

THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.
GENESIS.

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OR,

ANECDOTES, SIMILES, EMBLEMS, ILLUSTRATIONS, EXPOSITORY,
SCIENTIFIC, GEOGRAPHICAL, HISTORICAL, AND HOMILETIC,
GATHERED FROM A WIDE RANGE OF HOME AND
FOREIGN LITERATURE, ON THE VERSES
OF THE BIBLE.

BY

REV. JOSEPH S. EXELL, M.A.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

VERS. 1-8. He took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them.—*The duty of hospitality*:—I. AS A COMMON DUTY. II. AS A DUTY OF PIETY. Thus viewed, all duties are ennobled. 1. In their form. 2. In their motive. 3. The best qualities of the soul are developed. III. AS A DUTY WHICH IS PROPHETIC OF SOMETHING BEYOND ITSELF. As genius does not always know all it utters, so the faithful and loving heart cannot always relate what it holds. Such was the case with Abraham in his history. His duty rapidly rises in the form and meaning of it. 1. He entertains men on the principles of common hospitality (ver. 2). 2. He entertains angels. 3. He entertains God. (*T. H. Leale.*) *A prelude to the Incarnation*:—I. GOD APPEARS AS MAN. II. GOD PASSES THROUGH THE SAME EXPERIENCE AS MAN. The angel Jehovah performs human actions, and passes through human conditions. 1. He both speaks and listens to human words. This Divine visitor converses freely with Abraham, and listens to his offer of hospitality. So God manifest in our nature spoke with human lips, and heard through ears of flesh the voices of men. 2. He shares the common necessities of man. This Divine visitor has no real need for food and refreshment, and yet He partakes of them. Jesus, though He had no need of us in the greatness and independence of His majesty, yet took our infirmities and necessities upon Him. He lived amongst men, eating and drinking with them, and partaking of the shelter they offered. 3. As man He receives service from man. Jehovah, under the appearance of a man, partook of the food and of the hospitable services which Abraham offered. So Christ, in the days of His flesh, received the attentions of human kindness, shelter, food, comfort. He had special friends, such as those of the household of Bethany, which He loved so well. He was grateful for every act of kindness done to Him. III. GOD MANIFEST IS RECOGNIZED ONLY BY THE SPIRITUAL MIND. (*Ibid.*) *The Divine guest*:—There is no doubt as to the august character of one of the three who, on that memorable afternoon, when every living thing was seeking shelter during the heat of the day, visited the tent of the patriarch (see vers. 1-10). It was thus that the Son of God anticipated His Incarnation; and was found in fashion as a man before He became flesh. He loved to come incognito into the homes of those He cherished as His friends, even before He came across the slopes of Olivet to make His home in the favoured cottage, where His spirit rested from the din of the great city, and girded itself for the cross and the tomb. I. ABRAHAM TREATED HIS VISITORS WITH TRUE EASTERN HOSPITALITY. II. MAY IT NOT BE THAT CHRIST COMES TO US OFTEN IN THE GUISE OF A STRANGER? Does He not test us thus? Of course if He were to come in His manifested splendour as the Son of the Highest, every one would receive Him, and provide Him with sumptuous hospitality. But this would not reveal our true character. And so He comes to us as a wayfaring man, hungry and athirst; or as a stranger, naked and sick. Those that are akin to Him will show Him mercy, in whatsoever disguise He comes, though they recognize Him not, and will be surprised to learn that they ever ministered to Him. Those, on the other hand, who are not really His, will fail to discern Him; will let Him go unhelped away; and will wake up to find that “inasmuch as they did it not to one of the least of these, they did it not to Him.” III. GOD NEVER

LEAVES IN OUR DEBT. He takes care to pay for His entertainment, royally and divinely. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *The advent in the theophany*:—I. GOD VISITS HIS CHILDREN. II. GOD VISITS HIS CHILDREN IN HUMAN FORM. III. GOD VISITS HIS CHILDREN UNRECOGNIZED. IV. GOD VISITS HIS CHILDREN IN BLESSING. V. GOD VISITS HIS CHILDREN AT CRITICAL PERIODS. VI. WHEN GOD VISITS HIS CHILDREN, HE WILL BE BEST RECEIVED IN THE DISCHARGE OF THE SIMPLEST DUTIES. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*) *Abraham's celestial visitors*:—Lessons to be learned. I. KINDLINESS TO STRANGERS. II. FAITH IN THE PROMISES OF GOD. III. THAT THERE IS A CONCATENATION BETWEEN OUR SINS. Want of trust, such as Sarah showed, necessarily leads to want of courage, and want of courage is the ready cause of want of truth. Let us avoid the first steps to evil. IV. THE SIN OR INNOCENCE OF ANY ACTION DEPENDS UPON MOTIVES. Abraham laughed with joy, Sarah from incredulity. An action commendable in the one, was sinful in the other. V. THE LONGSUFFERING AND CONDESCENSION OF GOD. VI. THE WONDERFUL EFFICACY OF PRAYER. VII. THAT FOR THE ELECT'S SAKE THE DAYS OF EVIL ARE OFTEN SHORTENED OR POSTPONED. Great leaders produce great causes, as much as great causes produce great leaders. VIII. NOW SPIRITUALLY, AS FORMERLY ACTUALLY, GOD VISITS HIS PEOPLE. (*Homilist.*) *Mysterious visitors*:—I. THE UNEXPECTED GUESTS. II. THE POSITIVE PROMISE. To believe God's word is the path to blessing. III. THE REVEALED SECRET. (*W. S. Smith, B.D.*) *The coming of God, and the welcome of man*:—As the ruin of man consisted in his estrangement from God, so his restoration to eternal life consists in his return into the light of God's presence. The Divine enlightenment of man is the glory or manifestation of God. The history of the spiritual revivals in the patriarchal and Jewish churches was the history of the renewed manifestations of God's countenance. The theophanies witnessed by the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, gave to them the inspiration of life. But in the fullness of time, in the Incarnation, God who appeared in passing visions to the patriarchs, and shone between the cherubims in the mystery of the holy of holies, manifested Himself in the flesh and blood of the second Adam: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." Thus, "God manifest in the flesh" in Christ Jesus, is the life of humanity. To behold Him with the eye of the soul is to have the life of the soul. The conditions upon which God permits men to realize the blessed influences of His presence, are to-day exactly the same as they were three thousand years ago, when the "Father of the Faithful" recognized His nearness on the plains of Mamre. The form of this narrative, which records that manifestation of God, embodies everlasting principles which can never pass away. For our instruction it tells us how the "Father of the Faithful" welcomed the approach of God to his soul. Let us dwell, for our learning—I. UPON THE MODE IN WHICH THE DIVINE LIFE APPROACHED THE MAN. "The Lord appeared unto him" . . . "Lo, three men stood by him." 1. The mode in which the Divine Life manifested His presence to the patriarch, as recorded in this passage, is regarded by the Church as an adumbration of the fundamental doctrine of the Christian verity, that we worship the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity. This passage is accordingly appointed to be read on the festival of the Trinity. The words, "The Lord appeared unto him," give expression to the Unity of the Divine life. The words that describe the forms of the vision in which God manifested Himself to the soul of the man, "Lo, three men stood by him," express the other aspect of this great mystery, and teach us to think of Three Persons existing within the One Essence of God. St. John the Divine, in his book of Revelation, has been inspired by God to use words which may enable us by analogy to form some faint conception of the relations eternally existing between the three Persons in the Godhead. He illustrates those relations by teaching us to think of the Three Persons in the One Godhead, as we think of the three divisions of one time. Now, the past in time presents itself to our minds as the fountain and origin out of which the present is for ever being born, and out of which the future is for ever destined to proceed. The present, in which we have our being, is for ever departing from us, in order to return into the bosom of that past out of which it came, and in which it dwells. The future comes to us for ever, sent by the departed present, and coming, when it comes, in the name of the present. Our only existence is for ever dependent upon our standing-place in the present. It is our communion, or participation of the present, that enables us to look back, and to remember the past out of which we have come. It is by virtue of our standing on the rock of the present, that we can look forward to the future which it is about to send to us. In the same manner we think of God the Father as the fountain of being, who hath created us, and to whom we look

back, seeking the knowledge of our destiny in His creative purpose. So St. John represents the Father as "Holy" . . . "Lord God Almighty that was." We think of the Son as the Ever Present Life, who gives to us our standing in existence. "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." As we go back into the past, by standing in the present, so we can only come to the Father through the Son. He for ever says, "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." Likewise, as the present leads on to the future, so the Son sends to us—proceeding from the Father and Himself—the Holy Ghost. The "Holy Lord God Almighty that is," departs and intercedes to send to us the "Holy Lord God Almighty that is to come." Furthermore, although we necessarily think of time as presenting itself to our consciousness in these three forms, we nevertheless think of it as one in itself. The past, the present, and the future, are not three, but one time. II. THE MANNER IN WHICH THE FATHER OF THE FAITHFUL RECEIVED THE APPROACH OF GOD. Let us proceed to dwell upon the characteristics that marked the spiritual attitude of Abraham in welcoming the Divine vision. 1. We may, perhaps, infer from these opening words, "He lift up his eyes and looked," the very simple, but very necessary, lesson that the presence of God cannot be realized, unless the soul of man directs its gaze above the objects of the sensual, earthly life. There are men who never rise in thought or feeling above the low level of earthly, transitory interests: that plain upon which are built the habitations that are doomed to crumble into dust. The prayerless, thoughtless, sensual, earthly-minded man, cannot realize the presence of the Most High. The splendour of the Triune Majesty never dawns upon the eye of the soul that is engrossed in earthly things. Let no one expect to be partakers of Abraham's lofty experiences, unless he strives to follow Abraham's example, and to direct the aspirations of his soul upward. 2. We may also learn from this passage the well-known but frequently neglected truth, that there must be an effort of the soul to go forth, as it were, out of the habits of self, to meet the Divine life that comes near. Such seems to be the significance of the very simple but very deep words, "He ran to meet them from the tent door." The neglect of this truth has doomed many souls to long darkness and exclusion from the presence of God. Man must use the freedom of his will to go forth to meet the coming of God. There are some who have been misled by the influence of false teaching to ignore this great truth. They have reasoned in their hearts, saying, "If I am chosen and predestined to realize the blessed sight of God's countenance, He will, in His good time, make an irresistible approach to my soul, and force His Divine presence into the innermost chambers of my being. It is not necessary that I should use that power of will which I have received, in order to go forth to meet Him, who will come, or not come, to me according to His own good pleasure and eternal decree." Man cannot by his own will cause God to be either present or absent from His sanctuary and throne of grace. "His tabernacle is with men." But man can neglect to fulfil those conditions upon which God's presence can be realized by his own soul. By sloth, prayerlessness, and apathy, he can remain beneath the shadow of his earthly tent, and lose the vision of God, because he will neither lift up his eyes, nor go forth to meet Him. 3. The attitude of the patriarch in welcoming the Divine presence teaches us another lesson, viz., the spiritual necessity of humility as a condition of obtaining a clear and near vision of God. The law of reverential humility is binding upon the human soul, and has its original sanction in the majesty of God. The self-confident, arrogant, proud man, transgresses one of the laws that regulate his relation to the majesty of God, and is inevitably removed in spirit to a distance from the throne of God. He loses the faculty of realizing the Divine presence. The physical philosopher who proposes to approach the throne of grace, not as a humble suppliant, but as an irreverent experimentalist, asking for a sign of his own choosing, ignores the elementary truths of the relation existing between the King and the subject. He would acknowledge that for the successful performance of physical experiments, it is necessary to comply with all the known physical conditions. The laboratory of spiritual truth has its conditions. One of those conditions is that it must be pervaded in all its parts by the atmosphere of reverence. God will not reveal the light of His presence to man, however eagerly he may run forth to seek it, until he has learnt to recognize the weakness, the littleness, the unworthiness of his own being before the majesty of the most High. The patriarch's obedience to this law of spiritual insight is simply expressed in the words, "He bowed himself towards the ground." 4. The next clause in the text gives expression to the deep truth, that man cannot realize the blessedness of the Divine

