them on the shore and conduct them to the house of God, and introduce them to the society of praying people. These two obstacles removed, and the third will presently follow. Had not the Christian world so long neglected this unhappy class of men, the complaint would not have been heard at this late day, that their habits are too strong to be conquered. Those habits will yield to the means of grace and the influence of religious companions. But it is high time that these remedies were applied. It is said in England, and seems to be admitted here, that for some time past the ignorance and depravity of seamen have been on the increase. Surely no more time ought to be lost.

The particular measure on which I wish to fix your attention at present, is that of providing them with a place of worship when on shore. If this privilege is not furnished them in its most favourable form, there is no hope of making any general impression on their community. Without a sabbath or public worship at sea, what prospect of any favourable change if they cannot hear the Gospel when on land? The case becomes still more urgent when it is considered how small a fraction of time they are in circumstances to enjoy this privilege. It is calculated in London that seamen are on shore in different parts of the world one third or one half of their time,

B

and that a half even of that part is spent in foreign ports, where in general they have no opportunity to hear the Gospel; leaving but a fourth or a sixth of their time to be spent at home. In this country it has been reckoned, on what grounds I know not, that they are on shore in different parts of the world but a quarter of their time. And then, if half of that part is spent in foreign ports, they are at home but an eighth of their time, or from six to seven weeks in a year. Is this the only time you have to bring your seamen within the sound of the Gospel? How diligently ought this season to be improved. With all the temptations which surround them, what can you expect of them without the Gospel? And yet, unless the charity of strangers provides the privilege for them in foreign ports, they cannot hear the Gospel but six or eight weeks in a year. If you neglect them during this season, what but certain destruction awaits them individually, and what but increased ignorance and wickedness can be looked for in their community?

But if any thing is done for them in this way, it seems necessary to furnish them with a separate place of worship. No seats are reserved for them in your churches, and it would be impossible to render such a provision effectual. Should it be made, their peculiarity of dress, their aversion to mingling with other people, and the impression that they are not welcome in your assemblies, would render the provision unavailing. Or if they should accept it, how shall a mass of people, mostly strangers, and constantly changing, agree among themselves what churches they shall severally attend? And as they

love to go in groups, several different companies would be likely to repair to the same place, and many would waste half of the time of divine service in wandering from church to church. A few such experiments would discourage them altogether. Indeed a very little reflection will convince us that there is no way to secure their regular attendance without giving them a church to themselves.

This being settled, another question arises: on what plan shall the provisions for public worship in that church be conducted? To me it appears evident that it will not answer to rely on occasional supplies, nor on preachers employed for a short time and often changed. A people so unaccustomed, must be drawn to the house of God by one in whom they have confidence, and who shall be known as the seaman's friend. It is important also that one should be employed, who, separated from all other cares, shall have leisure, and a mind at work, to invent plans for executing a business so novel, and so different from any thing else that has been done on earth. There is an influence to be extended to other cities, and indeed throughout the maritime world. A course of extensive measures is to be pursued, which requires system, and a master spirit at the centre. And if the enterprise is to be carried honourably and efficiently through, the salary provided must be liberal, and such as will command services adequate to this difficult undertaking.

The expense of all this will be considerable at first, but it will be growing lighter every year. Diffuse through the great world of seamen a longing after the house of God, and break them down to a consci-

entious economy in the management of their wages, and they will do much towards supporting the Gospel for themselves. Bring them to cast a wishful look towards the sanctuary as they approach the shore, and fetch them home with a desire, after all their dangers and escapes, to present an offering to the Lord, and with their accustomed generosity they will cast in "a worthy portion."

