

J. Parley 1812

A

SERMON,

DELIVERED AT THE MEETING HOUSE OF THE SECOND
PARISH IN PORTLAND,

AUGUST 20, 1812 :

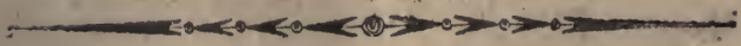
ON THE OCCASION OF
THE NATIONAL FAST.

BY NATHAN S. S. BEMAN,

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“ Follow peace with all men.”—PAUL.



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1812.

SERMON.

GENESIS 13, 8.

“ *And Abrahám said unto Lot, let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen ; for we be brethren.*”

EVER since the apostasy of man the world has presented a scene of disorder and ruin. The lawless and ungovernable passions of the human heart have burst forth in the expressions of *contention* and *war* ;—so that a history of our race has been little better than a register of the blackest crimes ! Even the first descendant of our primitive parents raised the weapon of death, and precipitated his brother prematurely to the grave ! *Pride, ambition* and *a desire of gain* have multiplied the causes of contention, and spread devastation and misery over the whole face of the earth. Princes, and other rulers, have sometimes wantonly sported with human blood, and stained the records of heaven with crimes which fallen angels never committed. This was the case in those wars which are recorded on the pages of the Grecian and Roman histories ;—and the same disposition is discoverable in those violent contests which have, in modern times, converted the whole continent of Europe into a field of slaughter and blood ! *War* is certainly one of the sorest judgments with which a nation can be visited ;—and in this light it has always been considered by every man who is under the influence of the spirit of the gospel. The religion of the bible inculcates the dispositions of unanimity and peace. A part of the anthem sung by the angels of heaven at the advent of the Saviour, was “ glory to God in the highest, and on earth *peace*, good will toward men.”

This disposition is strongly inculcated in every part of the Bible. “ If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” And we have a practical illustration of this precept in the words of our text. A con-

test had arisen between the domestics of Abraham and Lot, which was happily adjusted by the interposition of the pious and illustrious patriarch. His reasoning breathes the spirit of mildness and love. "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen ; for we be brethren."

We are assembled this day, my friends, by the direction of our rulers, to confess our sins as a people, and to implore the benedictions of heaven upon us as a nation suffering under the calamities of war. But it is impossible to do this with religious solemnity unless we take the dimensions of our national afflictions. Such is our spiritual insensibility, that we rarely ever *see* our transgressions in their true light, till we *feel* them in the sufferings to which they expose us. And how can we suitably deplore the evils of war, unless we fix our eyes upon the picture ;—unless we take a solemn and conscientious view of its horrors ? And what occasion can be more proper for a discussion of this subject, than the present ? And what passage in the whole oracles of truth can furnish a better illustration of the temper of the gospel—of "the meekness and gentleness of Christ," than the one we have chosen ? "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee."

Here let it be distinctly understood, that I shall not meddle with the political contests of the day. I preach only the politics of heaven ;—I inculcate the spirit of the bible. I hold up the patriarch Abraham for your imitation, who was the advocate of peace and "the friend of God." If I deviate, in a single instance, from the precepts of the bible, or from well authenticated facts, convince me of my error, and I will make a retraction as publicly as I commit the offence. Let us fix our eyes for a moment on the evils of war, *that disgrace of christendom and scourge of the world*. And in the prosecution of this subject, we shall find the most cogent and omnipotent motives to deter us from the influence of that vortex which has engulfed in indescribable ruin some of the most flourishing nations of the earth !

1. *Loss of property* may be noticed as one of the evils of war. The support of civil government, even in *times of peace*, must always be great;—but in *times of war* the burdens of the people increase in a rapid proportion. Fortifications must be erected;—vessels must be armed and manned for the defence of harbors and territorial waters, and large armies must be raised, equipped and supported at public expense. And these burdens must be borne by the people when they are least able to support them;—and when they will be removed, is beyond the province of human foresight to determine. During the existence of war, large national debts are sometimes contracted, and whole kingdoms have been degraded to poverty by the imposition of taxes. These things are serious evils; but they bear no comparison with the *positive sacrifice* of property—which is lost not only to the nation, but to the world. In the present case, our numerous vessels must be swept from the ocean, and those which do not become spoils to the enemy, will return to rot in our harbors.

The agricultural interest of a country generally, if not *always*, suffers by war. Many who, in times of peace, are employed in tilling the ground, and tending the fruits of the earth, are called to exchange the implements of husbandry for “the weapons of war.” They must “beat their ploughshares into swords, and their pruning-hooks into spears.” The field of battle, instead of the peaceful farm, becomes their sphere of operation. Hence *poverty* and *famine* frequently follow the steps of war. But when an army enters a country for the purpose of conquest, *plunder* and *the destruction of property* are among the objects of their visit. The dwellings of the *affluent*, and the cottages of the poor, are wrapped in flames;—and whole *cities* and *provinces*,—which were once the abodes of wealth and splendor, are converted into the regions of desolation and ruin! Before the destructive hand of war, the labors of civilization are demolished, and the monuments of riches and grandeur crumble to the dust!

2. *Depravity of morals* is another inevitable consequence

of war. The history of every nation under heaven may serve to illustrate the truth of this observation. Where will you find a war, either in *ancient* or *modern* times, which has not been attended by these deadly effects? Look at the nations of Europe which have been so long embroiled in the most diabolical contests! What has been the *moral* and *religious* tendency of war among them? Every man knows, who is acquainted with the state of the world, that the flood-gates of iniquity have been opened, and some of them have descended to the lowest grade of national depravity. *Robberies* and *murders* are vastly more numerous, than among those nations who have cultivated and pursued the arts of peace. The most flagrant and infamous crimes are among the common occurrences of the day. The sacrifice of human life, if it stand in the way of the gratification of *avarice* or *ambition*, is considered little worse than the plucking of a flower, or the destruction of a brute. And these are just such consequences as might be expected from the existence of war. The most base and depraved passions of the heart are called into action, and the most awful *expressions* of them are daily witnessed in the camp and the field of battle. The conflicting armies breathe the spirit of *murder* and *revenge*, and exult with satanic triumph at the wounds they inflict on each other. *One* sin is commonly followed by *many*; and the progress of depravity in *nations* as well as *individuals*, is from bad to worse. *War* is an *evil*, a *moral* evil in itself. There is always blame on *one* side, and frequently on *both*. I have sometimes thought, that if a nation should be guided entirely by the spirit of the gospel, they would enjoy the happiness of living at peace with all the world. Let this be as it may, it is incontrovertibly certain that wars proceed from the wicked and unhallowed passions of men. "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts, that war in your members?" War itself, being an evil, becomes the parent of an extensive and numerous progeny of the same moral description. "A corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit."

Camps and the field of slaughter are the head quarters of satan. There he erects the standard of darkness ; and commonly a large majority of the contending armies belong to his spiritual kingdom. The scenes which are witnessed in war have a deleterious influence on the heart. They obliterate serious impressions ; destroy the principles of responsibility to God, and degrade *men to monsters*. And, when these things are accomplished, you have given the reins to the vilest and most impious propensities of the human heart. Practical iniquity and infidelity must follow. The word of God falls to the ground, and the institutions of heaven are treated with contempt. The sabbath is little regarded ; and the profanation of this day invariably leads to greater ungodliness. The tented field is polluted with oaths ; intemperance, and licentiousness of every description become common, and a large proportion of the rising generation are drawn into the vortex of irretrievable destruction.

3. *The sacrifice of human blood* is a glaring and shocking trait in the picture of war. Nothing short of a sight of our own hearts can leave such a solemn impression of the doctrine of human depravity, as a review of the innumerable myriads of our race, who have been cloven down in the disasters of battle ! A single instance of murder is shocking to the feelings of humanity, and infinitely offensive to the purity of heaven. But, in times of war, who can count the number of the slain ? Who, that has a single fibre of human sensibility in his heart, can hear the groans of the dying, without deprecating that calamity, which inflicted the wounds ? Go into the field of battle, and weep over the *violence* and *ferocity* of man ! Here you behold the father of a numerous family, to whom they were looking for counsel and support, expiring in his blood ! Yonder is a whole house in tears at the death of a son and brother ! There is a young man borne to the grave, the only son of his mother—and she a widow ! The ground smokes with the blood of thousands ; and, perhaps, every one has a parent, a child, a brother, or a sister to deplore his loss ! But to the christian, this is by no

means the most gloomy part of the subject. His thoughts rise from the grave, which is now the receptacle of their bodies, and follow their souls to the tribunal of God ! He trembles at the prospect ! His charity would make the most favorable decision ; but when he considers the number of the slain, and the character and conduct of *many*, he cannot suppose them prepared to meet their God. Multitudes die with their hearts *burning* with revenge, and with oaths and curses on their lips. It is for the sacrifice of the *immortal soul*, then, as well as the perishable body, for which the christian must mourn. And, when *temporal* and *eternal* life are at stake, we should proceed with caution. How many lives may be sacrificed, and souls forever lost during this war, God only knows. In its prosecution, perhaps, our young men will be summoned to the walls of Quebec ; their blood be sprinkled upon the plains of Abraham, and their bodies be interred at a distance from their "fathers' sepulchres."

4. War is a violation of *the bond of brotherhood* which ought to unite the nations of the earth. We are all descendants of common parents ; for God "hath made of one blood all nations of men ;" and we are likewise children of the same God and Father of the universe ; "for we are also his offspring." Every man is our brother ; and this consideration furnishes the most powerful motives to unity and love. "Behold," says the Psalmist, "how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen ; for we be brethren." The spirit recommended in these, and numerous other passages of scripture, are applicable to men as *citizens of Zion*, of *our country* and of *the world*. Were these directions universally received and obeyed by men, *perfect harmony* would pervade the churches of Christ ; *party spirit* would be banished from every land under heaven, and the blessings of *perpetual peace* would visit all the nations of the earth. Members of the christian church cannot too frequently meditate on these words of our Saviour ; "A new com-

mandment I give unto you, that ye love one another.” “We want no other chain of affection,” says an elegant writer, “than the knowledge that we are christians; as such, we must weep and we may rejoice together; for we have been wrecked by the same storm, and are rescued by the same Redeemer.”—And let the citizens of the same country never forget that they are brethren. Their fraternal attachment for one another should be so *strong* as to moderate the heat, and check the impetuosity of party contention. The prosperity, respectability, happiness and strength of every community depend on the unanimity of its members. And the same principle should extend to every creature of God in the human form; it should encircle all the nations of the earth. The *jealousies* and *animosities*, which exist between different nations, are a direct violation of the whole tenor of the bible. This spirit is, no doubt, inspired by the angels of darkness; and its operation in the world has fixed an everlasting disgrace upon the character of man! The *African*, the *Chinese*, the *Indian*, the *Frenchman*, the *American*, and the *Briton* are all members of the same family; and they should all share in our affection and sympathy. And there are *peculiar* motives, which ought to operate on both nations, to prevent strife between this country and Great Britain.—The wealth of both countries is increased by a free and liberal intercourse;—we speak the same language, profess the same religion and are descended from the same origin. The ruler of each nation should say to the other, “let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee.”

5. The salvation or destruction, of the heathen will be affected by the war now under consideration. It is well known, that England is the only nation on the globe, which has, for many years past, made any considerable exertions for the salvation of the Pagans. Good men of different denominations have joined in this laudable and glorious undertaking; immense sums have been contributed, and men of apostolic zeal have borne to the benighted inhabitants of Asia *that some* gospel, which the nations

of Europe once received from their Apostles and primitive teachers. And the smiles of heaven have attended their labors. The bible begins, even now, to be read in some of the native languages of the East;—and, in many instances, the worshippers of *filthy* and *abominable idols* have become experimentally and savingly acquainted with the character and mercy of God! The temple of *Moloch*, that *cruel* and *sanguinary* deity of the heathen, already begins to be deserted; and the subjects of satan are every day revolting from his standard, and enlisting under the banner of the cross! In *Africa* the spirit of God has evidently attended the preaching of the gospel. Even the brutal Hottentot has been united to Christ, and begun the songs of heaven! A concern for the heathen has recently appeared in this country, and our first missionaries have probably by this time landed in India. But the united exertions of the two nations for the salvation of the Gentile world, must be interrupted and impeded by this war.—A ready intercourse between the missionary societies of England and America, must be *suspended*; and the means of defraying the expense of missions, in both countries, will be greatly *diminished*. *The treasure* that will be expended by Great Britain and America in the present war, should it continue for any considerable time, would be sufficient to send the gospel to the whole world, and support it, in every pagan land, till the days of the millenium! And I seriously doubt, whether the benefit which will accrue to *ourselves* or *our enemy*, in the prosecution of this war, will be of as much value as the salvation of a single heathen!—And how contrary to the spirit of the gospel;—how inconsistent in the nature of things, that the two nations, which are unitedly laboring for the conversion of the Pagans, should at the same time endeavor to bring national destruction upon each other! Will not *the heathen* themselves be ready to say, “if these are the fruits of the religion you bring us, we will still adhere to our idols!” It is mentioned as an aggravation of the contest between the herdmen of Abram and Lot, that “*the Canaanite* and *Perizzite* dwelt then in

the land." The patriarch knew that the heathen were the witnesses of their conduct ;—and he, no doubt, feared, that they might be fatally fixed in their antipathy to the true religion, by the iniquitous and unwarrantable contentions of the people of God ! This inspired his heart with the dispositions of benevolence and peace. This led him to look upon *strife* and *war* with the feelings of infinite *disapprobation* and *abhorrence* ! This influenced him to undertake the work of mediation between the contending parties :—“ Let there be no *strife*, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen ; for we be brethren.” And, no doubt, the highest angel of heaven would rejoice to execute the same benevolent office between the different and contending nations of the earth !

REFLECTIONS.

1. We learn from our subject the blessing of pious rulers.—Men in civil authority, under God, direct the destinies of the nation. They are the arbiters of *peace and war*,—of *life and death*,—of national reputation and glory, and of universal discord and ruin ! Our text furnishes an instance where a good man was the instrument of healing an evil, which in less skilful and pious hands, might have fatally fixed the families of Abraham and Lot in perpetual contention. And his mild and benevolent spirit is worthy of the imitation of every man, who bears the ensigns of civil authority. The character of rulers is a subject of such indescribable importance, that it cannot be neglected or trifled with by the nation, without entailing the curses of heaven upon ourselves and our posterity. I make no application of these remarks to any man, or any set of men in our country : I only exhibit the plain and reiterated declarations of a God of inflexible veracity. “ He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.” “ When the righteous are in authority the people rejoice ; but when the wicked beareth

rule the people mourn." "Thou shalt provide out of all the people, *able men, such as fear God, men of truth, haters of covetousness.*" Have we, as a nation, fully believed, and strictly obeyed these precepts and declarations of the bible? Or have we not rather, in innumerable instances, said by our practice, that these qualifications are not *necessary* in the character of a ruler? Have we not considered it of more importance, that he belong to our *political party*, than that he be such a man as will be approved by the Ruler of the universe? Have not *sabbath breakers*, the *profane* and the *intemperate* been elevated to seats in our national councils? Have we not bestowed political honors upon the *infidel*; upon the open and public scoffer at religion? If this is not the case, then my own eyes have deceived me; my own senses have been bewildered; and what I have considered awful realities are only the illusions of fancy and the visions of a dream! If we are indeed free from this national sin—then my heart is relieved from a burden, which has often dejected me.*

Still the moral and religious character of rulers is a subject of importance. Better that the hand of a freeman be palsied by the cold agonies of death, than be lifted in favor of a man, who is pronounced by the word of God unqualified for the office. God always *has*, and always *will*, chastise guilty nations for a violation of this part of his word. Read the history of the house of Israel; and you will find that the character of their rulers is an index of the state of the nation. When *piety* was exalted to the throne, divine mercy smiled upon the land; prosperity and plenty reigned in the habitations of the people, and bursts of universal devotion and joy ascended to the Monarch of the heavens. But when the national sceptre was swayed by the hand of *impiety* or *infidelity*, the land was shrouded in mourning; the angel of the Lord persecuted them, and they were smitten with "the besom of destruction." And the same principle is confirmed by the rise, progress and termination of all the nations which have ever existed on the globe.

* See Note at the end of the book.

2. In the light of this subject we may read our national sins. No one pretends to deny, that we are now suffering under the frowns and rebuks of Providence. A comparison of our *present* with our *former* condition as a nation sickens the heart, and depresses the spirit of the lover of his country, and the friend of human happiness. I need not point you to our deserted harbors and decaying vessels; I need not refer you to the prosecutions commenced every day in our courts, and the sacrifice of property made every day in our cities. These things *you* understand much better than *myself*. And at present we have no prospect of a change for the better. In case of the continuance of *this war*, we may expect to see many affluent families in our principal towns stripped of their property; and multitudes in the country reduced to "a morsel of bread." Our sea-ports *may* be plundered, and our habitations consumed to ashes.

Now we say the evils we *feel*, and the calamities we *fear* are indisputable indications of the displeasure of God. It would be *practical atheism* to say that he has nothing to do with these judgments. And to suppose that he has sent them upon us, or suffered them to be inflicted by any of his instruments, without our deserving them for our sins, is to tax him with *injustice*. Here then we arrive at an important conclusion. We are a "sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity." And we have individually added to the mass of national wickedness, which is now calling down the judgments of the Almighty upon us!—The institutions of heaven have been trodden under foot;—the sabbath has been violated;—the laws of *God* and our *country* have not been considered as *sacred*;—the gospel has been rejected;—the blessed Jesus has been excluded from our houses, and barred and bolted from our hearts! *Jealousies, party spirit* and *contentions among ourselves* have marked our character as a nation. In prosperity we have become proud and haughty, and forgotten the Giver of every good and perfect gift. Instead of ascribing our *national* and *individual* prosperity to God, we have sacrificed to

our net, and burned incense to our drag. Our rulers have promised to make us flourishing and happy, independent of God ; and his name and government have been studiously excluded from the records and acts of national legislation ! We may with infinite propriety adopt the language of the prophet : “ Our sins testify against us.”

3. We learn our duty as *citizens and as accountable beings* under the present visitations of heaven. In self-defence, I suppose, all men in our country will unite for the salvation of themselves and families. No enemy however numerous and potent, will attack us, on our own soil, with impunity.—But still we have a right to *desire and pray for peace*. And it must be a consolation to the lover of tranquility, that most of the religion of this country and Great Britain is *strongly and vitally* opposed to this war. May we not hope that the united, and ardent, and persevering supplications of so many christians will be answered in mercy ? May we not indulge the fond expectation, that they will be instrumental of bringing about a speedy and friendly adjustment of the existing difficulties between the two nations ? And where is the man who would not welcome, with acclamations of gratitude and joy, this auspicious event ? Who would not rejoice, that millions of treasure might be saved to the nation ? Who would not wish that a barrier might be erected against that overwhelming deluge of depravity which always marks the progress of war ? Who would not wish to stay the blood which issues from human veins ? Who, that ever offered a prayer to the God of heaven, has not ardently besought him to hasten that period when the human family shall “ dwell together in unity ?” When “ the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid ; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.” Who, that ever visited his closet for devotion, has refrained from shedding a tear over the deplorable condition of the miserable and besotted heathen ? And where is the pious heart that has not

been dilated with joy from the consideration, that the missionaries of England and America have united in bearing the glad tidings of salvation to our Gentile brethren ? If these are desirable objects, then, I repeat the remark, let us pray for the restoration of peace.

But, in order that our prayers may be answered, we must be humbled for our national transgressions. When God begins the work of chastisement, he never desists from his purpose without the reformation, or destruction of a people ! He has long been dealing with us as a nation by the execution of his judgments ; but “ for all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.” He is looking down upon us, and waiting for the fruits of repentance. He addresses us as he did his people of old : “ O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God ; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord ; say unto him, take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously.” Till this spirit becomes more general amongst us, we look in vain for the smiles of national tranquility. Be persuaded, then, to abandon those sins, which have already kindled the anger of God ; be entreated to receive, and obey, and honor the gospel of Christ. Let it be the prayer of the whole nation, “ Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts, cause thy face to shine ; and we shall be saved.” Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, “ *spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach ;*” —and let all the people say, *Amen.*

ARTHUR SHIRLEY.....PRINTER.

NOTE.

It has for some years past been a popular doctrine, in our country, that a man's *private* character has nothing to do with his qualifications for a *public* office! "We never trouble ourselves with a man's *amours*," said Thomas Jefferson, when informed that an officer of his appointment was a *licentious* character. This I had from the lips of a *democratic senator* now in congress, who told me, without any apparent sense of the impropriety of the sentiment, that this was president Jefferson's remark to him! But this doctrine is fraught with *absurdity* and *impiety*! It contravenes the precepts of the bible, and is confuted by the uniform and direful experience of ages. What is the reason, then, that *freemen* are not willing to give this subject a *serious* and *candid* investigation? Why do some men think *themselves* or *their party* designated, if a single remark is made on the importance of having *good men* to rule over us? In the presence of *some men* it is almost hazardous to repeat this passage of scripture;—"When the righteous are in authority the people rejoice; but when the wicked beareth rule the people mourn." I cannot account for this *strange, inconsistent, irritable* and *unchristian* disposition of the mind on any other principle than this;—they discover the bearing of these remarks on *their political favorites*, and make the application in spite of the preacher. But if this be the real cause, surely they ought to *abandon* men who cannot bear the scrutiny of the word of God! Our *duty* and *interest* as citizens unitedly direct us to this course of conduct. After a tour through the United States, I am thoroughly convinced, that most of our national calamities may be traced to our inattention to the character of rulers! In some of the states, I am sorry to say, that *infidelity* is a passport to honor. In the city of Washington, the Sabbath day is hardly known;—and the Chief Magistrate of this *christian* land rarely, if ever graces a church with his presence. Surely the people of New-England—the descendants of the *pious pilgrims* ought to set a better example.