presence, without an earnest effort to give depth and permanency to his religious impressions. The Divine forms that came to Abraham doubtless passed over the plains of Mamre. They drew nigh to other tents, but those who dwelt beneath their covering realized not the blessedness of their approach, because they fulfilled not the conditions upon which it could be known. The high aspiration, the earnest inquiry, the spirit of reverence, were found only in the Father of the Faithful. The chosen patriarch fulfilled one other condition, without which souls cannot attain unto the clear vision of God. He had the grace of spiritual perseverance. He was not content to permit the truth that had poured its bright beams into his soul to pass away. He sought to deepen the Divine impressions received, and to make them permanent. Such is the significance of the prayer: "My Lord, if now I have found favour in Thy sight, pass not away, I pray Thee, from Thy servant." In all the ages, the true children of Abraham are marked by this spirit of earnest perseverance, which seeks to deepen the experience of the soul. The dwellers in the tents of the world have not this characteristic. To them God draws near, but they never invite Him to stay. They seek to obliterate the impression at once; and in the angry impatience of a soul that will not give place, even for a moment, to the presence of the Divine life, that rebukes its own baseness, cry out, "What have we to do with Thee? . . . Art Thou come hither to torment us before the time?" There are others who welcome the Divine presence for a brief moment, but soon grow weary of its influence. In the church, or in some hour when the heart has been softened into sensibility by some sorrow or joy, they obtain a passing glimpse of the Divine life. The blessed experience of God's abiding presence is only known by them who, in the spirit of the patriarch, seek by prayer to make the vision lasting. We must learn to pray, as true sons of Abraham, and loving disciples of our risen Lord, in the journey of life, "Abide with us." "My Lord, if I have found favour in Thy sight, pass not away, I pray Thee, from Thy servant." 5. The next clause in the text, "Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet," doubtless gives expression to a deep and everlasting spiritual truth. What is the condition, essential to the entertainment of the Divine life, expressed in these words? They teach us that, in order to welcome the Divine life in its approach, the soul must apply to the forms in which it vouchsafes to dwell, the element of purification here represented by the water. We fetch fresh draughts of the cleansing influences that stream from the cross of Christ, and strive to welcome the life of God to abide with us, by washing away the dust that defiles the forms in which it vouchsafes to dwell. This is an everlasting condition, binding upon every son of Abraham. God will not dwell with us, and manifest the blessed light of His countenance to our souls, unless we seek to cleanse our walk in life. The dust of earth that clings to us unwashed away by the waters of grace; the unconfessed, unrepented, unforsaken sins, will make us utterly incapable of realizing the Divine life. 6. Another essential condition which man must fulfil in order to realize the blessed consciousness of God's presence, is expressed in these words addressed to the Divine forms: "Rest yourselves under the tree." What is the spiritual truth conveyed in these words? They teach us that there must be in human life hours of rest and calm meditation, in order to ensure the enjoyment of the Divine presence. The hours taken from the world and spent in Divine worship, in the calm peace of the church; the hours in which the soul enters into the closet, shuts the door, and prays to the Father which is in secret, are the hours in which man rises into the realization of the eternal life. 7. The last act in the patriarch's welcome of the Divine presence is described in these words: "I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on; for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said." The man is here permitted to offer unto the Creator of His own creatures in order to welcome His presence. Man is here represented as offering gifts to sustain the forms of the Divine life, and his offering is approved and accepted as a part of the welcome which he was bound to give. Such is the duty that rests upon man for ever. His services in themselves are of no value. His prayers, worship, alms, oblations—these are nothing in themselves. But they must be offered as expressions of loving welcome to the presence of God. If they are withheld, God will not lift up the light of His countenance upon the soul. The welcome which the human soul offers to God, finds its full expression in the holy eucharist. This vision of God brought with it to Abraham special blessings. He was inspired to look forward to endless life, typified in the supernatural birth of Isaac; and to realize the doom of the lost souls, typified in the destruction of the cities of the plain. Such are for ever the fruits of the

knowledge of God. It shows man the ways of life and death. If we would attain unto the blessedness of God's realized presence, we must remember that the conditions to be fulfilled are the same as they were thousands of years ago on the plain of Mamre. (*II. T. Edwards, M.A.*) *Abraham, the friend of God:—*I. THE FRIENDLY VISIT. 1. Abraham's hospitality. 2. God's gracious acceptance. A singular instance of Divine condescension—the only recorded instance of the kind before the Incarnation. II. THE FRIENDLY FELLOWSHIP. In the progress of the interview, as well as in its commencement, the Lord treats Abraham as a friend. 1. He converses with him familiarly, putting to him a question which no stranger in the East would reckon himself entitled to put. He inquires into his household matters, and asks after Sarah, his wife (ver. 9). 2. Then in the pains He takes, by reiterated assurances, to confirm the faith of Abraham and to overcome the unbelief of Sarah—in the tone of His simple appeal to Divine omnipotence as an answer to every doubt, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"—and in His mild but searching reproof of the dissimulation to which the fear of detection led Sarah, "Nay, but thou didst laugh,"—in all this, does it not almost seem as if by anticipation we saw Jesus in the midst of His disciples, stretching forth His hand to catch the trembling Peter on the waters, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" or, after the denial, turning to look on Peter, so as to melt his soul to penitence and love! 3. It is chiefly, however, in the close of this interview that Abraham is treated by God as His friend; being, as it were, admitted into His deliberations, and consulted in regard to what He is about to do. III. THE FRIENDLY AND CONFIDENTIAL CONSULTATION. 1. The Lord refers to the honour or privilege already granted to Abraham, as a reason for having no concealment from Him now (ver. 18). 2. The Lord, in communicating His purpose to Abraham His friend, refers not only to the high honour and privilege which that relation implies, but also to its great responsibility (ver. 19). IV. THE LIBERTY OF FRIENDLY REMONSTRANCE. 1. There is no attempt here to pry into the secret things which belong to the Lord our God (Deut. xxix. 29); no idea of meddling with the purposes or decrees of election, which the Lord reserves exclusively to Himself. 2. Nor in this pleading does Abraham arrogate anything to himself. He has boldness and access, with confidence, by the faith of Jesus. He has liberty to converse with God as a friend, to give utterance to his feelings and desires before Him, to represent his own case and the case of every one for whom he cares; and not for himself only, but for others, yea, indeed for all, to invoke the name of Him whose memorial to all generations is this: "The Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty" (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7). 3. Abraham's expostulation, accordingly, proceeds upon this name of the Lord, or in other words, upon the known and revealed principles of the Divine administration. Aspiring to no acquaintance with the secret decrees of God, and standing upon no claim of merit in himself, he has still warrant enough for all the earnestness of this intercessory pleading, in that broad general aspect of the character and moral government of God, to which he expressly refers. For he knows God as the just God and the Saviour; and on this twofold view of the ways of God he builds his argument in his intercessory prayer. 4. Such is the principle of Abraham's intercession for Sodom. And as it is founded on a right understanding of the nature and design of God's moral government of the world, in this dispensation of long-suffering patience, subordinate to a dispensation of grace, and preparatory to a dispensation of judgment, so it is combined with a spirit of entire submission to the Divine sovereignty. (*S. R. Candlish, D.D.*) *Hospitality:—*Consider this virtue in—I. Its source: a kind and generous heart. II. Its attendant qualities. 1. Prompt. 2. Admitting of no refusal. 3. Unsparing. III. The esteem in which it is held. It is—I. Pleasing to man. 2. Approved of by God. IV. The reward which it brings. 1. An angel may be entertained unawares. 2. Gratitude in its object is but natural to expect. (*J. H. Jones.*) *Abraham's hospitality:—*One thinking of these words of Abraham more seriously, "If I have found favour," &c., noteth by them, that when one cometh to us to whom we may do good, we, rather than he, receive a benefit, for the poor man peradventure receiveth of us a penny, and we of the Lord an hundredfold, and eternal life also. Whether had Elias the better that received a cake, or the widow that by him received such comfort? How, then, may the true consideration hereof quicken us in all charitable and merciful actions towards our brethren distressed, and needing our pity and comfort? (*Bp. Babington.*)

The true hospitality :—In that he nameth a morsel of bread, and yet performed better, we see the antiquity of this modesty, that of a man's own things he should speak with least. So use we to invite men to a pittance, or to some particular morsel, when yet we intend somewhat better. But whatsoever Abraham made ready, was all but moderate, in comparison of that ungodly excess that some now use, rather to show their own pride, than to welcome the guest. True welcome never consisted in meats and drinks, and multitude of dishes, but in that affection of an inward heart, which truly hath appeared in a cup of water, where better ability wanted, and which passeth all dishes and meats under the sun. (*Ibid.*) *Hospitality* :—Some years ago a pious widow in America, who was reduced to great poverty, had just placed the last smoked herring on her table to supply her hunger and that of her children, when a rap was heard at the door, and a stranger solicited a lodging and a morsel of food, saying that he had not tasted food for twenty-four hours. The widow did not hesitate, but offered a share to the stranger, saying, "We shall not be forsaken, or suffer deeper for an act of charity." The traveller drew near the table; but when he saw the scanty fare, filled with astonishment, he said, "And is this all your store? And do you offer a share to one you do not know? Then I never saw charity before! But, madam, do you not wrong your children by giving a part of your last morsel to a stranger?" "Ah," said the widow, weeping, "I have a boy, a darling son, somewhere on the face of the wide world, unless heaven has taken him away; and I only act towards you as I would that others should act towards him. God, who sent manna from heaven, can provide for us as He did for Israel; and how should I this night offend Him, if my son should be a wanderer, destitute as you, and He should have provided for him a home, even as poor as this, were I to turn you unrelieved away?" The widow stopped, and the stranger, springing from his seat, clasped her in his arms. "God indeed has provided just such a home for your wandering son, and has given him wealth to reward the goodness of his benefactress. My mother! O my mother!" It was indeed her long-lost son returned from India. He had chosen this way to surprise his family, and certainly not very wisely. But never was surprise more complete, or more joyful. He was able to make the family comfortable, which he immediately did. The mother lived for some years longer in the enjoyment of plenty.

Vers. 9-15. *Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?*—*The conflict between fear and faith* :—I. THE THINGS PROMISED TO FAITH ARE DIFFICULT OF BELIEF. 1. It is necessary that faith should be thus tried by difficulty. 2. We must be cast entirely upon the word of God. II. FAITH MAY, FOR A WHILE, BE QUITE PARALYZED BY FEAR (ver. 15). 1. In sincere souls this condition is only momentary. 2. To accept God at His word would save us from all foolish wonder. III. GOD GRACIOUSLY GRANTS POWER TO OVERCOME THE FEAR. If only faith is real at bottom and in any way lays hold upon God, He will pardon its infirmities and repair its weaknesses. This He did in Sarah's case. 1. By mild reproof. 2. By recognizing the good which is mixed up with our infirmity. 3. By repeating His promises. 4. By casting us upon His own omnipotence (ver. 14). (*T. H. Leale.*) *Lessons* :—1. Gracious hospitality hath sweet returns from God as acceptance with Him. 2. Known to God are souls who entertain Him, better than He is known to them. Where is Sarah? 3. God calleth for the woman to be sharer in the promise with the man. 4. It is good to be at hand, near to God in our places, when promises are given out (ver. 9). 5. God labours to put believing souls above all doubts concerning His promise. 6. God is punctual in His own time to perform His promise. 7. God will keep His saints alive to see the good which He promiseth them. 8. Weak saints may receive promises with their ears, and yet not believe nor digest them (ver. 10). 9. Sensible objections may puzzle the weak faith of God's servants (ver. 11). 10. Weakness of faith and strength of sense may make saints despise the promise. 11. Nature's defects are apt to question the power of God to help them. (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Lessons* :—1. God takes notice of the unbelief of saints, in word, and deed, to reprove them. Jehovah said, &c. 2. Good works toward God do not excuse from unbelief of His promises. Sarah's feast stops not God's mouth against sin. 3. Husbands should hear God's complaints of their wives to amend them, so Abraham did. 4. God is displeased to have objections from sense set up against His promise (ver. 13). 5. God is absolutely able to do anything what He please in heaven or earth. 6. God proposeth His absolute power for faith to rest on against all sensible

objections. 7. God's promise is joined with His power to take of weak souls from sinful doubting. 8. God tenders the weak in faith, and doubleth His promise for their support (ver. 14). 9. Saints weak in faith, may be so overtaken as to seek to hide one sin by another. 10. Guilt and fear may lead souls to such transgression. 11. God will make His servants own their iniquities, though through weakness they had denied them. 12. God will be gracious to His saints in making them know their sins (ver. 16). (*Ibid.*) *Sarah's sin*:—I. HER UNBELIEF. II. HER UNTRUTH. *God's promise treated with incredulity*:—Sarah does not appear to have been by any means a blameless character. Her conduct towards Hagar showed us that she was a woman capable of generous impulses, but not of the strain of continued magnanimous conduct. She was capable of yielding her wifely rights on the impulse of the brilliant scheme that had struck her, but like many other persons who can begin a magnanimous or generous course of conduct, she could not follow it up to the end, but failed disgracefully in her conduct towards her rival. So now again she betrays characteristic weakness. When the strangers came to Abraham's tent, and announced that she was to become a mother, she smiled in superior, self-assured, woman's wisdom. When the promise threatened no longer to hover over her household as a mere sublime and exalting idea which serves its purpose if it keep them in mind that God has spoken to them, but to take place now among the actualities of daily occurrence, she hails this announcement with a laugh of total incredulity. Whatever she had made of God's word, she had not thought it was really and veritably to come to pass; she smiled at the simplicity which could speak of such an unheard-of thing. This is true to human nature. It reminds you how you have dealt with God's promises—nay, with God's commandments—when they offered to make room for themselves in the everyday life of which you are masters, every detail of which you have arranged, seeming to know absolutely the laws and principles on which your particular line of life must be carried on. Have you never smiled at the simplicity which could set about making actual, about carrying out in practical life, in society, in work, in business, those thoughts, feelings and purposes, which God's promises beget? Sarah did not laugh outright, but smiled behind the Lord; she did not mock Him to His face, but let the compassionate expression pass over her face with which we listen to the glowing hopes of the young enthusiast who does not know the world. Have we not often put aside God's voice precisely thus; saying within us, We know what kind of things can be done by us and others and what need not be attempted; we know what kind of frailties in social intercourse we must put up with, and not seek to amend; what kind of practices it is vain to think of abolishing; we know what use to make of God's promise and what use not to make of it; how far to trust it, and how far to give greater weight to our knowledge of the world and our natural prudence and sense? Does not our faith, like Sarah's, vary in proportion as the promise to be believed is impractical? If the promise seems wholly to concern future things, we cordially and devoutly assent; but if we are asked to believe that God intends within the year to do so-and-so, if we are asked to believe that the result of God's promise will be found taking a substantial place among the results of our own efforts—then the derisive smile of Sarah forms on our face. (*M. Dods, D.D.*)

Vers. 16-18. And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?—*The secret of the Lord with Abraham*:—God communicates Himself, and the knowledge of His ways and designs, to His faithful ones. There was a special propriety for this mode of dealing with His servant Abraham. Consider this—I. AS ONE OF THE PRIVILEGES OF GOD'S FRIENDSHIP WITH HIM. Communication of secrets is one of the special privileges of friendship. Where we trust our secrets the intimacy must be very close, and the confidence of love very great. God imparted to His friend Abraham a twofold secret. 1. The secret of loving intercourse. 2. The secret of His purposes. II. AS DEPENDING UPON HIS DESTINY AND CHARACTER. Abraham was not only a saint, but also a representative man, through whom God intended to convey great blessings to mankind. He was the human foundation upon which God's most gracious purposes concerning the race were to be erected. The friendship of God with him, therefore, is to be considered—1. With regard to his destiny. God had known him, that is, determined him for a purpose. (1) Political. He was to "become a great and mighty nation" (ver. 18). (2) Religious. Abraham was to be the founder not only of a great but of a holy nation. 2. With regard to his

personal character, God knew that Abraham was a righteous man, and that he would be just and upright in the government of his family, bringing them up in the fear and love of Himself. So would they enjoy the benefits of the covenant of grace, and avoid the doom of the wicked. (*T. H. Leale*) *The friend of God*:—I. WE ARE TO PONDER THIS MOST INTERESTING SCENE. In it we shall find three leading acts. 1. The condescending visit of God to Abraham. (1) The Lord appeared to him in the form of a man. (2) The Lord suffered Himself to be a guest at Abraham's table. (3) One main object of the visit was to evoke faith in the heart of Sarah; without which the promise could not have been fulfilled. 2. The revelation of the Lord's purpose to Abraham (vers. 16–22). 3. Abraham interceding for Sodom (vers. 23–33). II. APPLY TO OURSELVES. As Abraham's spiritual seed, we are called to be friends of God. 1. Jesus calls us His friends (see John xv. 15). 2. Jesus manifests Himself to us as He does not to the world. Certainly, this is an inward and spiritual manifestation; but it is not less real or delightful than that vouchsafed to Abraham. 3. He condescends to be refreshed by us. When we do His will, and offer Him praise, He sees of the travail of His soul, and is satisfied. He sups with us. 4. He reveals to us His secret. This relates to His second coming, to the destruction of the world, and the final overthrow of the ungodly. The fate of Sodom represents that of all the earth. 5. We are permitted to intercede for others. (*The Congregational Pulpit.*) *God's reasons for revealing His intentions to Abraham*:—1. The importance of his character. He was not only the friend of God, but the father of "a great nation," in which God would have a special interest, and through which "all other nations should be blessed." Let him be in the secret. 2. The good use he would make of it. Being previously disclosed to him, he would be the more deeply impressed by it: and according to his tried and approved conduct as the head of a family, would be concerned to impart it as a warning to his posterity in all future ages. As the wicked extract ill from good, so the righteous will extract good from ill. Sodom's destruction shall turn to Abraham's salvation: the monument of just vengeance against their crimes shall be of perpetual use to him and his posterity, and contribute even to the "bringing of that good upon them, which the Lord had spoken concerning them." (*A. Fuller*)

Ver. 19. *For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him.*—*Family religion*:—I. THE LIGHT IN WHICH ABRAHAM APPEARS IN THIS PASSAGE; AND HOW HE WAS QUALIFIED FOR THE DUTY HERE ASCRIBED TO HIM. 1. A man of knowledge. 2. A man of piety. 3. A man of virtue. 4. A man of authority. 5. A man of fidelity. 6. A man of diligence. II. THE NATURE OF THIS DUTY; OR HIS ENDEAVOURS FOR THE GOOD OF HIS FAMILY. 1. He not only prayed with and before his family, but interceded for them as a priest. 2. He was a prophet in his family. 3. He was a king in his house, and used authority. III. HOW PLEASING IT WAS TO GOD, AND THE BLESSED CONSEQUENCES THEREOF TO ABRAHAM AND HIS FAMILY. Observe—The reason why God would hide nothing from Abraham. "For I know him," &c. Abraham was communicative of his knowledge, and improved it to the good of those under his care, and therefore God resolved to make communications to him. The way to the accomplishment of God's promises: "That the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him." Family blessings arise from family religion;—temperance, frugality, industry, discretion—peace, quietness, love, harmony—the favour, protection, and care of God; His direction and aid—all necessities (*Psa. xxxvii. 25; Matt. vi. 33*)—prosperity, as far as will be good for us, and our families. (*J. Benson, D.D.*) *The parental empire*:—The text implies—I. THAT A PARENT IS INVESTED WITH REGAL AUTHORITY. II. THAT A PARENT'S AUTHORITY IS TO BE WIELDED IN SUBORDINATION TO THE DIVINE. III. THAT A PARENT WHO THUS WIELDS HIS AUTHORITY ENSURES THE FULFILMENT OF THE DIVINE PROMISE IN HIS EXPERIENCE. (*Homilist.*) *Lessons*:—1. God's knowledge of souls giveth them capacity of receiving his revelations. The knowledge of His election and approbation. 2. God's knowledge determines souls unto duty and doth commend them for it, so it did to Abraham. 3. God's known ones will command for God all within their power. 4. Children and servants are to be commanded by God's approved rulers to keep close to His way. 5. Saints known of God will take care for their seed to serve God after their departure. Succeeding generations are their care. 6. The commands of godly fathers and governors are answered fruitfully where God knoweth souls. 7. Keeping the way of Jehovah and doing justice are inseparably enjoined and performed. 8. Such souls are fittest to receive discoveries of God's purposed judgments, who make the

best use of them. 9. The full accomplishment of all promises in Christ are the consequences of duty, caused by them. 10. God will bring home all the good promised in Christ unto His covenant ones. 11. God will not hide any thing that is good from the people of His promise; He sheweth evil to avoid it. 12. What God hath vouchsafed and spoken to Abram hath always been with respect unto His Church's good. So in this case to the Church in his family (ver. 19). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*)

Parental government of a family:—I. We are to consider, WHO THEY ARE THAT COMPOSE A FAMILY. Some families are smaller, and some are larger than others. Families are usually composed of parents and their children, which are sometimes less, and sometimes more numerous. But parents may have other children and youths committed to their care and instruction, and those equally belong to their family. Besides their own and other children, they may have those whom they employ in their service, and who reside in their house; and these all belong to their family. They may also have some persons whom they invite to reside with them gratuitously. These likewise belong to the family. In a word, all whom they permit to enter under their roof for pleasure, entertainment, protection, or relief, belong to their family for the time being. Parents are heads of their families, whether larger or smaller, and whether they are composed of persons of different ages, characters and conditions, or not. Their parental authority extends to every individual of their family.

II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN PARENTAL AUTHORITY, OR WHAT IT GIVES PARENTS A RIGHT TO DO IN RESPECT TO THEIR CHILDREN AND HOUSEHOLDS. And here it may be observed—1. That it gives them the right of dedicating them to God. 2. Parental authority gives parents the right of instructing their children, as well as the right of devoting them to God. 3. Parental authority gives parents a right to restrain, as well as to instruct their children and households. Children and youth are naturally inclined to vanity and vice, from which they need to be guarded and restrained, not only by instruction, admonition and advice, but by proper authority.

III. THE IMPORTANCE OF EXERCISING PARENTAL AUTHORITY. This will appear, if we consider the great and happy consequences which family government tends to promote. 1. Family government directly tends to promote family religion. 2. The proper exercise of parental authority is highly important, as it tends to propagate religion from generation to generation, throughout the world. 3. The proper exercise of parental authority directly tends to promote both temporal and spiritual prosperity. Improvement—1. If it be so important, as has been said, that parents should properly exercise parental authority over their children and households, then it is highly important that they themselves should be pious. 2. If it be so important that parents should duly exercise their parental authority over their children and households, as has been said, then they are entirely inexcusable and guilty, if they neglect to do it. 3. If the proper exercise of parental authority be so important as has been said, in order to promote and perpetuate religion, then we may discover the primary cause of the declension of religion in any place where it has prevailed and flourished. It must be primarily and principally owing to the neglect of parents in exercising their parental authority over their children and households. 4. If the proper exercise of parental authority be so important, as has been said, to promote and perpetuate religion, then we may discover the primary cause of the prevalence of religious errors at this day in this land. 5. We learn from this subject, to whom it primarily and principally belongs to bring about a reformation in piety and virtue. It certainly belongs to parents in particular. And is there a pious or sober parent, who will not acknowledge that a reformation is necessary? (*N. Emmons, D.D.*)

Family training:—WE SEE THE HIGH VALUE GOD PLACES ON EARLY SPIRITUAL TRAINING. Children and servants are both to be brought under religious influence. II. WE SEE THAT GOD NOTICES HOW SPIRITUAL TRAINING IS CARRIED ON. God could trust Abraham. He would "command," not in dictatorial tones of tyrant, but by power of consistent life. Devout advice. Gentle firmness. III. WE SEE THAT GOD MADE THE BESTOWMENT OF INTENDED BLESSINGS DEPENDENT ON THE FAITHFUL DISCHARGE OF DUTY. (*F. Hastings.*)

Christian culture:—I. The first duty of the head towards his household, relates to the DAILY WORSHIP OF GOD. II. RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION. III. FAMILY GOVERNMENT. (*The Homiletic Review.*)