This plan of erecting a single church, so far from being extravagant and visionary, is only a beginning. If there belong to the United States 100,000 seamen, and one sixth of them are on our shores at once, there are of this number near 17,000 in the country continually. Add half as many more for foreign seamen, and it swells the number to 25,000. Allow a fifth to be detained from the sanctuary, and calculate a thousand to a congregation, and there are enough for twenty churches. Add all the families belonging to 100,000 seamen, and who will say that fifty churches would be too many for the United States? Again, if there belong to this port 15,000, and one sixth of them are constantly at home, there are of this number 2500 continually here. Add half as many more for foreign seamen, and allow a fifth to be detained from the sanctuary, and there are 3,000 to be accommodated with seats every sabbath. To these add the families belonging to 15,000 seamen, and there ought to be at least seven or eight churches in this city. But some have placed the number of those continually here as high as six or seven thousand. This would increase the required number of churches to nine or ten. And yet but one is now in contemplation. So far therefore from transcending the

bounds of moderation in this attempt, you have only made an honourable beginning.

In the business of the moral improvement of seamen, we ought not to shrink from any supportable expense. Consider how much we are indebted to them for our wealth and prosperity. It is for our service that they forego the moral and religious advantages which we enjoy. For us they tear themselves from churches and sabbaths. And it is but a small return to furnish them with the means of grace during the few weeks that they are on shore. This is a debt of honour and justice, pressing with peculiar force on merchants and others connected with commerce. It is a debt which ought long since to have been discharged. The commercial world are in great arrears to this class of men. But thousands of them have gone to the bottom of the ocean unpaid, and are now beyond our reach. May the mercy of God shield us when the cry of their blood is heard. We cannot raise them from their watery bed, but let us hasten to pay the debt to their survivors. Let us in contrition lavish upon them till they are full. This cannot indeed relieve the unhappy men who are gone, but it is all the atonement we can make.

If it were lawful to associate a lower consideration with this sacred motive, I might add, that it is no less our interest than our duty to make this provision for seamen. It would greatly add to the security of our shipping and commerce. The parents and friends of those who are or shall be seamen, are deeply interested in another sense in the measures now in contemplation. Masters and mates of mer-

chant vessels, and all passengers by sea, have a great stake in the character of this class of men, and in the means taken to render them orderly and moral, instead of lawless and profligate. But what I have chiefly in view is the pecuniary interest which may be brought to balance the expense of the provision. There is a prodigious mass of society who in this respect are interested in the elevation of seamen from their ignorance, profligacy, and insubordination, to the character of intelligent, sober men, obedient to superiors, and faithful to their trust. This is true of ship-owners, insurers, merchants, and manufacturers, together with the numerous class of their dependants, and all others who are directly or indirectly supported by commerce. This portion of society could well afford to support the whole expense, and would find their interest in doing it.

But in a still higher sense are all those interested who pant after the reformation of a world. On this sublime event the measures now in contemplation have an important bearing. Change the general character of our seamen, and what a prodigious alteration would be wrought in the moral state of our sea-ports. Remove so large a part of the worst of the moral contagion, and bring it over to the side of piety, and what a wonderful change of proportions between the good and evil of our cities. Turn all that mass of temptation which carries away the most wretched part of society, into prayer for the reformation of the wicked, and how much you take out of one scale and put into the other. What a revolution would thus be wrought in all the sea-ports of

**Christendom.** And this would be no inconsiderable step towards the general improvement of the race.

But seamen are destined to act a still more conspicuous part in the reformation of the world. With their existing character they present a bar to the spread of the Gospel, by raising prejudices against the Christian name in every heathen port they visit. But let them be brought under the sanctifying influence of Christianity, and they will become, though not formal, yet efficient missionaries to every part of the world. Their zeal in transporting Bibles and tracts, added to their example and conversation in heathen ports, will have a mighty influence in favour of Christianity throughout the globe. And after they have seen and been affected with the state of the heathen, they will bring back a report glowing with life and feeling, to awaken the sympathy and zeal of the Christian world. They will become reconnoitering parties, every where dispersed, to make out and present to the eye of the Church a graduated scale of human misery, to show where aid ought first to be applied. They will constitute the great medium of intercourse between Christendom and its missionary stations throughout the earth, and will give to that intercourse a tone and interest which mere stupid organs could never impart. Another part of their work, as expressly fixed by prophecy, will be to carry home the Jews. "The ships of Tarshish first ["shall wait for me,"] to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them." And when they shall come in through the Mediterranean with a press of sail, as on flying wings, and the whitening canvass, to an eye perched on Jerusalem, shall ap-



pear like a cloud in the horizon, then I seem to hear the gazing spectators, bending from the holy hills, exclaim, "Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?"\* This is the literal application of the text, and the very imagery that lay in the eye of the prophet.

To prepare the way for these splendid events, the time seems to have come when God is about to bring to pass a great revolution in the republic of mariners. This appears from the spirited exertions which are beginning to be made for them on both sides of the Atlantic. It was long ago said that "the set time" to favour Zion would come, when the servants of God should "take pleasure in her stones and favour the dust thereof." In some happy age an indissoluble connexion was to exist between exertions and their desired effects. And the present, it has been remarked, is a day distinguished, not so much for human efforts, (great as they have been,) as for the success with which they are crowned. We have only in the name of the Lord to put our hand against a world, and it will move. In an age so distinguished for the smiles of God on the humble exertions of his people, we may take encouragement, rising up to assurance, from the simultaneous movements in different parts of the world in favour of seamen.

The first institution for this object was founded as early as the year 1780. It was a Bible society for the British navy and army, which arose under the patronage of the late benevolent John Thornton. After his death it declined, but was revived again in

\* Isaiah 60. 8, 9.

1804, under the name of the Naval and Military Bible Society. In 1806 it took a more systematic organization, and received for its president the archbishop of Canterbury. This society has distributed more than 110,000 copies of the Scriptures. Nor have its labours been in vain. During the late protracted war in Europe, some unusual attention to religion appeared in the English fleets, which has continued since the peace. A considerable number of naval officers have become decidedly concerned for the interests of religion, and several of them successful ministers of the Gospel. It is worthy of particular remark, that by this means providence has raised up a set of men versed in the manners and language of seamen, and capable of sending their appeals through the marine world as no other men could have done. This advantage they have not failed to improve, and have written a number of instructive and pungent tracts in the dialect of mariners, probing their weaknesses, exposing their dangers, conciliating their prejudices, and intertwining in the dialogue so much of nature and the manners of the sea, as easily to catch the attention of sailors. I cannot but consider them as raised up for this very purpose.

Within the last two years the attention of the religious public in England has been more distinctly turned towards this interesting class of men. On the 30th of December 1817, a meeting was held in London for the purpose of devising means for their religious improvement; which led the way to the formation, on the 29th of January 1818, of the Merchant Seamen's Bible Society, auxiliary to that great Institution which has gladdened half the nations. On

the 18th of the following March arose up after it the Port of London Society for promoting Religion among Seamen. This Society proceeded without delay to fit up a vessel on the Thames for a mariners' church. They rendered it capable of accommodating seven or eight hundred, and named it the Floating Chapel. It was opened for public worship in May following, and has ever since been gratuitously supplied by neighbouring ministers, who have furnished two sermons stately on the sabbath, and one generally in the week. Large assemblies of seamen have been collected, who have generally appeared attentive, and frequently in tears under the word. Two other Floating Chapels are said to be in a course of preparation on the same river. The impression on the maritime community has already become visible. The number who take pleasure in reading the Scriptures has greatly increased, and even social prayer is becoming a favourite exercise on board of other vessels. These two societies hope to be followed by similar institutions in all the out ports of the British empire.

One whole year before these recent movements in London, that is, in December 1816, a number of gentlemen in this city formed themselves into a committee to receive contributions for building a mariners' church. About the same time a Marine Bible Society was instituted in Philadelphia. Another has since been established at Charleston, South Carolina, and another at Boston, where a minister is employed in preaching chiefly to seamen. On the 12th of March 1817, the Marine Bible Society of New-York, auxiliary to our national Institution,

was organized; and on the 4th of July following, a Marine Bible Society, auxiliary to this, was established at New-Haven. In May 1818, the building committee before mentioned, in connexion with other gentlemen, took incipient measures to form the Port of New-York Society for promoting the Gospel among Seamen, with the double object of erecting the mariners' church and supporting a preacher. The society has since been completely organized. The directors have obtained an act of incorporation, and a subscription for about \$8000. After purchasing a lot in Roosevelt-street, they laid the corner stone of the church on the 13th of October 1819, and have made considerable progress in the building.

While these things were going on, a new spring was given to the whole design by the formation of the Marine Missionary Society of New-York, which arose into being in the autumn of 1818. This society, which consisted of both gentlemen and ladies, had for its sole object the employment and support of a preacher to seamen. They entered immediately into contract with the Rev. Mr. Stafford, and have hitherto furnished the whole of his salary. In December they opened a temporary place of worship in Cherry-street, which had been fitted up for them by the Port Society; and here the Gospel has been preached to mariners ever since. The house, which is capable of accommodating several hundreds, has been well attended, and on sabbath evenings, generally filled to overflowing. These two societies have entered harmoniously on the same course; one undertaking to build the church, and

the other to assist in supporting the preacher. It is gratifying also to learn that these measures have been warmly approved by the great body of shipmasters and seamen. The directors of the Port Society, in their report for May last, stated that no less than 800 seamen had already applied to their minister for Bibles and tracts, that 200 had come to him under more or less concern of mind, and that about twenty had been brought to hope in the mercy of God.

From all these motions of providence may we not conclude that preparations are making for a vast republic of pious seamen, to fulfil the mighty purposes of grace in the four quarters of the world? Yes, the time is coming when every cabin that floats will be a Bethel.

And now who shall stand forth the honoured instruments of this godlike work? In such a business what place is so entitled to take the lead among the cities of our country, as this great emporium of commerce? It belonged to you to spread this high example before the commercial world in the west,—to set forth this act of sacred justice in sight of all who live upon the labour and deprivations of seamen. You have done it, and you have done well. And it will never be said of this wealthy city, standing at the head of American commerce, that they suffered such an enterprise to fall through for want of funds. A greater spirit will surely be roused on this subject. Every generous merchant, and ship owner, and insurer, will take up the business as his own personal concern. And God will bless the labour of their hands.

I appear before you this evening at the request of the Marine Missionary Society; and the collection to be taken up is to enable them to pay the salary to their preacher, to whom, and for other matters, they are in arrears about \$500. The burden of supporting the weekly ministrations to seamen, must at present fall mostly on a charitable public. Men must be found willing to put their united hands under this weight, or it will fall to the ground. Is it not an imperious call? Among all the objects presented to the consideration of our charity in this day of benevolent enterprise, is there one which makes a louder demand upon us, especially in this incipient and feeble state of the undertaking? A large amount must be drawn from the yearnings of compassion, or the whole attempt must be abandoned. I know the pressure of the times, but death is pressing upon seamen, and will not wait for the times to change. Nay, they must encounter the hazard of a *speedy* death in your service, or the times to you will be harder still. And if the times are hard, others will give less, and more is needed from you. I come in the name of that God who formed, and that Saviour who died for seamen. I come in the name of that God who filled the sails of your ship with prosperous breezes, and by the aid of seamen brought your rich cargo into port. I come in the name of that God who stationed his angel at your door, and guarded you and yours from the late pestilence. Come gather up what you would have given the apothecary, and lay that as a thank-offering at your Redeemer's feet. And will you not put an offering into the hands of each of your children who have been preserved, and send them forward to

bear the expressive token to Christ? Who is there among you that loves the Saviour and the souls of men better than his pelf? Who is there among you that twenty years hence would rather enjoy the smiles of Christ than to have left on earth a large estate? Who among you will place his soul in that sailor's stead who the very next voyage is to be swallowed up in the waves and go unprepared to his doom? When he enters eternity, and finds himself banished from all good for ever, and for ever, and for ever!—O! O! O the insupportable thought! Could he have attended one evening in the Mariners' Church, something might have reached his heart. Tens of thousands are going to the same doom, unless rescued by the charity of the Church. Where shall we bound our exertions? What shall we dare to retain for ourselves? Brethren, the case is now before you: the eyes of God are upon you: I leave you to your own reflections.

12 DE 87

