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THE ARRIVAL OF THE BRITANNIA.

A

S E R M O N

DELIVERED IN THE

FEDERAL STREET MEETING-HOUSE,

IN BOSTON, JULY 19, 1840.

BY EZRA S. GANNETT.

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AN HONOR — A RESPONSIBILITY

IN 1840 the *Britannia* — first Cunard steamer — braving the elements and the hazards of a then somewhat unfamiliar motive power, set out on a voyage that was to have far-reaching effects on world progress. A glorious new era of maritime transportation was heralded. In the words of Commander F. E. Chadwick, U.S.N., a naval authority of the eighties: “The establishment of the Cunard Line marked the setting of ocean steam travel firmly on its feet.”

The intervening years have seen amazing developments in transatlantic traffic. Two continents have been brought closer and closer — communication — understanding — the interchange of ideas — all have been vastly facilitated.

And so, it is with justifiable pride that the Cunard Line looks back over its record of ninety years. To have initiated such an important link between the old world and the new — to have aided so vitally in the march of civilization — is both an honor and a responsibility. For the future has a right to expect nothing less than that promised by high performance in the past.

To the fulfillment of this promise the Cunard Line, as always, pledges its ships and men.



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1872

S E R M O N

ON THE

ARRIVAL OF THE BRITANNIA.

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Entered according to the act of Congress, in the year 1840,
by JOSEPH DOWE,
In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the District of Massachusetts.

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S E R M O N .

GENESIS xlix. 13.

ZEBULUN SHALL DWELL AT THE HAVEN OF THE SEA; AND HE
SHALL BE FOR A HAVEN OF SHIPS.

OUR citizens have for several days been kept in somewhat anxious expectation of an event, whose naked importance would scarce seem to justify any considerable degree of attention. Its novelty alone will not explain the fact of such a general interest. Never indeed has a vessel of the same class, of equal size and stateliness of appearance with that whose arrival has been so eagerly anticipated, ever entered our port. But the triumphs of steam over wind and water, over distance and difficulty, have become familiar to our observation. We have seen with our eyes, as well as heard of, the results which have been obtained through its agency alike on sea and on land,—results which a few years ago were contemplated, if

at all, only by the fancy of some bold prognosticator, but are now brought within the every day experience of the whole people. It is the connexion of this event with the past and the future, which gives to it a peculiar interest. We look upon it—and how can we help looking upon it—as a landmark in the progress of our community. I confess that no event which has occurred since the commencement of the present century seems to me to have involved more important consequences to this city, than are likely to flow from the establishment of regular and efficient steam communication between the capital of New-England and the great commercial island—the maritime threshold, if I may so style it—of the Old World. Its effect must be seen in the industry, wealth, population, manners and general culture of the inhabitants of this peninsula and of the neighbouring towns. Our *character* will be reached by its influence, and our children be affected, for good or evil, by the success of the undertaking, whose commencement has been noticed by the civil authorities and by the concurrent sentiment of the citizens. It is proper therefore that it should also be noticed in the pulpit, whence the interests of society should always be regarded with a wakeful concern, and the feelings of the people be met with a just sympathy or be checked by timely counsel.

It would not be difficult to find not only moral, but religious, associations with which to invest this occurrence. To the devout mind it suggests new illustrations of the power and wisdom of the Creator. Here is "this great and wide sea," which at first sight appears to be a barrier reaching down to the foundations of the earth, but as effectual an obstacle to the intercourse of the nations who live on its opposite shores as if it reached up to the sky—behold it, not surmounted only, but made subservient to the very purpose which in our haste we might think it was meant to oppose. The skill of the shipbuilder and the science of the navigator had indeed shown to former times, that the ocean might be used to bring those into acquaintance who were divided by its broad expanse; but there were uncertainties, and delays, and perils, which still made a great difference between the journeying of the traveller on land and the voyage of the visiter to another continent. But now this difference disappears; and in regard alike to time and to security the questions which arise on departure from home are answered with equal ease, whether New Orleans or London be the place of destination. A voyage to Europe is reduced to a matter of calculation within the ability of any schoolboy who has learned the rule of simple division. In this we see no contravention of the laws of the Creator, but an