Religion in the family:—WHAT ARE THE PRACTICAL ELEMENTS OF WHICH THIS RELIGION IS COMPOSED? 1. Every parent or guardian of a family is in duty bound to maintain proper domestic government. 2. The religious education of the family properly devolves upon the parent. 3. God must be worshipped in the family. 4. Religion in the family will be discovered in the exemplification of the Christian temper. II. We come to

consider THE BLESSED RESULTS THAT ATTEND RELIGION IN THE FAMILY. The personal benefits, we apprehend, will be considerable; but we purpose to consider the relative advantages of religion in the family. 1. The conduct we have described will have an important bearing on the domestics, as to their future character and final destiny. 2. Your piety as parents will have an important bearing on the peace and happiness of the family. "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" 3. You may further consider that your religion in the family has an important bearing on society. Society is becoming increasingly corrupt—the rising race threaten to outdo their parents in crime; iniquity abounds. The want of religion in the heads of households has contributed in no small degree to this growing deterioration. (*John Williams.*) *The true principle of education*:—I. Now, you should observe THE PECULIARITY OF THE EXPRESSION, "I KNOW HIM THAT HE WILL COMMAND HIS CHILDREN AND HIS HOUSEHOLD AFTER HIM." Such an expression seems to imply that there is no tendency in children to walk in the right way. They have to be dealt with in the way of command—as though, if left to themselves, the almost certainty is that they will walk in the wrong. And this is a great though melancholy truth never to be lost sight of, in our reasonings upon man and religion. And the moment it is proved that children are given into our keeping with a tendency to evil, we are bound to consider that it rests with ourselves to counteract evil tendencies, just as though it were wholly dependent on us whether they should grow up into the righteous or the unrighteous. Let us learn from every instance of stubbornness in children, from every outbreak of passion, from every spiteful action, from every petty quarrel, that we are in boyhood the very miniatures of what we should all be in manhood, if it were not for the grace of God, and that therefore, in dealing with a child, we have not to deal with unoccupied soil, but with soil already impregnated with the seeds of moral evil; and, oh! let this knowledge persuade us of the importance of the duty, and also of the difficulty of thoroughly following the example of Abraham, of whom God could say—"I know him that he will command his children and his household after him." But here we come to a most important question, as to the manner in which the example may most efficiently be copied. We have a thorough belief that the great secret of training lies in the always regarding the child as immortal. The moment that this is kept out of sight we scheme and arrange as though the child had to live only upon earth, and then our plans not being commensurate with the vastness of their object will necessarily be inadequate to the securing its good. Educate on the principle that you educate for eternity, otherwise it is impossible to produce a beneficial result. If it be a sound maxim, and sound it must be, for Christ Himself delivered it, that the direct way of obtaining such things as are good for us upon earth is to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," what is it but the carrying this maxim into the business of education to count that the best mode of improving the mind, of forming the manners, and of fitting for a profession, is never to suffer the present world to keep the next out of sight, to draw every motive from eternity, and to make every pursuit terminate in God? Only remember, that in carrying out any theory of religious education, far more will depend on example than on precept. II. But we come now to consider THE PROMISE WHICH IS CONTAINED IN OUR TEXT, AND WHICH MAY SERVE TO ENCOURAGE US IN OUR ENDEAVOURS TO COPY THE PATRIARCH'S EXAMPLE. "They shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment." But do children who have been rightly trained always turn out well? When you come to think on what right training is, a system of example as well as of precept, you must assuredly see how likely it is that the best training has been defective—that even parents who have taken most pains have failed in thoroughly educating their children for God; and of course it is vain to urge that the Divine promise has not been accomplished, so long as there could be doubt as to whether the condition on which it is made has been rigidly complied with. But having delivered this caution, we may proceed to state our thorough conviction, that when parents have done their best to bring up their children in the fear of the Lord, the almost invariable result is, that, sooner or later, these children become what they have wished them to be. It is not that children will walk from the first without any deviation in the course which the parent anxiously prescribes; there is no promise to this effect in Scripture; Solomon only says of the child trained in the right way, that "when he is old he will not depart from it"; and the word rendered "old" does not mark youth or manhood, as distinguished from infancy or childhood—it belongs strictly to the decline of life, to the season of decrepitude and

grey hairs. It is the word used, for example, of Isaac, when it is said—"And it came to pass, when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim." Our text, as we have already said, by the using the words "after him" seems equally to be looking on to some distant day, as if God would throw parents altogether on their faith, and emphatically warn them against thinking labour lost, because as yet they can discern none of its fruits. In place of despairing, ought not the stubbornness of the soil to be but an argument for increased diligence in all the arts of moral husbandry—seeing that it is on "patient continuance in well-doing" that a recompense is promised by the word of our God? We find, then, the greatest material for consolation in such a passage as our text. We would not ask a stronger encouragement. The emphatic remonstrance of a parent with a dissolute child is not necessarily thrown away because the child persists in his dissoluteness; it may come up with all the touching tones of the remembered voice when the parent has long lain in the grave, and work remorse and contrition in the prodigal. (*H. Melville, B.D.*) *Duties of parents*:—A well-ordered, godly household is among the noblest triumphs of our Christianity. I. Let us first consider the duties of parents to their children in the years of INFANCY AND CHILDHOOD. The first anxiety of the parents will be about the infant's reception into the Church. And it is a question of no light or ill-considered moment with the pious parents to determine who shall undertake for the child in that holy sacrament; who, in the event of their own early removal, would be most likely to enter into the responsibilities and sanctity of sponsorship, and so give a practical reality to that orphan's promise, "When my father and my mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up." I shall presume to offer suggestions to mothers bearing on the treatment of children in their very earliest years. 1. Thus I exhort you to begin cultivating, even in infancy, the principle of prompt and unquestioning obedience. 2. Passing, however, from the infant stage to that commonly designated as childhood, I proceed to offer some suggestions on the best mode of cultivating the religious affections at this period. 3. But, in connection with the formation of the religious character in childhood, we must consider how far it is expedient to impress upon the mind at this tender age anything of stated and compulsory attention to the practical duties and exercises of the Christian life. II. But let us proceed to consider the duties devolving on parents towards their children at the second stage, or the PERIOD USUALLY ASSIGNED TO THEIR SCHOOL LIFE. But, in relation to the treatment of children at this period of life, the point which of all others will be found to task parental judgment and discrimination most is how to order the discipline of correction or reproof. The discipline itself must, of course, begin from the very earliest period. Let us see what forms of correction seem to be here forbidden. 1. Thus the language may be taken to forbid all angry and intemperate correction. 2. Again, these prohibitions of the apostles extend to that cold, distant, and forbidding demeanour which some fathers think essential to the maintenance of parental authority; but which, in effect, turns the reverence of children into slavish fear. 3. But these are negative directions. What suggestions are to be offered towards a plan of temperate, judicious, and yet firm and effectual correction? Of these some are obvious and general; as, for instance, that all correction be administered upon principles of the most righteous fairness. Again, it should always be apparent to children that you are driven to the use of correction by a loving necessity—by the affection you bear to their souls. 4. But a more important direction for the administering of reproof is to be given, founded on the law for dealing with offenders, laid down by our Lord Himself. "Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee thou hast gained thy brother." Here is an excellent model for parental reproofs. First, let a little time elapse after the wrong is done to give opportunity for reflection. III. The third class of suggestions to be offered on the duties which parents owe to their children has respect to the interval between the CLOSE OF THE EDUCATION PERIOD and the time when the parental roof is quitted, and entrance has to be made on the active duties of life. 1. And here the first subject of anxious thought to the parent will be a devout and earnest preparation for the rite of Confirmation. 2. A second counsel for this period goes to recommend a careful avoidance of all needless and irritating restrictions upon children; all tightly held reins upon their reasonable choice and liberty; all those offending reminders of an unmitigated and unlightened yoke which might tempt them to leave the parental roof before the time. 3. We may conclude with one other suggestion having reference to the choice of

a calling for our children, or their ultimate settlement in life. (*D. Moore, M.A.*) *Family religion*:—I. THE DUTY OF FAMILY RELIGION IS CLEARLY DERIVED FROM SCRIPTURE BY THE CASE OF ABRAHAM. When it is said that God knew, that is, approved him in his conduct, in that he commanded his children and household after him, we must consider such approbation extended to all who tread in the steps of Abraham in this particular. It is clearly the duty of every Christian to do all the good which he can during the time of his sojourn here upon earth, whether as relates to the bodies or the souls of men. The more nearly persons are allied to us, the more binding is the duty. The master of a family then must improve his talent. His influence and authority is a sacred trust to be accounted for at the great day. I infer, therefore, upon these grounds the duty of family prayer. In addition to this, all the members of a household have many wants and share many blessings in common, and therefore all should join together in a common service of prayer and praise. II. Having thus pointed out the duty of family prayer, we MAY CONSIDER THE ADVANTAGES RESULTING FROM IT. It is an acknowledgment day by day of God's right over us, of our dependence on Him for everything which we enjoy, either as relates to time or eternity. It is a solemn memento to all the members of a household that God is greatly to be feared. It is a positive channel by which our heavenly Father conveys multiplied blessings to those who wait upon Him. Moreover it tends to unite together the members of a family, and to lessen those jars and dissensions which often interrupt the peace of households. III. But THERE ARE DIFFICULTIES IN THE WAY OF FAMILY PRAYER TO BE CONSIDERED. First, as to the time and manner of conducting it. Only determine to begin the practice, and the fit time will easily be found. But again, a difficulty may be urged that persons are not always in a becoming state of mind to pray, and that therefore it is not desirable or advantageous to appoint a set time for prayer. This would be a valid argument against all appointed seasons of prayer whatever, and I believe that we enter upon most dangerous ground in admitting any force in such an objection. We must stir up the gift of God within us, and this most especially by calling upon Him to enable us to pray, and by setting ourselves to pray in dependence on the Holy Spirit who helpeth our infirmities. IV. We have now to consider HOW FAMILY PRAYER OUGHT TO BE CONDUCTED. Let it be done with gravity, reverence, and seriousness, as becomes the Almighty Being whom we are going to address, and in whose special presence we are about to appear. Let this be done, where it is possible, both morning and evening; in the morning before the members of the family disperse to their several employments, and in the evening at a convenient hour before they retire to rest. (*H. J. Hastings, M.A.*) *Family worship*: its propriety and utility:—I. THE OBLIGATION we are under to maintain the worship of God in our families. 1. And here we will first of all observe that family worship is reasonable in itself. Shall the father of a human family be respected in his person, acknowledged in his authority, and loved for his paternal kindness; and shall the one common Father of all, the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of mankind, and the God of all our mercies, remain unrespected, unacknowledged, unloved? 2. Moreover, family worship comes recommended to us by many scriptural examples. Joshua's well-known determination was: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." When David had brought the Ark of the Covenant from the house of Obed-edom, and set it in the midst of the tent which he had pitched for it, he "returned to bless his house." Job, fearing lest his sons in the unchecked gaiety of their hearts should blaspheme the Lord, "rose up early in the morning and offered sacrifices for them all," and "thus did Job continually." Cornelius was "a devout man—one that feared God with all his house, and prayed to God always." We read of the Saviour praying with His disciples as well as for them, and often did He privately instruct them. II. THE ADVANTAGES derivable from family worship. 1. The continuance and prevalence of piety in our families is, in a good measure, assured by family worship. 2. Family worship, too, when prudently conducted, is attended with this advantage—it tends to promote unity and peace in households. 3. Another great advantage resulting almost necessarily from the practice of family worship is the preservation of a sense of Divine and spiritual things in the mind. 4. A further advantage derivable from family worship is the efficiency it gives to ministerial labour. 5. And whatever advantage the worship and service of God in our families failed to produce, our performance of a plain and acknowledged duty would bring with it its own rich reward. As in Psalm xix. 11, we read, "In keeping God's commandments there is a great

reward." III. The excuses made for neglecting family worship. 1. An excuse made by many for neglecting family worship is want of ability to pray in the presence of others, or to lead a family's devotions. Now, it so happens that this is almost the only case in which people pretend to have a very mean opinion of their own abilities. But, admitting you have no ability to do so, you may seek and ask it. 2. Others, again, will say, We fear being ridiculed; we fear we shall be thought too strict and precise in our domestic habits. Here, however, I would observe: The irreligion of the multitude should be a powerful incentive with us to cherish religious habits and the fear of God in our houses. 3. Another excuse urged by some is, We have no time. Bring this excuse to the Bible. Abraham had flocks and herds exceeding many, and very much cattle. Job, too, had the same. Joshua was the leader and commander of all the armies of Israel. David occupied a throne, and had all the cares of government on his mind. But have you really no leisure?—none for amusement? 4. A final excuse we shall notice is this, Fear of personal restraint. This excuse, if we mistake not, lies at the root of almost every other. Let the heart be examined, and many a one will find there, "I am fearful of a restraint upon myself; I am afraid if I have daily family worship in my house I shall not be able to indulge myself and enjoy the world as I am disposed to do; more will be expected from me than is expected now; I must be consistent; if I say, 'Hallowed be Thy name,' I must not take the name of God in vain. (*W. Mudge, B.A.*) "*My mother never tells lies*":—Some females, says *The St. Louis Observer*, met at the house of a friend, in this city, for an evening visit, when the following scene and conversation occurred:—The child of one of the females, about five years old, was guilty of rude, noisy conduct, very improper on all occasions, and particularly so at a stranger's house. The mother kindly reproved her. "Sarah, you must not do so." The child soon forgot the reproof, and became as noisy as ever. The mother firmly said, "Sarah, if you do so again I will punish you." But not long after Sarah "did so again." When the company were about to separate, the mother stepped into a neighbour's house, intending to return for the child. During her absence the thought of going home recalled to the mind of Sarah the punishment which her mother told her she might expect. The recollection turned her rudeness and thoughtlessness to sorrow. A young lady present observing it, and learning the cause, in order to pacify her, said, "Never mind, I will ask your mother not to whip you." "Oh," said Sarah, "that will do no good; my mother never tells lies." Said my informant, who is also a parent, "I learned a lesson from the reply of that child which I shall never forget. It is worth everything in the training of a child to make it feel that its mother never tells lies." (*Moral and Religious Anecdotes.*) *Parents, a blessing*:—I thank God for two things, yes, for a thousand; but for two among many—first, that I was born and bred in the country, of parents that gave me a sound constitution and a noble example. I never can pay back what I got from my parents. If I were to raise a monument of gold higher than heaven, it would be no expression of the debt of gratitude which I owe to them for that which they unceasingly gave, by the heritage of their body and the heritage of their souls, to me. And next to that I am thankful that I was brought up in circumstances where I never became acquainted with wickedness. (*H. W. Beecher—from his last public letter.*) *The blessedness of submission to parents*:—A child who had been trained in the ways of religion by a parent who was kind, but judiciously firm, as she sunk to rest in peaceful reliance on her Saviour's love, affectionately thanked her beloved mother for all her tender care and kindness, but added, "I thank you most of all for having subdued my self-will." And why so much gratitude for the mother's faithful discipline? Doubtless because the child regarded it as preparatory to the submission of her will to God, and thus instrumental of her salvation. *Family religion*:—Religion in thy house must of necessity be minded, or the whole family is cursed. The naturalists observe of the eagle that, building her nest on high, she is much maligned by a venomous serpent called *parias*, which, because it cannot reach to the nest, maketh to the windward, and breathes out its poison, so that the air being infected, the eagle's young may be destroyed; but by way of prevention, the eagle, by a natural instinct, keepeth a kind of agate stone in her nest, which, being placed against the wind, preserveth her young. Satan, the crooked serpent, is ever busy to poison the air in thine house, and thereby to destroy thyself, servants, and whole household. The only stone for prevention is to set up religion. (*G. Swinnock.*) *Parental example*:—The ancient Romans were accustomed to place the busts of their distinguished ancestors in the vestibules of their houses,

that they might be continually reminded of their noble deeds. They supposed that a recollection of their illustrious virtues would lead to the imitation of the same by all the living members of their households. There is no doubt that the influence of this practice was most happy upon the living, awakening in many breasts high and noble aspirations. At any rate, history records the names of many renowned Romans who descended from the families in which this custom was observed. The young grew up to reverence the worthies whose statues they daily saw, and to emulate the virtues which gave their ancestors such lasting fame. In these days we have no busts of honoured ancestors in the porches of our dwellings; but we have something more impressive. The characters of living parents are constantly presented for the imitation of children. Their example is continually sending forth a silent power to mould young hearts for good or ill; not for a single month or year, but through the whole impressible period of childhood and youth, the influence of parental example is thus felt. If it be constituted of the highest and purest elements, the results will be unspeakably precious. Sons and daughters will become patterns of propriety and goodness, because their parents are such.

Family prayer.—In Greenland, when a stranger knocks at the door, he asks, "Is God in this house?" and if they answer "Yes," he enters. Reader, this little messenger knocks at your door with the Greenland salutation, Is God in this house? Were you, like Abraham, entertaining an angel unawares, what would be the report he would take back to heaven? Would he find you commanding your children and your household, and teaching them the way of the Lord? Would he find an altar in your dwelling? Do you worship God with your children? . . . If not, then God is not in your house. A prayerless family is a Godless family. . . . I have sometimes seen family worship in great houses; but I have felt that God was quite as near when I knelt with a praying family on the earthen floor of their cottage. I have known of social worship among the reapers in a barn. It used to be common in the fishing-boats upon the friths and lakes of Scotland. I have heard of its being observed in the depths of a coal-pit. I scarcely know the situation in life in which a willing family might not contrive to pray together. If you live in a scoffing, ungodly neighbourhood, so much the better. Abraham built his altar whilst the heathen Canaanites looked on. He lifted up a testimony for God, and God honoured him, so that Abimelech, his neighbour, was constrained to say, "God is with thee in all that thou doest." (*J. Hamilton, D.D.*)

What the religious man is to his family.—The religious man may be considered in his family as the keystone to the arch of a building, which binds and holds all the parts of the edifice together. If this keystone be removed, the fabric will tumble to the ground, and all the parts be separated from each other. Or he is to his family as the good shepherd, under whose protection and care the flock may go in and out and find pasture; but when the shepherd is smitten, the sheep will be scattered. (*H. G. Salter.*)

Christian example.—The Christian parent ought to be a living exemplification of Christianity. His house, his habits, his associates, his pursuits, his recreations, ought all to be so regulated as to evince that religion is, indeed, the parent of order, the inspirer of good sense, the well-spring of good humour, the teacher of good manners, and the perennial source of happiness and peace. (*Bp. Jebb.*)

Parental instruction.—A prison chaplain gives it as his experience that "the last thing forgotten in all the recklessness of dissolute profligacy is the prayer or hymn taught by a mother's lips, or uttered at a father's knee; and where there seems to have been any pains bestowed even by one parent to train up a child aright, there is in general more than ordinary ground for hope."

Moulding human character; a noble work.—Raphael did well, and Phidias did well; but it is not painter or sculptor who is making himself most nobly immortal. It is he who is making true impressions upon the mind of man; frescoes for eternity, that will not shine out till the light of heaven reveals them; sculptures, not wrought in outward things, but in the inward nature and character of the soul. (*H. W. Beecher.*)

Young should be trained to attendance at public worship.—The question is often asked how shall we get our working-classes to attend public worship? The answer may be supplied by an incident of my boyhood. On the mantelshef of my grandmother's best parlour, among other marvels, was an apple in a phial. It quite filled up the body of the bottle, and my wondering inquiry was, "How could it have been got into its place?" By stealth I climbed a chair to see if the bottom would unscrew, or if there had been a join in the glass throughout the length of the phial. I was satisfied by careful observation that neither of these theories

could be supported, and the apple remained to me an enigma and a mystery. But as it was said of that other wonder, the source of the Nile, "Nature well known, no mystery remains," so was it here. Walking in the garden I saw a phial placed on a tree bearing within it a tiny apple, which was growing within the crystal; now I saw it all; the apple was put into the bottle while it was little and grew there. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 20. Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous.—*God's judgment on Sodom*.—I. The vale of Sodom was a region blooming and smiling in all the riches of nature; ON EVERY HAND THERE WAS SOMETHING TO RAISE THE THOUGHTS TO THE CREATOR. But amidst all this, what was man? His wickedness was so aggravated and extreme, that the region itself was doomed to perish with its inhabitants. Sin still infects the fair field of nature, and it is this which spoils the beauty of the scene. If all the sin in the world could become a visible thing, it would blast and overpower in our view all the beauty of nature. The sin of Sodom was so aggravated that its cry went up to heaven, and the righteous Governor was obliged to manifest Himself. II. It is impossible not to be struck with THE CALMNESS AND QUIETNESS WITH WHICH THE WORK OF VENGEANCE PROCEEDED. Three persons came on a friendly visit to Abraham. They accepted his hospitality; spoke with him on a matter of complacent interest—the renewed assurance of his posterity. Then "the men rose up from thence and looked toward Sodom." We are left in the dark as to one circumstance here. Only two of the persons went on to Sodom, leaving Abraham to converse with the Almighty. The third disappears from our view—unless he was a manifestation of the Divine Being Himself, and the same that Abraham conversed with in that solemn character. III. Notice WHAT VALUE THE LORD MUST SET ON THE RIGHTEOUS, when for the sake of ten such men He would have spared Sodom. Only one righteous man dwelt in Sodom, and he was saved. IV. THE PRECISE MANNER OF THE FEARFUL CATASTROPHE IS BEYOND OUR CONJECTURE. It would seem that an earthquake either accompanied or followed it, but the "fire from heaven" is intimated as the grand chief agent of the destruction. The people of Sodom had no time for speculations; there was just time for terror and conscience and despair. Yet our Lord says there is a still greater guilt, a more awful destruction even than theirs. The man that lives and dies rejecting Him had better have been exposed to the rain of fire and brimstone and gone down in the gulf of the vale of Siddim. (*J. Foster.*) *Lessons from Sodom*.—I. Notice first THE WORDS OF GOD WHICH INTRODUCE THIS HISTORY. "Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great," &c. Behind this human manner of speaking what a lesson is here! The judgments of God from time to time overtake guilty nations and guilty men; but, huge and overwhelming catastrophes as these often are, there is nothing hasty, blind, precipitate about them. He is evermore the same God who, when the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah waxed great, is described as going down to see and inquire whether they had "done altogether according to the cry of it." II. In God's assurance to Abraham that if there are fifty, forty, thirty, twenty, or even ten righteous men found in the city He will not destroy it, we may recognize a very important law of His government of the world: this, namely,—THAT IT IS NOT THE PRESENCE OF EVIL BUT THE ABSENCE OF GOOD WHICH BRINGS THE LONG-SUFFERING OF GOD TO AN END. However corrupt any fellowship of men may be, however far gone in evil, yet so long as there is a sound, healthy kernel in it of righteous men, that is, of men who love and fear God and will witness for God, there is always hope. III. This promise of God, "I will not destroy it for ten's sake," SHOWS US WHAT RIGHTEOUS MEN, LOVERS AND DOERS OF THE TRUTH, ARE. They are as the lightning conductors, drawing aside the fiery bolts of His vengeance, which would else have long since scorched, shattered, and consumed a guilty world. Oftentimes, it may be, they are little accounted of among men, being indeed the hidden ones of God crying in their secret places for the things which are done against the words of God's lips. The world may pass them, may know nothing of them, yet it is for their sakes that the world is endured and continues unto this day. IV. Does not this remind us of one duty on behalf of others which we might effectually fulfil if a larger measure of grace dwelt in our hearts?—I MEAN THE DUTY OF PRAYER AND INTERCESSION FOR OTHERS. Prayer for others is never lost, is never in vain; often by it we may draw down blessing upon others, but always and without fail it will return in blessing on ourselves. (*Archbishop Trench.*) *Sodom*.—I. SODOM'S SINFULNESS. Her sins were committed amidst an unbounded

flush of prosperity; they were committed amidst scenes of much natural loveliness, Nature being outraged before the eye of her most beautiful forms; and they were committed not only in opposition to Nature's silent, but to God's spoken, warnings.

II. SODOM'S WARNINGS. One was given by the entrance of Lot within its gates; another was given by the advent of Chedorlaomer and the invaders from the east. Abraham and Melchizedek cast their sublime and awful shadows from the King's Dale southward upon Gomorrah's walls; but the sinners within felt not the hallowing sense of their presence, trembled not at the steps of their majesty.

III. SODOM'S INTERCESSOR. Abraham's prayer shows—1. The confidence that existed between himself and God. 2. It shows God's personal knowledge of evil. 3. It shows God's reluctance to punish. 4. It gives proof of the tremendous guilt of Sodom.

IV. This terrible catastrophe lies in a BYE-PATH OF THE DIVINE PROCEDURE; it did not relate immediately to the general course of the patriarchal dispensation; and yet what an awful "aside" did the fall of these cities utter. It must have struck Abraham with a new sense of the evil of sin and of the holiness and justice of God. (*G. Gilfillan.*)

*God's judgments on nations:—*I. THEY ARE PRECEDED BY A LONG HISTORY OF WICKEDNESS. 1. The shedding of innocent blood (Gen. iv. 10; Job xvi. 18). 2. The peculiar sin of Sodom. 3. The oppression of the people of God. 4. Withholding the hire of the labourer (James v. 4).

II. THEY ARE MANIFESTLY RIGHTEOUS. 1. They proceed slowly. 2. They are only inflicted when the reasons of them have been made evident. 3. They are self-vindicating. (*T. H. Leale.*)

*The depravity of Sodom:—*We have to speak, then, of Sodom's sinfulness. Delicacy may seem to repel us from such a subject altogether, but there is a false as well as a true delicacy, which, by passing by sin in silence, gives it an amnesty, and suggests the thought of its repetition. Had the sin of Sodom been confined to that people, and had it been rooted out with the guilty cities, it would almost have been sacrilege against human nature to dig it up from the slush of the sea of death, and expose it to the world. But alas! it still exists even in Christian nations, and requires still to be denounced. Had there been but one prevalent evil practice in Sodom, there is something so disgusting, and at the same time comparatively so rare, in the sin which bears the name of the city, that it might have been as well, perhaps, to have passed it over in silence. But it is evident that the peculiar iniquity of Sodom was only the climax and consummation of the general depravity of the place. This is clear, both from the general principles of human nature, and from certain distinct declarations in the Word of God. We are told that "pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness," were the sins, or rather were sins producing the flagrant and fatal sin of Sodom; and no doubt along with these every species of excess and licentiousness abounded, so that the city formed, with the exception of Lot and his family, one blot on the face of the earth; and we can conceive of a visitor shuddering with horror, as, passing through it at eventide in haste, he in this street hears cries, faint and half-sincere, of "Father, force me not!" and in another, finds men and women staggering in their vomit; and in a third, hears men cursing Jehovah, and cursing Lot, and cursing Abraham; and in a fourth, sees obscene dances; and in a fifth, beholds many plunging into the fires of an idol-sacrifice. All this, and more than this, which dares not even be shadowed out in expression, might have been seen in this fearful city, running over as a great caldron of iniquity, and coming to a point in that sin for which its inhabitants are set forth for an example, "suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." It added to the aggravation of these sins, that they were committed amidst an unbounded flush of prosperity; that they were committed amidst scenes of much natural loveliness, nature being outraged before the eye of her most beautiful forms; and that they were committed not only in opposition to nature's silent, but to God's uttered protest. (*G. Gilfillan.*)

*Sodom and its sin:—*Sodom itself stood not only in the alluvium of a river bed, but on a main highway for land carriage between Babylon and Egypt. The natural consequences of such a position followed fast. When Ezekiel in his analysis of its decline calls "fulness of bread," comes without toil to a population so favourably situated. Wealth flowed in. With wealth easily acquired came "abundance of idleness"; and with leisure and wealth came luxury, their daughter. Then followed pride, the insolence of the pampered; at last, self-indulgence and shameless licence. Possibly the time had not yet arrived for the cultivation of those adornments which lend dignity to wealth, and serve even to veil the deformity of dissolute manners; of letters, I mean, and of the arts. Possibly the race was not endowed by nature with such gifts. At any rate, we detect no signs of such a degree of culture or refinement as

has always accompanied civilization among Aryan peoples. The early civilization of the Hamitic tribes seems to have been of a vulgar material type, and to have fallen a speedy prey to vice and corruption. How far that corruption had gone in the case of Sodom is only too apparent on the face of the narrative. Disgusting and unnatural lust has been the plague-spot of heathenism in other times, as well as of at least one Moslem race in our own. But it never carried itself with such effrontery, or showed its vileness so openly, as in the town which has given it a name. Wherever it has appeared, it has marked a stage of social degradation ripe for destruction. Four hundred years after Sodom, other Canaanite tribes in Palestine had become infected with it, till the land was ready, in the strong words of Leviticus, to "spue them out." Its prevalence in Greece when St. Paul wrote his letter to the Church of Rome showed how near Greece was to its fall. What it means in the case of the Turk, we are seeing to-day with our eyes. Unnatural vice fills the cup of iniquity to overflowing. It sends up a "cry" to heaven that the righteous Judge must answer. (*J. O. Dykes, D.D.*)

Vers. 22-33. Abraham stood yet before the Lord.—*Abraham's intercession for Sodom:*—The intercession of Abraham is the first prayer that the Bible records; and in its great characteristics, human and spiritual, it is one of the most remarkable. It is the intercession of a good man, a friend of God, for men who, in their wickedness and their defiance of God, had well-nigh approached the utmost possibilities of human evil. I. A MAN'S PRAYING POWER IS NOT AN ARBITRARY THING; IT IS THE RESULT OF LONG ANTECEDENT SPIRITUAL PROCESSES. It is very significant that it is Abraham and not Lot who is the intercessor for Sodom. 1. Jehovah does not even impart His confidence to Lot; only at the last moment, when all is determined, He mercifully sends His messengers to bring him to a place of safety. 2. Even supposing Lot had been made acquainted with Jehovah's purpose, he would not have been capable of interceding for Sodom as Abraham did. He had not the requisite spiritual qualifications. There was spiritual life in Lot, but it ever leaned to the worldly side of things. There was spiritual life in Abraham, but it leaned to the heavenly side of things. II. THE PRAYING POWER OF MAN IS CONDITIONED UPON THE CIRCUMSTANCES BY WHICH HE SURROUNDS HIMSELF. Abraham was at Mamre; Lot in Sodom. III. EVEN WHEN GOD VOUCHSAFES TO VISIT A MAN, MUCH OF HIS SPIRITUAL BLESSING DEPENDS ON HIS CHARACTER AND CIRCUMSTANCES. IV. IT IS INSTRUCTIVE TO COMPARE THE INTERCESSION OF ABRAHAM WITH THE PLEADINGS OF LOT WHEN THE ANGELS SOUGHT TO DELIVER HIM. The prayer of Abraham is perfect in its humility, when daring in its boldness. The prayer of Lot is troubled, selfish, and self-willed. V. There is one contrast more, which is very suggestive. THE NARROW, SELFISH, SELF-WILLED PRAYER OF LOT WAS ANSWERED; THE HOLY, CHRIST-LIKE INTERCESSION OF ABRAHAM WAS UNAVAILING. Therefore it is no criterion of a right or wrong prayer, that it does not receive the kind of answer we solicit. (*H. Allon.*) *Abraham pleading for Sodom:*—I. ABRAHAM'S INTERCESSION WAS THE RESULT OF A DIVINE COMMUNICATION (Gen. xviii. 17, 18). The Spirit of truth inspires men to pray by showing them things to come. It is asserted by Dr. Finney that there are three ways in which God still makes communications to men: first, by the express promises and predictions of the Bible; second, through the movements of His providence; and third, by His Spirit, instructing us and making intercession for us, because we know not what to pray for as we ought. When we are thus moved to pray, we pray according to the will of God. II. THE PATRIARCH'S PRAYER WAS GROUNDED ON A CONVICTION OF GOD'S CHANGELESS RECTITUDE (see ver. 25). "It is," as one says, "man beseeching that right may prevail; that it may prevail among men: by destruction, if that must be; by the infusion of a new life, if it is possible. It is man asking that the gracious order of God may be victorious, in such a way as He knows best, over the disorder which His rebellious creatures have striven to establish in His universe. The mercy which is prayed for is not an exception from righteousness, but the fruit of it." Any other prayer must be a mockery and an abomination in the sight of God. Any other prayer is an insinuation that man is a better being than his Maker. III. ABRAHAM'S PRAYER WAS DEFINITE. He had many flocks and herds, men-servants and women-servants; yet he asked only that the inhabitants of those guilty cities might be spared. His one request he made known in simple, straightforward language, speaking with God as a man talks with his friend. This is the character of most of the prayers recorded in the Bible. IV. ABRAHAM'S PRAYER CONSTANTLY ENLARGED ITSELF. He asked for more and more: first, that the city should be spared for the sake of fifty righteous men, then for the sake of forty.

five, then for forty, for thirty, for twenty, and for ten. There he paused. A whole city would have been spared for the sake of ten righteous men. God tempts His children to ask large blessings. We make too small demands on His mercy and goodness. V. ABRAHAM'S PRAYER WAS INSPIRED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT. The impulse came from above. As the strings of an Æolian harp are breathed upon by the winds of heaven and made to send forth sounds of an almost unearthly sweetness in swelling and dying cadences, so the mute faculties of the human soul are made vocal: unspoken thoughts become articulate in prayers and intercessions, according to the will of God; in supplications and thanksgivings; nay, even in deep sighings and groanings that utter themselves forth with supernatural sweetness and power, expressing the mind of the Spirit and the will of God. (*E. B. Mason, D.D.*) *Abraham's intercession*:—I. THE MARVELLOUS CONDESCENSIONS OF GOD. 1. He has friends among men. 2. He reveals to His friends His plans, His hidden purposes. (1) Because God had great things in store for him, He would take Abraham into His cabinet council. (2) Another reason was that Abraham was a wise and faithful parent. II. GOD TESTS THE WICKEDNESS OF MEN TO SHOW WHETHER OR NOT IT IS RIPE FOR JUDGMENT. III. THIS NARRATIVE DISCLOSES IMPORTANT TRUTHS CONCERNING INTERCESSORY PRAYER. The first solemn prayer on record is an intercession, a plea for sparing a wicked city. We see here: 1. The encouragements to intercessory prayer. God made known to Abraham what He was about to do, and thus invited his intercession. He has made known to us the purposes of His government. He has disclosed the issues of sin and holiness. Does He not thus invite us to intercede with Him in behalf of sinful men? 2. We see here the qualifications for intercessory prayer. Power in prayer is in proportion to holiness. The best men are nearest to God, and most powerful in prayer. Faith strengthened his petition. Humility made his approval pleasing to God. Charity enforced his plea. Earnestness characterized his intercession. 3. We see here the grounds for intercessory prayer. Abraham did not approach God thoughtlessly, or without good reasons which he was prepared to plead. He urged the value of righteousness. He also urged God's perfect justice as a reason for his petition. God would not destroy the innocent with the guilty. The Almighty is pleased to invite us to urge upon Him reasons for granting our requests, though they are at the beginning perfectly plain to Him. If to these reasons we add also His mercy displayed in the sacrifice of Christ, may not our prayers be irresistible? IV. WE LEARN THAT THERE ARE LIMITATIONS TO INTERCESSORY PRAYER. Why did not Abraham ask that the judgment be averted from Sodom for the sake of five righteous men? God draws out from him the intensity of his intercessory spirit; and as the suppliant approaches to nearer acquaintance with God, he gains a better understanding of the Divine judgments. He is led to a new insight into the condition of Sodom, and the forbearance and justice of God. Abraham appears at first to have been shocked at the destruction with which God threatened Sodom. His justice had not been outraged. His love had not been abused. But intimate communion with God reconciled him to the punishment which God inflicted. The point at which he ceased to plead came sooner than we might have expected. But the failure of his intercession, if he regarded it as a failure, resulted from his ignorance of the depths of sin, and an inadequate conception of the mercy of God. Men are often shocked at God's threatened punishment of the wicked. But the true way to comprehend the meaning of His threats is, not to argue against the justice of God, not to explain away His threatenings, and presume to interpret them in violation of the ordinary laws of language; but go and plead with Him for the lost, and as you approach nearer to Him in the increasing earnestness of petition, you shall gain such clearer insight into His wisdom and mercy as shall content you with His purposes. (*A. E. Dunning.*) *Intercessory prayer*:—I. THE RIGHT TO UTTER IT PRESUPPOSES A LIFE OF GODLINESS. II. IT IS SUPPORTED BY THE THOUGHT OF THE DIVINE JUSTICE. III. IT IS MARKED BY THE SPIRIT OF BOLDNESS. 1. This boldness was based upon the conviction that God would stay judgment upon wicked communities for the sake of the righteous few among them. 2. This boldness was based upon a sense of the Fatherhood of God. Without a sense of this filial relationship with God no man could presume so much. 3. This boldness is tempered by humility. Abraham speaks as one who can hardly realize his right to speak at all (ver. 27). He remembers what he is in the sight of his Creator. Our high privilege does not destroy the reasons for awe and reverence. IV. WE MUST RECOGNIZE THE FACT THAT IT HAS PROPER LIMITS. 1. The moral limits of the Divine clemency. The long-suffering and forbearance of God may be tempted too far. 2. By a sense of what

is due to the Divine honour. The dignity of God's character and government must be upheld. 3. By our recognition of the Divine sovereignty. God rules all things supremely by a righteous will. It is not given to us to adjust the exact proportions of justice and mercy in God's dealings with mankind. To attempt this would be presumption. 4. By the confidence which we ought to have in the Divine character. Abraham felt that he had no need to go further. He had seen enough already of God's favour and willingness to save. Therefore he might hope and trust for the future. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Pleading for Sodom*:—I. THE BURDEN OF THE DIVINE ANNOUNCEMENT. II. THE IMPRESSION WHICH THIS ANNOUNCEMENT MADE ON ABRAHAM'S MIND. 1. There was a natural anxiety about his kinsman, Lot. 2. There was also a fear lest the total destruction of the cities of the plain might prejudice the character of God in the minds of the neighbouring peoples. III. THE ELEMENTS OF ABRAHAM'S INTERCESSION. 1. It was lonely prayer. 2. It was prolonged prayer. 3. It was very humble prayer. 4. This prayer was based on a belief that God possessed the same moral intuitions as himself. 5. This prayer was persevering. IV. OBSERVE ONE OF THE GREAT PRINCIPLES IN THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT OF THE WORLD. A whole city had been spared if ten righteous men had been found within its walls. Ungodly men little realize how much they owe to the presence of the children of God in their midst. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Intercessory prayer*:—I. THIS IS THE ENERGETIC ENERGIZING (LITERAL FOR "EFFECTUAL") "PRAYER OF THE RIGHTEOUS (CHRISTIAN) MAN." In ingenuity, in a kind of dialectic skill where logic is spiritualized by devotion, and reasons step by step, it is the mate and type of the cry of the woman out of the coasts of Canaan, "That be far from Thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked;" and then, carrying the moral argument deeper yet, "and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from Thee." How well this clear-sighted man knew, how much better than some of us "advanced" nineteenth-century Christians know, what kind of a God God is! How vivid the figures! How real the action! How intense the personality! "Anthropomorphism"? Very well: why not? The yearning, aching heart of a mother, of a loving friend, of a true patriot, of a shepherd-king whose descendants, herds and flock lie asleep around him in the pastures every night while he leans on his staff and talks with the Almighty, is not to be frightened by ultra-spiritualism with a Greek polysyllable. The first chapter of St. John ought to exorcise that phantom. What is "the Word made flesh" but anthropomorphism—God in man's form? What faith foresaw and prophecy foretold, the incarnation has made a fact; and thereby prayer becomes what otherwise it could never be—one part in a dialogue, one voice in an antiphon, a conversation between earth and heaven. II. A CHIEF BLESSEDNESS OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER IS THAT WE CAN USE IT FOR THOSE WHOM WE LOVE AND CARE FOR WHEN WE CAN SERVE THEM IN NO OTHER WAY. Their distance, their very nearness, their unbelief, their pride, their dignity, their resentments, their desperation, may render our other helps—helps of the hand or tongue, of counsel or cheer or warning—of the most delicate generality or the friendliest sympathy, impossible or futile. We stand by the sufferer, the blind wanderer, the ungrateful child, the hardened sinner, in speechless agony and dismay. The patriarch doubtless felt that to go down into Sodom and preach against sodomy would be waste, or worse. But there is one gracious benefaction which no possible hindrance can stay; one gracious office which cannot lose its grace by opposition, or apathy, or rejection, or scorn; one heavenly charity which we can bestow at our own free will, everywhere, under all outward conditions, in spite of any infirmity or rebuff or discouragement, in health or sickness, by ejaculation or continued entreaty, as long as we live. III. NOTICE THE JOINING OF THE TWO BRANCHES OF THE CHRISTIAN LOVE, THE LOVE OF THE BROTHER MAN WITH THE LOVE OF THE FATHER. (*Bishop F. D. Huntington.*) *Abraham's intercession for Sodom*:—Next to being concerned about his own safety, a good man will be anxious that others should be saved. The Bible contains several examples of this benevolent anxiety. Thus Jeremiah (ix. 1; xiii. 17; xiv. 17), Isaiah (xxii. 4), Lot (2 Pet. ii. 7, 8), &c., &c. The reasons are clear. 1. A good man cannot forget his own past life. 2. He has now a clear view of the nature and effects of sin. 3. He desires the extension of the kingdom of God. Hence his intercession for Sodom was—I. MARKED BY GREAT IMPORTUNITY. Importunity an element of successful prayer. Jacob wrestled till the break of day. The blind man (Mark x. 48) cried "so much the more." Our Lord enforced importunity in His teachings (Luke xviii. 1; see also Luke xi. 5; xxi. 36; Rom. xii. 12; Eph. vi. 18; Col. iv. 2; 1 Thess. v. 17). Abraham was importunate. Prayed six times, and obtained six distinct answers. II. CHARAC-

TERIZED BY WONDERFUL HUMILITY. 1. Did not presume upon the distinguished relation in which he stood to God. Always referred his request to the will and character of God. He prayed because a good man ought to pray; not because being good he deserved to be answered. 2. Acknowledged he was but "dust and ashes" in the presence of God. The Pharisee and the Publican. III. FILLED WITH LOFTY REGARD FOR THE CHARACTER OF GOD. 1. He assumed that the wicked ought to be punished. Of this he expresses no doubt. Adopts this as the inevitable determination of infinite justice. Yet earnestly desires that the righteous may be spared. Would have men know that the righteous God distinguished between the good and the bad. Would rather the wicked should be mercifully spared than that the righteous should be unrighteously destroyed. IV. SIGNALIZED BY A WIDE CHARITY. Would fain believe that there were fifty righteous souls even in Sodom (com. with those who thought that nothing good could come out of Nazareth). Still clung to the hope that there might be some, however few, good men in that vile place. Charity hopeth all things. Would sooner believe too much than that was good of Sodom than too little. V. DISTINGUISHED BY PROFOUND ACQUIESCENCE IN THE WILL OF GOD. Was afraid to go beyond that will. "Suffer me to speak," &c. Went as far as he felt that he dared. Found, as he proceeded, that God would be merciful as well as just; even to the worst. Was willing to save many for the sake of a few (see Matt. xiii. 28, 29). LEARN—1. To pity sinners, and hate sin. 2. To prize the righteous. "The salt of the earth." 3. To intercede for one's own house especially (Job i. 5). (J. C. Gray.)

Four great facts:—In this passage there are four great facts which should be borne in mind by Christian thinkers and teachers. I. That God holds inquest upon the moral condition of cities. II. That God is accessible to earnest human appeal. III. That the few can serve the many. IV. That human prayer falls below Divine resources. (J. Parker, D.D.)

Intercession:—What do most of us know of the value and meaning of intercession? I speak of intercession in its human aspect. And I begin by asking you to confess that you know but little of it as a part of prayer: that most of us, when we have prayed, as we may, more or less fully and earnestly, for ourselves, have done praying; that, whether we feel much or little interest in prayer for ourselves, we feel less or none in prayer for others not ourselves. And in contrast with this admission, it must have struck all of you how very much of intercession there is in our public services—how much in proportion to the other kind of prayer. I might almost say that of prayer directly for ourselves there is but little in the public worship of our Church, following, in this respect as in others, alike the direction of the inspired Scriptures and the example of more ancient Christian Churches. I fear that this is sometimes felt by us to be a drawback to the spiritual character of our congregational devotions. We should like more about ourselves. Even our Lord's own form of prayer has too little about ourselves for our taste. For "our" and "us" we should read "my" Father, "my" daily bread, "my" trespasses, lead "me," deliver "me." Next in order amongst our intercessions we place the ministers of God's Word and sacraments, and the congregations in which they are appointed to conduct that ministry. Thus far we have thought rather of the work of life, the work of rulers, and the work of pastors, and the work of Christians generally; praying that each and all may do that work effectively, and not forget in doing it that, whatever it be, it is the work of God. But now in the last place we are taught to think of the other half of life—its sufferings. I have briefly spoken to you of some of the topics suitable to intercession. Let me not end without a word or two as to the motives by which we should be drawn to it. And I can suffer none to compete in importance with this, the most obvious of all; that all such prayers have a special assurance of acceptance and success. They are, indeed, even more than other prayers, conformable to the mind of God. They are unselfish prayers. It is the recorded experience of one at least who knew what he thus testified, that he had often proved the value of intercessory prayer in its reaction upon other prayer and upon the heart. Often when he knelt down cold and indifferent, unable to brace himself to strong spiritual effort in his own behalf, he bethought himself of another—a friend or a sister—and prayed earnestly to God not for his own but for what he knew to be another's want. And never did he do so without finding himself in no long time released from darkness and bondage, and able to pour out his whole heart, for himself also, with a fervour and happiness which a few moments before had seemed to be impossible. Let us try this experiment. When we know not how to pray, let us intercede. When the chamber of prayer is fastened within us, let the key of intercession be used to unlock it. I need not say

to any one what the effect of intercessory prayer must be in its influence upon our spirit and conduct towards him, or towards those, who have been the subject of it. What a spirit of kindness, of friendly interest, of concern in their best and truest welfare, must it kindle within us! How shall we watch over them and towards them for good! How anxious shall we be to see good, how fearful of communicating evil! How it pledges us to the recollection of their souls, and lays us under a double responsibility not to counteract our own desires, our own efforts, in their behalf! Finally, I must add that intercession is a Divine work, and that, in practising it, we are sharers with Christ and with the Holy Spirit in that which is at once their chosen office and our one hope. When we pray for another, we are doing that, through Christ's merits, which it is our happiness to think that He is doing for us through His own. (*Dean Vaughan.*) *The intercourse of God and His friend*:—I. THE FRIEND OF GOD CATCHES A GLEAM OF DIVINE PITY AND TENDERNESS. Communion with the very Source of all gentle love has softened his heart, and he yearns over the wicked and fated city. Where else than from his heavenly Friend could he have learned this sympathy? The friend of God must be the friend of men; and if they be wicked, and he sees the frightful doom which they do not see, these make his pity the deeper. Abraham does not contest the justice of the doom. He lives too near his friend not to know that sin must mean death. The effect of friendship with God is not to make men wish that there were no judgments for evil-doers, but to touch their hearts with pity, and to stir them to intercession and to effort for their deliverance. II. THE FRIEND OF GOD HAS ABSOLUTE TRUST IN THE RECTITUDE OF HIS ACTS. Abraham's remonstrance, if we may call it so, embodies some thoughts about the government of God in the world which should be pondered. His first abrupt question, flung out without any reverential preface, assumes that the character of God requires that the fate of the righteous should be distinguished from that of the wicked. Another assumption in his prayer is that the righteous are sources of blessing and shields for the wicked. Has he there laid hold of a true principle? Certainly; it is indeed the law that "every man shall bear his own burden," but that law is modified by the operation of this other, of which God's providence is full. Many a drop of blessing trickles from the wet fleece to the dry ground. Many a stroke of judgment is carried off harmlessly by the lightning conductor. The truest "saviours of society" are the servants of God. A third principle is embodied in the solemn question, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? He is Judge of all the earth, and therefore bound by His very nature, as by His relations to men, to do nothing that cannot be pointed to as inflexibly right. But true as the principle is, it needs to be guarded. Abraham himself is an instance that men's conceptions of right do not completely correspond to the reality. His notion of "right" was, in some particulars, as his life shows, imperfect, rudimentary, and far beneath New Testament ideas. Conscience needs education. The best men's conceptions of what befits Divine justice are relative, progressive; and a shifting standard is no standard. It becomes us to be very cautious before we say to God, "This is the way: walk Thou in it"; or dismiss any doctrine as untrue on the ground of its contradicting our instincts of justice. III. THE FRIEND OF GOD HAS POWER WITH GOD. "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" The Divine Friend recognizes the obligation of confidence. True friendship is frank, and cannot bear to hide its purposes. On the human side, we are here taught the great truth that God's friends are intercessors, whose voice has a mysterious but most real power with God. If it be true that, in general terms, the righteous are shields and sources of blessing to the unholy, it is still more distinctly true that they have access to God's secret place with petitions for others as well as for themselves. The desires which go up to God, like the vapours exhaled to heaven, fall in refreshing rain on spots far away from that whence they rose. In these days we need to keep fast hold of our belief in the efficacy of prayer for others and for ourselves. God knows Himself and the laws of His government a great deal better than anybody else does; and He has abundantly shown us in His Word, and by many experiences, that breath spent in intercession is not wasted. In these old times, when worship was mainly sacrificial, this wonderful instance of pure intercession meets us, an anticipation of later times. And from thence onwards there has never failed proof to those who will look for it, that God's friends are true priests, and help their brethren by their prayers. Our voices should "rise like a fountain night and day" for men. But there is a secret distrust of the power and a flagrantly plain neglect of the duty of intercession nowadays, which needs sorely the lesson that God "remembered

Abraham" and delivered Lot. Luther, in his rough, strong way, says: "If I have a Christian who prays to God for me, I will be of good courage, and be afraid of nothing. If I have one who prays against me, I had rather have the Grand Turk for my enemy." (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Abraham's intercession for Sodom*:—

I. THE CLOSE INTIMACY WHICH A GOOD MAN MAY HAVE WITH HIS MAKER. Three things indicate Abraham's closeness of intimacy. 1. He knew his Maker's purpose. 2. He felt his Maker's presence. 3. He heard his Maker's voice. II. THE WONDERFUL INFLUENCE WHICH A GOOD MAN MAY HAVE OVER HIS MAKER. Abraham's prayer was—1. Definite. 2. Unselfish. 3. Trustful. 4. Humble. 5. Importunate. Lessons: 1. The spiritual blessedness of a good man. 2. The social value of a good man. (*Homilist.*) *Abraham's address to God*:—I. THE BEING WE WORSHIP.

1. Infinitely great. 2. Incomprehensibly glorious. 3. Transcendently holy. 4. Unboundedly benevolent. II. THE TRUE CHARACTER OF THE BEST WORSHIPPERS. "Dust and ashes." The terms seem to indicate—1. Our origin and mortality. Formed of the dust; residents of the dust; travellers to the dust. 2. Our depravity. Dust and ashes. Ashes are only the refuse of what was once more valuable. Now man is fallen, debased, and worthless. III. IN WORSHIP GOD ALLOWS US TO SPEAK UNTO HIM. Now, we do this—1. In adoration and praise. 2. In confession of sin. 3. In supplication and prayer. (1) With reverential fear. "In Thy fear will I worship." (2) With deep self-abasement. (3) With resignation to His divine will. (*J. Burns, D.D.*) *Abraham's intercessory prayer*:—I. CONTRASTS.

1. Abraham at Mamre. Lot in Sodom. 2. The peaceful entertainment in the tent of Mamre. The disturbed hospitality of Sodom. 3. The purity of country life—the corruptions of the city. 4. Abraham's prayer for others—Lot's prayer for himself. 5. Sodom was destroyed—Zoar was saved. II. THE VALUE OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER. 1. To pray for others a duty. 2. To pray without discouragement. 3. Its value to others. 4. Its value to ourselves. Our religious life will register itself in prayer. III. THE RELATION OF GOOD MEN TO THE WORLD. 1. They are "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world." 2. Cities and nations attain to true greatness and permanence when they have righteous men in them. 3. With their decline, they decline; and with their extinction they perish. Sodom was safe so long as Lot remained in it. IV. LESSONS: 1. The unselfishness of a religious life. 2. To live near to God. 3. To make the right use of religious knowledge. 4. To run our prayers along the line of God's character, and to base them upon Divine precepts and promises. 5. That prayers may be denied in their letter, but answered in their spirit. (*Lewis O. Thompson.*) *Abraham's intercession*:—I. THE SUPERINDUCING CIRCUMSTANCES OF ABRAHAM'S INTERCESSION.

1. Abraham's characteristic courtesy. 2. The revelation of Divine purposes. II. THE ARGUMENT OF ABRAHAM'S INTERCESSION. 1. An appeal to Divine justice. 2. An appeal to Divine compassion. III. THE REASON OF THE FAILURE OF ABRAHAM'S INTERCESSION. 1. His intense humility, which would not allow him to go beyond a certain limit. 2. His inadequate conception of Divine mercy. 3. His knowledge of the unworthiness of the Sodomites, for whom he pleaded. 4. His spiritual conception of the demerit of sin, and of the perfection of the Divine attribute of justice. Lessons: 1. The possible important consequences of things trifling in themselves: Abraham's courtesy led to the most sublime scene of human intercession on record. 2. The high estimate that God places upon family instruction. 3. God's readiness to answer prayer is greater than the faith of the greatest believer. 4. So long as Abraham interceded, so long Jehovah tarried to listen. 5. There is nothing more acceptable to God than the intercession of His saints. (*D. C. Hughes, M.A.*) *Abraham's intercession*:—I. Abraham makes a good use of his previous knowledge. Being made acquainted with the evil coming upon them he stands in the gap, and labours all he can to avert it. They knew nothing: and if they had, no cries, except the shrieks of desperation, would have been heard from them. It is good having such a neighbour as Abraham; and still better to have an Intercessor before the throne who is always heard. The conduct of the patriarch furnishes an example to all who have an interest at the throne of grace, to make use of it in behalf of their poor ungodly countrymen and neighbours.

2. He does not plead that the wicked may be spared for their own sake, or because it would be too severe a proceeding to destroy them; but for the sake of the righteous who might be found amongst them. Had either of the other pleas been advanced, it had been siding with sinners against God, which Abraham would never do. Wickedness shuts the mouth of intercession; or if any should presume to speak, it would be of no account. But how then, it may be asked, did Christ

make intercession for transgressors? Not by arraigning the Divine throne, nor by alleging ought in extenuation of human guilt; but by pleading His own obedience unto death! 3. He charitably hopes the best with respect to the number of righteous characters even in Sodom. At the outset of his intercession, he certainly considered it as a possible case, at least, that there might be found in that wicked place fifty righteous; and though in this instance he was sadly mistaken, yet we may hope from hence that in those times there were many more righteous people in the world than those which are recorded in Scripture. The Scriptures do not profess to be a book of life, containing the names of all the faithful; but intimate, on the contrary, that God reserves to Himself a people, who are but little known even by His own servants. 4. God was willing to spare the worst of cities for the sake of a few righteous characters. This truth is as humiliating to the haughty enemies of religion as it is encouraging to its friends, and furnishes an important lesson to civil governments, to beware of undervaluing, and still more of persecuting, and banishing men whose concern it is to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world. Except the Lord of Hosts had left us a remnant of such characters, we might ere now have been as Sodom, and made like unto Gomorrah! If ten righteous had been found in Sodom, it had been spared for their sakes: but alas, there was no such number! God called Abraham to Haran, and when he left that place, mention is made not only of "the substance which he had gathered," but of "the souls which he had gotten." But Lot, who went to Sodom of his own accord, though he also gathered substance, yet not a soul seems to have been won over by his residence in the place to the worship of the true God. (*A. Fuller.*) *The world's obligation to God's saints*:—I. THE CERTAIN DESTRUCTION OF THE WICKED; which some people say they cannot believe, because out of harmony with their notions of the character of God. God is determined on the destruction of the cities of the plain, and all their inhabitants; and He gives these reasons (ver. 20)—"The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and their sin is very grievous," or heavy. Observe—1. The cry was very great. A cry of blood, like that of Abel's from the ground, for vengeance against the murderer (ch. iv. 10). Murder, no doubt, was rife in Sodom; and He who had demanded blood for blood, could not overlook it. A cry of proud defiance against God, as represented in Ezek. xvi. 49, 50; and that God knows too well what is due to Himself to disregard. A cry of oppression, injustice, and wrong. The cry of defrauded labourers, which the Apostle James says, "enters into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth" (James v. 4). A cry of cupidity, drunkenness, and revelry, such as went up to Jehovah from those whom He had called to be His people, and to whom "He looked for judgment, but beheld oppression; for righteousness, but beheld a cry" (Isa. v. 7). And shall we not add, a cry from the vexed spirit of righteous Lot—a cry of filial supplication mingling its music, so agreeable to the ears of a loving Father, with the hoarse discord of angry passions and self-inflicted woes? Doubtless that cry from Lot brought down the Omnipotent avenger; and the accumulated cry from the multitude "which no man could number," of His blood-bought people, who have complained to Him of their treatment from a Satan-ruled world, in every generation since, shall at last bring Him down again, to teach the persecutors that they have persecuted not them but Him (Acts ix. 4). 2. Their sin was very grievous, or heavy. Like a black cloud, gathering increased density from accumulated vapours of human wickedness until it becomes so charged with rain, thunder, lightning, and tempest, that it must at length empty itself upon the devoted earth over which it lowers. Thus sin cannot be suffered to press upon God's creation for ever—sooner or later it shall be removed, and all who have their life in it must perish. 3. The signal destruction of Sodom and her kindred cities was resolved on. God is a Sovereign Judge and Ruler. To Him vengeance belongs. "He can create and He destroy." "To Me," says God, "belongeth vengeance and recompense" (Deut. xxxii. 35); and His people are taught to address Him in that character (see Psa. xciv. 1); and shall we say that "God is unrighteous who taketh vengeance"? (Rom. iii. 5). The sinner, in fighting against God, is labouring for his own destruction. II. THE CERTAIN SALVATION OF THE RIGHTEOUS. 1. If this means those whom God shall find naturally righteous, when He comes to take account of such as shall be saved, then the whole human race must be excluded from its benefits, for never since the day of Adam's fall, was there a man, woman, or child on the earth whom God would or could admit to be righteous in themselves. 2. No inspired writer, either of the Old or New Testament, has failed to describe man as a sinner, and far from righteousness. 3. And yet have God's righteous ones, in

every generation, had a place and a mission in the earth. God speaks of them as actually existing human beings. The Bible is full of their history, position, character, proceedings, and prospects. III. THE FORBEARANCE OF GOD TOWARDS THE WICKED, FOR THE SAKE OF THE RIGHTEOUS. Under this head we are called upon to consider—1. That God has a people whom He calls peculiarly His own, mingled among the mass of dead, ignorant, and ungodly human beings composing what is called the world; just as righteous Lot was placed in Sodom, in the city, but not of it, residing in the midst of its depraved inhabitants, yet not identified with their wicked ways or deeds of darkness, “but rather reproving them.” We have a perfect illustration of the external mingling, yet spiritual separation, that exists between Christ’s redeemed ones and the subjects of Satan’s rule in this world, in the parable of the tares and wheat, supplied by our Lord for the instruction and consolation of His people in their present state. And in referring to the value of intercessory prayer for our beloved country at such a time as this. Abraham pleaded for Lot. He remembered him when God announced to him the overthrow of Sodom, where Lot dwelt. Observe: 1. Lot was dear to the heart of Abraham. He called him his brother (Gen. xiii. 8; xiv. 14); and he probably thought there would have been found at least ten righteous persons in his household, for whose sake Sodom would be spared. Thus our Divine Mediator loves those whom “He is not ashamed to call His brethren” (Heb. ii. 11), and claims for their sake the suspension of Almighty judgment pronounced against an apostate world. 2. Lot had accompanied Abraham out of the land of idolatry into the land of promise. He was, therefore, identified with him in his pilgrimage state, and this formed a link between them, which, notwithstanding their present local separation, rendered them objects of tenderest interest to each other. Thus Jesus included in Himself, on the cross, and at the sepulchre, all that the Father had given to Him. They were crucified with Him, and they are risen with Him (Rom. vi. 6; Col. ii. 12). Thus they are one with Him, and He is one with them. 3. But the tie between Abraham and Lot had been drawn still closer by the devoted affection exhibited by the former in rescuing his kinsman from the hands of the spoiler. Sodom had been attacked by the confederate kings, taken, and pillaged. Lot and his family were carried away captives, and his property fell into the hands of the conquerors. