

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### THE CHAPLAIN AND CHAPEL IN A MAN-OF-WAR.

The next day was Sunday; a fact set down in the almanac, spite of merchant seamen's maxim, that there are no Sundays of soundings.

No Sundays off soundings, indeed! No Sundays on shipboard! You may as well say there should be no Sundays in churches; for is not a ship modeled after a church? has it not three spires--three steeples? yea, and on the gun-deck, a bell and a belfry? And does not that bell merrily peal every Sunday morning, to summon the crew to devotions?

At any rate, there were Sundays on board this particular frigate of ours, and a clergyman also. He was a slender, middle-aged man, of an amiable deportment and irreproachable conversation; but I must say, that his sermons were but ill calculated to benefit the crew. He had drank at the mystic fountain of Plato; his head had been turned by the Germans; and this I will say, that White-Jacket himself saw him with Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* in his hand.

Fancy, now, this transcendental divine standing behind a gun-carriage on the main-deck, and addressing five hundred salt-sea sinners upon the psychological phenomena of the soul, and the ontological necessity of every sailor's saving it at all hazards. He enlarged upon the follies

of the ancient philosophers; learnedly alluded to the Phiedon of Plato; exposed the follies of Simplicius's Commentary on Aristotle's "De Coelo," by arraying against that clever Pagan author the admired tract of Tertullian--De Prascriptionibus Haereticorum--and concluded by a Sanscrit invocation. He was particularly hard upon the Gnostics and Marcionites of the second century of the Christian era; but he never, in the remotest manner, attacked the everyday vices of the nineteenth century, as eminently illustrated in our man-of-war world. Concerning drunkenness, fighting, flogging, and oppression--things expressly or impliedly prohibited by Christianity--he never said aught. But the most mighty Commodore and Captain sat before him; and in general, if, in a monarchy, the state form the audience of the church, little evangelical piety will be preached. Hence, the harmless, non-committal abstrusities of our Chaplain were not to be wondered at. He was no Massillon, to thunder forth his ecclesiastical rhetoric, even when a Louis le Grand was enthroned among his congregation. Nor did the chaplains who preached on the quarter-deck of Lord Nelson ever allude to the guilty Felix, nor to Delilah, nor practically reason of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, when that renowned Admiral sat, sword-belted, before them.

During these Sunday discourses, the officers always sat in a circle round the Chaplain, and, with a business-like air, steadily preserved the utmost propriety. In particular, our old Commodore himself made a point of looking intensely edified; and not a sailor on board but believed that the Commodore, being the greatest man present, must alone

comprehend the mystic sentences that fell from our parson's lips.

Of all the noble lords in the ward-room, this lord-spiritual, with the exception of the Purser, was in the highest favour with the Commodore, who frequently conversed with him in a close and confidential manner. Nor, upon reflection, was this to be marvelled at, seeing how efficacious, in all despotic governments, it is for the throne and altar to go hand-in-hand.

The accommodations of our chapel were very poor. We had nothing to sit on but the great gun-rammers and capstan-bars, placed horizontally upon shot-boxes. These seats were exceedingly uncomfortable, wearing out our trowsers and our tempers, and, no doubt, impeded the conversion of many valuable souls.

To say the truth, men-of-war's-men, in general, make but poor auditors upon these occasions, and adopt every possible means to elude them. Often the boatswain's-mates were obliged to drive the men to service, violently swearing upon these occasions, as upon every other.

"Go to prayers, d----n you! To prayers, you rascals--to prayers!" In this clerical invitation Captain Claret would frequently unite.

At this Jack Chase would sometimes make merry. "Come, boys, don't hang back," he would say; "come, let us go hear the parson talk about his Lord High Admiral Plato, and Commodore Socrates."

But, in one instance, grave exception was taken to this summons. A remarkably serious, but bigoted seaman, a sheet-anchor-man--whose private devotions may hereafter be alluded to--once touched his hat to the Captain, and respectfully said, "Sir, I am a Baptist; the chaplain is an Episcopalian; his form of worship is not mine; I do not believe with him, and it is against my conscience to be under his ministry. May I be allowed, sir, not to attend service on the half-deck?"

"You will be allowed, sir!" said the Captain, haughtily, "to obey the laws of the ship. If you absent yourself from prayers on Sunday mornings, you know the penalty."

According to the Articles of War, the Captain was perfectly right; but if any law requiring an American to attend divine service against his will be a law respecting the establishment of religion, then the Articles of War are, in this one particular, opposed to the American Constitution, which expressly says, "Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or the free exercise thereof." But this is only one of several things in which the Articles of War are repugnant to that instrument. They will be glanced at in another part of the narrative.

The motive which prompts the introduction of chaplains into the Navy cannot but be warmly responded to by every Christian. But it does not follow, that because chaplains are to be found in men-of-war, that,

under the present system, they achieve much good, or that, under any other, they ever will.

How can it be expected that the religion of peace should flourish in an oaken castle of war? How can it be expected that the clergyman, whose pulpit is a forty-two-pounder, should convert sinners to a faith that enjoins them to turn the right cheek when the left is smitten? How is it to be expected that when, according to the XLII. of the Articles of War, as they now stand unrepealed on the Statute-book, "a bounty shall be paid" (to the officers and crew) "by the United States government of \$20 for each person on board any ship of an enemy which shall be sunk or destroyed by any United States ship;" and when, by a subsequent section (vii.), it is provided, among other apportionings, that the chaplain shall receive "two twentieths" of this price paid for sinking and destroying ships full of human beings? I How is it to be expected that a clergyman, thus provided for, should prove efficacious in enlarging upon the criminality of Judas, who, for thirty pieces of silver, betrayed his Master?

Although, by the regulations of the Navy, each seaman's mess on board the Neversink was furnished with a Bible, these Bibles were seldom or never to be seen, except on Sunday mornings, when usage demands that they shall be exhibited by the cooks of the messes, when the master-at-arms goes his rounds on the berth-deck. At such times, they usually surmounted a highly-polished tin-pot placed on the lid of the chest.

Yet, for all this, the Christianity of men-of-war's men, and their disposition to contribute to pious enterprises, are often relied upon. Several times subscription papers were circulated among the crew of the *Neversink*, while in harbour, under the direct patronage of the Chaplain. One was for the purpose of building a seaman's chapel in China; another to pay the salary of a tract-distributor in Greece; a third to raise a fund for the benefit of an African Colonization Society.

Where the Captain himself is a moral man, he makes a far better chaplain for his crew than any clergyman can be. This is sometimes illustrated in the case of sloops of war and armed brigs, which are not allowed a regular chaplain. I have known one crew, who were warmly attached to a naval commander worthy of their love, who have mustered even with alacrity to the call to prayer; and when their Captain would read the Church of England service to them, would present a congregation not to be surpassed for earnestness and devotion by any Scottish Kirk. It seemed like family devotions, where the head of the house is foremost in confessing himself before his Maker. But our own hearts are our best prayer-rooms, and the chaplains who can most help us are ourselves.