approximation to a better understanding of them ; and the better they are understood, the more clearly is it seen that the whole frame and structure of the world are suited to promote human happiness and improvement. The ocean was intended to be the highway of the nations, on which they might pass and repass and never crowd its ample space. Look too at that agent, which is now brought into obedience to the will of man and made conducive to his comfort, convenience and pleasure—how terrific and ungovernable appear its capacities ; yet how admirable is their adaptation to the wants of man in an advanced state of civilization, and how great their value in spreading civilization over the world. Here is an instrument, of still unknown efficiency, which for six thousand years was regarded hardly with curiosity, much less with confidence in its practical uses, now found to be of the utmost importance in the arts, and probably, nay, certainly, destined to work momentous changes in the relations of human society. With such an example before us it is any thing but presumption to anticipate further discoveries, which shall reveal stores of benefit for mankind, laid up by the Creator in elements or combinations of matter which are not at present understood ; nor is it an irrational, but a sound conclusion, that every part and principle of the creation, if we did but comprehend its

nature, might be made instrumental for promoting the interests of man's individual and social existence. Let a calm, humble and grateful piety follow out the trains of thought which one such illustration as we are now noticing suggests, and what large as well as profitable views may we not obtain of the beneficence of the Maker of the universe.

The same facts to which we have just adverted, if contemplated from another point of view, may confirm our sentiments of admiration and gratitude towards the Author of our being. They show us what man has done, and they intimate to us what he is capable of doing. By his own study and industry he has converted one of the most frightful instruments of destruction into the minister of his pleasure, and by its means made the billows of the ocean a pathway for his triumphant ships. Here too we perceive the wisdom of the Creator in his government of man. It is sometimes asked—Why were not the great discoveries of modern times included within the knowledge of our race at an earlier period, or at its commencement, when it might have begun its career with so much greater advantage? The answer is obvious. Man, and mankind, can best be trained for perfection by gradual and voluntary developement of the powers which belong to the

individual and the race. This developement must be slow, but it is sure, and, allowing sufficient length to the periods of comparison, we may pronounce it constant. The history of navigation is an example in point. At first man looked over the waste of waters, and saw only an impassable boundary, which laughed to scorn his wish to escape from the confinement which it imposed. But ere long he had scooped out the trunk of a tree or prepared a rude boat from its bark, and trusting himself upon the bosom of the mighty element which had at once awakened and mortified his curiosity, he found that it was made for his use no less than the land. The rude boat was enlarged, its architecture became a study and an art, the mast was raised and the sail spread, and the galley and the barge were constructed to answer the demands of national honor or of personal luxury. Ages passed, and the compass was delivered by the hands of science into the mariner's possession; the noble and graceful ship rode proudly upon the waters, and claimed to be considered the most wonderful production of human art. Science pursued its inquiries and perfected its calculations, and it seemed as if navigation had obtained the command of every possible means of successful struggle with the winds and waves. When lo! the oar and the sail give place to the ponderous engine, and the vessel which

but yesterday was borne by its white wings across the Atlantic is to-day followed by the steamer, which treads the waves with its iron foot as if conscious of its superiority. What a history is this of human accomplishment! And who is so slow of belief or so languid in hope, that he does not here perceive evidence of the capacities and destiny of man? Let him who rejoices in the present, or looks forward with the expectation of faith to the future, give God the glory; for it is He who has granted to man the power, and the opportunity, to draw from nature both instruction and service.

The interest which is felt in the arrival of the *Britannia*, doubtless, arises chiefly from its connexion with the business and outward prosperity of our city. We are a mercantile community, this is a commercial place; and of course whatever affects the trade or economical interests of the city will be viewed with general solicitude or hope, as it may be thought to promise advantage or injury. But it is impossible to separate these interests from the morals and the spiritual welfare of the people. Business is one branch of moral discipline; prosperity must beget facilities for the formation of virtuous, or of vicious, character. It is therefore a proper inquiry for this place and hour—what will be the probable effect of

this enterprise upon the trade and general business of Boston? The answer is plain. The trade and business of this metropolis must be materially increased by the establishment of regular and speedy communication with Great Britain. Our wealth will be augmented, our activity quickened; means of employment will be created for the industrious, new opportunities of speculation be furnished to the adventurous. Connected with our system of rail-roads which has already gone so largely into effect, and which must be greatly extended, the introduction of this mode of intercourse with the Old World will give an impulse, and probably a permanent support, to our industry, the effects of which will be seen on every side. It is not our merchants, nor our mechanics, nor our laborers on wharves or in stores, alone, who will feel the change that this event is suited to produce. We shall all be reached by it, as we shall all sympathise in the spirit of energy and its results, which may be traced to this cause. It is not an idle hope, nor a vainglorious assertion, that Boston is destined to become a place of great business, and consequently of large population and great wealth. So are many other cities of our land, some of which must always exceed this in commercial importance. But this city must grow, and grow with a rapidity beyond that of any former period in its

history. With its lines of communication terminating on the one hand on the shores of Europe, and on the other mingling with the waters of the Mississippi, it is impossible that it should not draw to itself a large amount of capital and industry of the most productive kind.

That this increase of business will have its advantages, it would be useless to deny. Money, commerce, industry, are among the means which the Divine Providence has embraced in its plan of education for man. But there are also temptations, dangers and evils incident to prosperity; and it is more important that we should contemplate these than that we should be busy in arranging our hopes. I think we ought to look with some concern, with great concern, upon the brightness of our prospects. The sunshine of prosperity may draw up from the heated mass of thought and sentiment moral exhalations, that shall fill the atmosphere of society with the seeds of disease. The next year may be a season of great peril. If business should revive from its long depression, thousands will be tempted to enter upon its engagements without sufficient means or proper experience, while others may be induced to lay out plans the extent of which will be their own condemnation, if it should not be the

occasion of failure; and so the same course of unreasonable calculation, extravagant enterprise, (with extravagant expenditure too,) and ultimate disaster be again run, which has signalized the history of the last few years. Especially is there danger, that business, as it shall become more active and profitable, will engross the minds of the people, and they will think of little else than their worldly affairs. Let then the word of Christian counsel be heard at this moment. This is the time for it to speak, before men have returned with desperate eagerness to the accumulation of wealth. And this is the word which it utters:—Beware of the dangers by which you will soon be encompassed. Go into them with your eyes open and your consciences awake. Do not regard wealth as an end; it is only a means. Understand its value as a means—not to luxury, not to self-indulgence, not to the vain acquisition of influence—but a means to self-denial and to usefulness. Let your industry covet opportunities of doing good, and your ambition aspire to spiritual improvement. Be honest, moderate, devout, whether the tide of prosperity ebb or flow. Keep your Christian character unstained and unimpaired by its exposure to the influence of worldly success; or if you have no such character to guard, then get it—get it now, before you enter that season of peril which is before you.

Let your first question be—not how shall we best accommodate our business to the signs of the times—but how shall we best prepare our souls for the exigencies of moral life which we see to be near at hand? Resolve to be good men, religious men, who shall fear God and work righteousness, let come what may—be the temptation of circumstances or example what it may. Set one another a good example. Be good citizens by being true Christians.

If you, my hearers, desire the honour and welfare of Boston and would place her at the head of the cities of the Union, then bear it in mind—for it is a truth that in your moments of calm thought you will admit—bear it in mind, that with a population of eighty thousand, all of whom were people of principle, of solid worth and Christian excellence, with the institutions of religion maintained from affection, and the institutions of justice upheld by obedience, and the institutions of charity supported as a privilege, and the inhabitants pervaded by a common spirit of piety and duty and love, this would be a more noble city, than if it included half a million within its limits, who were sacrificing themselves to gain, to pleasure, or any other form of worldliness. Much as I love Boston, fellow-citizens, and because I love her, I would rather see her first in virtue, though she were small and poor, than outstripping New-York, or London even, in

wealth and numbers, if she must pay the price of character for such distinction. And character, mark you, in this connexion—the character of a community—is nothing but the character of individuals. Each one of us therefore must take a part, and cannot help bearing a part, in determining whether Boston shall be in truth a *great* city. Give it moral greatness, and Providence will bestow the wealth and renown. Seek ye first the righteousness of God, and all these things shall be added unto you.

There is a still more direct influence upon the morals of our city than any that we have yet noticed, which must follow from the establishment of certain and frequent communication with Europe. We must expect an importation of the opinions and manners of the old countries. They come to us now indeed. Every packet ship which arrives at New York from the ports of England and France brings, in one form or another, a large amount of the thought and feeling which prevail there, to be added to our stock of ideas and sentiments. We welcome each new contribution. We read and reprint foreign literature, we copy foreign manners, we adopt the conventional rules of judgment which obtain abroad. This is natural. It is foolish to complain about it. Imitation is the habit of youth; we are a young people, and look with fond respect to the seats of an elder

civilization than our own. In regard to manners and opinions too, that which is fashionable or prevalent three thousand miles off is more sure of winning our regards than that which is within the circle of near observation, for "distance lends enchantment to the view" and softens the absurdities which might repel us if they were directly under our eyes. Hence we shall, without doubt, for a long time to come receive from Europe a considerable part of our intellectual persuasions and our moral tastes. The arrival of a steam ship every fortnight at our doors, freighted with the influences which the Old World is no less eager to send than we to receive, must increase the danger of our losing independence, as well as of our neglecting to cultivate originality, of character. If I thought it would be of any use, I might suggest the importance of forming a character of our own in spite of the influences which come to us across the Atlantic. But it would be a vain undertaking, and perhaps it is not best. All that we can do is, to form a national character *with the help of these influences*. That we may do this and not be ashamed of the result, we must exercise discrimination, and reject what is bad while we accept that which is good. There is much in the opinions of the Old World, which is neither suited to our position, nor in harmony with truth : much in foreign manners, that is condemned

alike by sound principle and pure taste. But there is also much, that it would be a benefit to us to adopt ; much that is humane and elegant in manners, and much that is just and important in opinion. The danger is that we shall receive the whole with a common gratitude, but, as in liquids the more ethereal parts escape while the dregs sink to the bottom and remain, that the worst part only will stay with us. Alas for us ! if the corrupt habits of older communities should be introduced into our young system. It would be like tainting the blood of childhood, and so infusing the cause of subsequent debility and premature decay. We must discriminate and select and cast aside, for our own sake, and yet more for the sake of our posterity.

The event which is the occasion of these remarks will have one beneficial tendency which we ought not to overlook. It will strengthen the bonds of kind and just consideration between the nations of the Eastern and the Western Continents. This must be its effect, for its design is friendly and mutually advantageous intercourse. The enterprise of which it is the commencement will have a twofold influence in confirming the harmonious relations that exist between our country and Europe. Its commercial importance, as we have seen, is great. But

commerce is one of the chief means of binding the different portions of the human race in close relationship of amity and dependence. The ties of mutual interest are woven into a durable fabric of peace. How strong an illustration of this principle have we in the present relations of Great Britain and the United States. Notwithstanding the occasions of hostility which exist, and which a quarter of a century ago would have enkindled the flame of war, the interests of the two countries are now so blended in the transactions of business, that each has been anxious to smother, in the hope of finally extinguishing, its spirit. Every new facility to commercial intercourse, and especially the opening of a permanent channel of communication, is a pledge for the maintenance of goodwill. As the rail-roads of our own land make neighbors of those who a short time ago were separated by tedious distances, so does the passage of the steam-ship across the ocean remove that feeling of distance, which has been one cause of separation between us and the land of our fathers. And then follows the other consequence which I had in mind—the interchange of visits between those who dwell on the two sides of the great deep; from which must grow a better understanding of each other's character, and of the institutions by which the character of each is respectively affected, and a more

generous, if not a more respectful confidence from each to the other. It is true of nations as of individuals, that (except where the absurd point of honor is made the occasion of strife) acquaintance softens asperities, and by producing a fairer judgment and presenting opportunities of kind offices, knits together the sympathies of men. We have already seen the effect of this new mode of traversing the Atlantic, in the increased number of those who come hither from abroad, as well as of those who visit Europe from our own shores. While every steamer carries its full complement of passengers, the lines of packet ships, it is said, were never better supported. The correspondence too which these several vessels bear in their countless voyages—how immense has it become. Who can doubt that here are circumstances which must every day render it more difficult to drive, or tempt, the people of the civilized world to assume towards each other an attitude of hostility. I think I discover in every new arrival from the Eastern Continent a fresh security for the peace of the nations. Let another quarter of a century perpetuate the pacific influences of the last twenty-five years, and it may become a problem of difficult solution for statesmen, how they can plunge Christendom, or any considerable portion of it, into war.

I will allude to but one other result, which may be anticipated from the continuance of those facilities of international communication which have just been established. It will be seen in the new motives and helps for the diffusion of Christianity. And this result will be secured by a double action of the instrumentality under our present notice. Christians living in the two hemispheres will acquire earlier and fuller intelligence respecting each other's plans ; and will cherish in each other's bosoms, by example and reciprocal advice, the spirit of our religion. The recent past is a guarantee in this respect for the future. More has been done within the last ten years to bring the Christians of England and the United States into coöperation, than had been effected in a previous century. They have seen and conversed with one another, have written to and about one another, and so have established a sort of common possession of the religious spirit. As a necessary consequence, efforts for the conversion of the Heathen world have been pursued with better judgment and greater success than before. Confidence has taken the place of jealousy, and the errors as well as the wisdom of each section of the Church being made known to all, a large amount of fruitless expenditure of time, money and zeal is saved. In connexion with the event before us and the results

which it promises to the two countries immediately interested, take into view the magnificent schemes of the British and French Governments for the extension of steam navigation across the Southern Atlantic and the Indian Ocean, and it is a moderate hope which the Christian philanthropist indulges, that before many years shall have passed, the preachers and the records of Christianity shall have penetrated and settled upon every spot of the Pagan World. Is not the hour approaching, which shall fulfil the prophetic voices that were heard in heaven by him who enjoyed the Apocalyptic vision, as they said, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever?"

I doubt not, my hearers, that I have justified to your minds my choice of the subject of this morning's discourse; for I cannot doubt your concurrence in most, at least, of the remarks which have been made. We contemplate the event of which I have spoken, not chiefly in a mercantile or a national point of view. We believe that it is fraught with issues of spiritual moment to the whole world. I think that I can perceive in it another great step towards the completion of that work, which was dimly foreseen by those who laid the foundations of

civilized and Christian life on these western shores. In 1620 the *Mayflower* entered Massachusetts Bay, after a tedious and perilous passage of more than two months' duration, across the then almost untrav-elled ocean, and cast anchor in sight of a sterile coast, amidst the bleakness of winter. In 1840 the *Britannia*, after crossing the same waters in little more than two weeks, approaches, amidst the splendours of summer, a city crowning the curve of that same bay, around whose whole extent may be seen flourishing towns and the promise of an ample harvest. How great the contrast in the physical circumstances! In each case, however, suited to the social aspect of the scene. The hopes that were cherished in the little cabin of the *Mayflower*, have been more than realized. God grant that the hopes which now swell the bosoms of a vast community, be not disappointed!

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