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S E R M O N,

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IN THE MIDDLE DUTCH CHURCH,

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SERMON, &c.



PSALM 107. 23—32.

They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters ; these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths : their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet ; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven. O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men ! Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.

No truth is better established than the special superintending providence of God over all his works, and at the same time more generally denied, or if not denied, utterly disregarded and forgotten, by the majority of mankind. Are they prosperous in their undertakings? Are their health and lives continued? Do they escape misfortunes and afflictions? They ascribe their good estate to their own power and skill, and not to the

providence of God. They are, in their own estimation, as gods to themselves, having the atheistic feelings of Nebuchadnezzar, when walking in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon, he said in the pride of his heart, "Is not this great Babylon which I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?"

How often, however, are they reduced, if not to the fearful condition of the Babylonian monarch, yet, to the hardships of poverty, the pains of sickness, the torments of disgrace; in a word, to a condition where their own power and skill, in which they had trusted, cannot extricate them from their sufferings, their perils, their degradation. Then conscience is awakened from its slumbers, and acts as the vicegerent of God. Constrained by the urgent necessity of their case, they call upon God for relief; thus acknowledging *his* superintending providence, and renouncing dependance upon *their own* power and skill. He appears in their behalf, delivers them from the miseries of their condition, and restores them to their former state. Alas! few remember his goodness! It is with them as it was with the lepers whom Christ healed. He asked, "were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found, he added, that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger." The stranger was a Samaritan; the rest were Jews. Lamentable truth! that in the bosom of the visible Church so large a proportion should be found forgetting

their obligations to God. This fact renders it incumbent upon the ministers of religion to press often upon their hearers the subject of Divine providence.

To this providence the Psalmist directs our attention in this Psalm, and calls upon the Church of God, the redeemed of the Lord, to celebrate this preserving power. “O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy, and gathered them out of the lands from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south.” He then proceeds to unfold to them the following instances of his providential interposition in favour of the children of men, viz. travellers lost in a wilderness, but directed and conducted home; prisoners rescued from captivity; sick and dying men restored to health; mariners preserved in a storm at sea, and brought safe into port.

Without adverting further to the design and connexion of this Psalm, your attention is requested to *the special providence of God as it is exercised over those who go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, in saving them from the dangers of the deep; and to the improvement which men ought to make of this exercise of Providence, so as to glorify God and promote the happiness of society at large.* The consideration of these two topics of discourse suggested by the text, cannot fail to make the redeemed of the Lord say, “O that men would

praise the Lord for his goodness; and for his wonderful works to the children of men. Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders."

I. We are to unfold *the providence of God as it is exercised over those who go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, in saving them from the dangers of the deep.* To do this, let us attend to the use which God has enabled men to make of the sea, and to his preservation of their lives when exposed to its dangers.

First, God in his providence has enabled men to make use of the sea. For "they who go down to the sea in ships, do BUSINESS in the great waters."

Two classes of men are here designated, viz. they who go down to the sea in ships for the purpose of exchanging the commodities of different countries, and they who draw from the sea its various productions. Both go down to the sea in ships to prosecute commercial pursuits, with the view of procuring the means of their support.

As commercial pursuits on the sea cannot be carried on without some knowledge of navigation, a few prefatory remarks on the origin and improvements of the latter, are necessary before we proceed to discuss the nature and advantages of the former.

1. *The origin of navigation is of remote antiquity, and its improvements are the result of time.* From the simple narrative of the sacred historian, it would appear, that the building of the ark by Divine command had furnished the first idea of a ship to

the world after the flood. That an important change in our earth was effected by this catastrophe, is unquestionable; and that the water was thereby made to exceed the land, is probable. But it does not appear, that the theory of those philosophers is correct, who maintain, "that the whole earth at first consisted of a uniform light crust, which covered over the abyss of the sea," and which was broken by the deluge. The language used in giving us an account of the creation expressly states, not merely that the waters under the heaven were gathered together unto one place, and thus gathered, were called seas, which might be explained consistently with the theory of which we have taken notice. But it assures us that the waters by the command of God, brought forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life; and constrains us by fair construction to consider, that the fowl flying above the earth were not more in the open firmament of heaven, than the great whales and other living creatures were in the waters; that the seas were smaller than they now are; or that communication by land between the different parts of the earth was practicable; and therefore, we have no sufficient data to deny, that the art of ship-building, and the science of navigation, were unknown. God himself, we believe, knowing the necessity and the use of ships in that future state of the earth, which the deluge would produce, imparted to Noah the great and important art.

After this terrible event, the posterity of Noah

in different places made a slow improvement in the art communicated by their divine teacher. It is not unlikely their first efforts have been rafts of wood bound together for the purpose of navigating rivers; then they resorted to trunks of trees, made hollow by fire; to this succeeded the construction of larger vessels, to be propelled at first by rowers, and afterwards by sails. Their first efforts appear to have been made by the sons of Javan, the son of Japhet, the great-grand-son of Noah. For by them Moses informs us, “that the isles of the Gentiles were divided in their lands.” This occurred about 100 years after the flood, in the year 2247 before Christ.

At what period astronomical observations were introduced for the guidance of vessels remote from the sight of land, is not known, but the honour of the discovery is ascribed to the Phœnicians. Such guidance being necessarily imperfect, the voyages performed were along the coasts, unless storms drove the vessels out to sea. This mode of conducting navigation continued until the discovery of the mariner’s compass, by means of which vessels can traverse the ocean in all directions with safety.

When we consider the dangers of the deep, and the fragile structure of even the strongest vessels when contrasted with the violence of the sea put in motion by the winds, we need not be surprised that a heathen poet should sing,

“ Or oak, or brass, with triple fold,
Around that daring mortal’s bosom roll’d ;

Who first to the wild ocean's rage,
 Launch'd the frail bark, and heard the winds engage
 Tempestuous, when the south descends
 Precipitate, and with the north contends ;
 Nor fear'd the stars portending rain,
 Nor the loud tyrant of the western main,
 Of Power supreme the storm to raise,
 Or calmer, smooth the surface of the seas."

Nor that he adds,

" Jove has the realms of earth in vain,
 Divided by the inhabitable main,
 If ships profane, with fearless pride,
 Bound o'er the inviolable tide."

But the heathen's wonder at man's boldness in venturing on the deep, is explained by his ignorance of the fact, that God directed the first vessel to be built, and his charge of profanity against those who go down to the sea in ships, is rebutted and disproved by the nature and advantages of commerce by sea. Let the heathen celebrate in the finest strains of poetry, "the daring courage" of man, and "the vain division made by his chief God;" we will celebrate the perfections of *the true God*, and rescue our fellow-men from the charge of contravening his will in this matter.

2. *Commerce is an exchange of commodities.*
 "The inequality with which the productions of nature are distributed in each country, gave occasion to traffic among mankind. Commerce began by exchanges between particular persons; and by slow degrees spread from village to village, city to city, province to province, kingdom to kingdom. till at last it comprehended and unit-

ed the whole world. Necessity was the parent of commerce. The desire of procuring conveniences, nourished and gave it strength. Covetousness, luxury; and, above all, a taste for superfluities, brought it at length to the highest perfection*." My design does not permit even cursory sketches of the history of commerce, excepting so far as they may be incidentally afforded in the examination of its advantages. These are *personal*, *political*, *social*, and *religious*. You will please to recollect, that my remarks are particularly intended to apply to commerce carried on by those "*who go down to the sea in ships, who do business in great waters.*"

1. The first advantage of commerce by sea, is *personal*. They who embark in this pursuit, do it to obtain a living, or to increase their wealth. This it is granted is its lowest object; yet in this, as in other matters, the principle of self-preservation is called into exercise, for the promotion of future and general good. Men must labour for the subsistence of themselves and families. Two great fields of industry present themselves to their view, viz. the earth, and the sea. Some cultivate the former, and others traverse the latter. Both classes follow occupations in themselves honest, and are directed in their pursuits by the providence of God. Commerce is as lawful by sea as by land; and by sea or land is as lawful as agriculture and manufactures. The great object of commerce, agriculture, and manufactures, is

* Goguet.

lawful gain, the reward of honest industry. Unless personal considerations excited men to “go down to the sea,” they would for ever have remained on the land. Under the influence of these considerations, they brave the dangers of the deep; pass on from country to country, collecting in each such articles as they may convert to their own profit in their place of residence. By their enterprise they enrich themselves, and the community with whom they are connected. Whilst they increase their own coffers, they multiply the resources of their country. They act from a regard to their own subsistence and aggrandizement; but God makes their conduct beneficial to others.

2. The second advantage of commerce by sea, is *political*. The enterprise of individuals excites the enterprise of the states of which they are members. Connexions are formed between countries far removed from each other; and while by the exchange of their respective commodities, they are mutually benefitted, an interchange of opinions and feelings takes place, which, in the issue, is productive of important consequences. It is true, that commercial states are not free from the desire of conquest; but it is as true, that they carry with them to their conquered countries the spirit of liberty.

A commercial people cannot be the quiet slaves of a despotic government. The genius of commerce is hostile to absolute subjection. Of the truth of this remark, we find abundant evidence

in the histories of the Phoenicians and Carthaginians in ancient times; but more especially in modern times, in the cities composing the Hanseatic league. To the spirit, which commerce inspired, may be ascribed the successful struggle of Holland with Spain; as, also, the freedom enjoyed in Great-Britain and in this country at the present time.

Commerce, moreover, operates upon the political world in a salutary way, by continually introducing new characters on the stage, possessing different talents, all of them calculated for promoting the general good. In addition to this, it is indispensably necessary for the distribution and disposal of the fruits of agricultural labour, and manufacturing ingenuity. Without commerce the former will decrease, and the latter fail. Where commerce is subordinate to both, you find patrician families, and aristocratic power.

3. The third advantage of commerce by sea, is *social*. It makes those engaged in its pursuits citizens of the world. It subdues their national prejudices, and overcomes their local feelings. They forget that they are English, or Scotch, or Dutch, or French, whilst they realize that they are *men*, partakers of the same nature.

Let me not be considered as undervaluing patriotism or the love of country. The question of the poet,

“ Breathes ther. the man with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own, my native land ;

Whose heart hath ne'er within him burn'd,
 As home his footsteps he hath turn'd,
 From wandering on a foreign strand ?

comes with force to my heart; and whatever others may answer, for myself I can say, I am not that man. My country! the land of my birth! the place of the sepulchres of my fathers! the sound vibrates delightfully on mine ear, and communicates enthusiasm to my heart. It is not, then, this laudable preference to our own people which commerce destroys; but that proud, selfish preference which causes the natives of one land to regard those of another with haughtiness and contempt. Such a view, we are informed, Alexander the Great took of this subject. "In his judgment commerce was to be cultivated, not merely as the procuress of superfluous luxuries, but that the interchange of commodities might produce a reciprocation of sentiment and affection; and that the free, equal, and unobstructed communication among men of different countries might remove those local prejudices which prevented them from viewing each other as brethren*." And who can deny, that such a judgment in this matter exhibits him as one of the most enlightened statesmen that has ever appeared in our world!

In the present divided state of the world, the love of country is a duty: but as this divided state will not always continue, the more it is divested of selfishness and pride, the better. The social nature of man never was intended to be *exercised*

* Gillies, Vol. I. p. 196.

in a small, circumscribed *sphere*; and as that nature will be *exercised* in its most extensive *sphere*, during the Millennium, whatever prepares the way for such *exercise*, is really advantageous. We are not sufficiently in the habit of regarding commerce in this light, for we do not think and act as Christians, with the word of prophecy in our hands.

4. Let us, then, lastly, consider the advantage of commerce by sea, in a *religious* view. The Gospel of the kingdom is to be preached in all the world, and the knowledge of Christ's salvation is to cover the sea as the waters cover the earth. How shall the predictions of Scripture, on this subject, be accomplished in those parts which are removed from each other by the great waters? They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in the great waters, shall be made the instruments. Whilst the interpretation of some prophecies, which supposes that a commercial people will bring the converted Jews to the promised land, is not entirely satisfactory to my mind; there is evidence enough to assure us that a commercial people must send the Gospel to the remote heathen. What now would have been the state of India, Africa, and the South Sea Islands, had not the commerce of Great-Britain furnished means for the Missionary efforts of her various societies? I have no doubt, that in the end, whilst agriculture and manufactures will obtain their merited meed of commendation, commerce will be used as the great mean of fulfil-

ling the Scriptural prophecy of the latter day glory.

Well, then, may the psalmist call on the Church of God, the redeemed of the Lord, to say, "O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever;" when they contemplate the use which he, in his providence, enables men to make of the sea.

Secondly, God in his providence preserves the lives of men exposed to the dangers of the deep. *"He commandeth and raiseth the stormy winds, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad, because they be quiet: so he bringeth them unto their desired haven."*

The dangers of the deep, which the psalmist so admirably describes, are such as cannot be avoided by human foresight, nor repelled by human power. They are dangers arising from the wind and sea combined, both being put in violent and awful commotion by the command of God. In different parts of our country the former has, in its march, desolated the earth, and the latter, on the sea-board, made dreadful havoc among the works of man. But, in the West-Indies the tremendous fury of these combined elements has done its perfect work. Yet, still, on the land, when the tempest pours

forth its force, lays waste our fields, and overturns our habitations, we cherish a secret confidence, that there are refuges, hiding-places—and therefore do not feel so directly the necessity of Divine interposition for our preservation. A storm at sea furnishes no such refuges or hiding-places to our dismayed spirits—at least, we feel more hopeless of them; and, therefore, are more conscious of the Divine interposition when rescued from danger.

It is true, the same superintending Providence is exercised both on the sea and on the land; so that we are as safe on the one as on the other. And I am inclined to believe, that the aggregate of casualties occurring on the former is not greater than on the latter.

There are circumstances, however, which add to the horrors of the one, whilst they diminish those of the other. Ships, for the most part, are alone, without company. Their number, in the most busy times, does not bear the same proportion to the magnitude of the ocean, as travellers, habitations, or towns, do to the extent of the land. There is something in solitude which adds to the effects of misery. On land, especially in a settled country, it rarely happens, that a suffering individual is deprived of food for any number of days. On the sea, how often, by reason of adverse winds, are the seamen and passengers called to experience the corrosive gnawings of hunger, and the intolerable scorchings of thirst! In a multitude of instances they are compelled to abandon the vessel, and commit themselves in an open

boat to the mercy of the sea: and there, exposure to its waves adds to the misery of want. Some on masts or spars have floated for days in the most horrible suspense and agony, before they were relieved—nothing but death staring them in the face. Not a few vessels have foundered at sea, and all on board perished. Numbers have been ship-wrecked on barren or barbarous coasts, and fallen victims to famine or cruel men. Time would fail to unfold to you the multiplied casualties to which they who “go down to the sea in ships, that do business in the great waters,” are exposed. Suffice it to add, that the dangers of the deep appear in their most finished form of terror in a storm at sea.

Of this we have an affecting and sublime, but short, description by the psalmist, in the text. “Experience alone can illustrate its beauty, evince its truth, and point out the propriety of the circumstances which are selected to furnish us with a full and complete idea of the whole*.”

Picture to yourselves, my hearers, a vessel struggling with the winds and waves, her masts cut down, and her lading cast overboard. Then

Her joints forget their firm elastic tone;
 Her long keel trembles, and her timbers groan.
 Upheav'd, behind her, in tremendous height,
 The billows frown, with fearful radiance bright!
 Now shivering, o'er the topmost wave she rides,
 While deep beneath th' enormous gulf divides.
 Now launching headlong down the horrid vale,
 She hears no more the roaring of the gale:

* Horne, on the Psalms.

Till up the dreadful height she flies,
Trembling beneath the current of the skies*.

Add to this the commingled thunder and lightning; let the imagination have full scope; and, after all, your ideas of the horrors of a storm at sea are imperfect and feeble.

No wonder, then, that men at such a time “reel to and fro, and stagger like drunken men, and are at their wit’s end.” No wonder, that they then cry unto God; for who but God can save them? Even the Atheistic Volney, in such an hour, cried unto God, in a storm on one of our Lakes.

Well may the Psalmist call upon the Church of God, to say, “O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever;” when they see God, in his providence, preserving men exposed to the dangers of the deep, and bringing them out of their distresses into a safe haven. And the Church of God, affected by these manifestations of God’s mercy in Providence, breaks forth in the exclamation, “O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men. Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.” That exclamation, my hearers, contains the appeal which the New-York Marine Missionary Society makes to you this evening, in behalf of those “who go down to the sea in ships, that do business in the great waters.” And in this appeal you find,

* The Shipwreck.

II. The improvement which ought to be made of the providence of God in the preservation of these persons.

Many of those who “go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters,” I know, are in affluent circumstances. But you will readily perceive, it is not for the employers, but the employed; not for merchants, but for seamen, who are earning their support in the service of merchants, that I am commissioned to plead. This long neglected, but highly useful class of our fellow-men, have for some time past excited the sympathy of Christians in the old world. That sympathy has at length been awakened in the bosoms of Christians in this new world, and in most of our large commercial cities has produced laudable exertions for their spiritual welfare.

Listen to a plain unvarnished account of the operations and success of the Society formed for their benefit in this place. On the 20th of December last, they succeeded in opening a place of worship for their use. In that place divine service is regularly administered twice on every Lord's day. The attendance of seamen and their families in the morning is tolerably good; and in the evening the place has been full from the beginning, and sometimes a considerable number have been compelled to go away for want of seats. Between 4 and 500, it is estimated, are present every evening. The hearers of the weekly evening lectures are not so numerous. The prayer meeting has hitherto been well attended.

Seamen listen with eagerness to the instructions of divine truth. The congregation is peculiarly attentive: at times there is great solemnity. The Lord has evidently blessed the efforts of the Society; for under the preaching of their minister, numbers have been awakened, and have asked, "What shall we do to be saved?" Several have gone to sea trusting in the mercy of God. Many of the wives of seamen are giving evidence, that they have passed from death unto life. More than 50 families of seamen, belonging to no other congregation, have signified their desire to belong to this.

Such, then, being the favourable commencement of this institution, such its prospects of ultimate benefit to the objects of this holy charity; who that values the welfare and prosperity of a commercial community like ours, or seeks the glory of God, will, or can withhold his aid in contributing to its success?

Seamen, upon trial, are found willing to attend upon the word of life, and take an interest in its important truths. And the result of this experiment will unquestionably prove, that their vices are not so much the result of their occupation, as of the negligence of the Church of God in not attending to their situation. Year after year they have "seen the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep;" but few have profited, because few have been furnished with the means of profiting to their spiritual good. Those displays of terrible power; those seasonable inter-

positions of Divine Providence which all have witnessed, have been lost upon the majority. The dangers to which they have been exposed, and the escapes which they have made, have originated in them a peculiar fearlessness of life, and a consequent prodigality in the expenditure of their wages. An open, unsuspecting honesty has exposed them to the snares of designing persons, and an uninformed liberality of feeling has levied wasteful contributions upon their means, not to make themselves or friends really happy, but to gratify the corrupt passions and appetites of both. In every port to which they have sailed, multitudes have fallen victims to such snares, and have suffered the disastrous effects of such contributions. And what is most humiliating to the dignity of our nature, is, that their employers have rather encouraged these habits under the mistaken, the *grossly* mistaken idea, that no one can be a good seaman who does not indulge in them. Thanks be unto God, few think so now; and still fewer dare to avow the shameful opinion! I rejoice that so many merchants are united in this righteous and benevolent cause; and cannot but add, would God that all in this city were enlisted!

The claims of this society are strong; more than ordinarily strong, upon all who have acquired opulence, or even competence, from their commercial pursuits. God has blessed your exertions through the instrumentality of seamen. They have gone for you to distant lands; breasted the storms of the ocean; endured the effects of

climate; preserved your vessels, or those in which your goods were deposited, by their skill and intrepidity, from the dangers to which they were exposed, and brought them home in safety. You are clothed with the stuffs, and your tables are laden with the productions of other countries, which they have brought. They have been carriers of the means through which you have accumulated property for your own use, and that of your families. Are you not then bound, upon every principle of gratitude, to aid in furnishing them with spiritual instruction?

Think of the perils often, the shipwrecks often, the deaths often they encounter in your service. At the very time when you and your families are adorned with the fine linen and costly apparel manufactured beyond the sea, or are seated at your tables feasting with your friends on the luxuries of foreign climes; the men who have watched, and toiled, and suffered in conveying them to you, may in the wide ocean be encountering the tempest, or sinking in the waves, to rise no more.

Have none perished in your service? If so, has not conscience suggested the painful truth, that whilst they have been tempted by your wages to risk their lives for your gain, you had withheld a part of that gain for the salvation of their souls? O fearful gain, purchased at the expense of only one soul! How much more fearful when purchased at the expense of many souls!

Let the time past suffice, for you to have failed in this duty, and henceforth commiserate their spi-

ritual state. This evening listen to the claim of God. He says, as the God of providence, I have filled your coffers through the services of seamen. As the God of grace I require, that from your abundance you give a portion for their conversion and eternal life. What heart that is not dead to the finer feelings of our nature, can refuse?

On you, Christian brethren, the claims of this society are still stronger. Over and above those which spring from the gain you may have obtained through this class of men, there is super-added those which spring from the use which you can make of them to spread abroad the triumphs of the cross, and the use which God will ultimately make of commerce to introduce the Millennial day. Let these men be instructed in the knowledge of the truth; let them be converted unto God, and they will distribute your Bibles and your Tracts from port to port, from clime to clime; and to these silent teachers will add their own testimony, and speak from their own experience of the wonders of redeeming love. Every vessel you dispatch will be a Bethel on the deep, and its hands messengers of good to their fellow-men. Who can tell but they will be important agents, not merely by their nautical skill, but by their conversation and exertions in causing the latter day glory to dawn on our world?

Come, then, my hearers, one and all, join in this work of faith; cast in your substance to assist in its success. By the united efforts of Societies of this nature throughout the Christian Church.

the oceans and the seas, the gulphs and the rivers, will resound with the praises of the Lord. The floods, with the earth, will lift up their voices unto God, and sing, "HALLELUJAH, THE LORD GOD OMNIPOTENT REIGNETH." *Amen.*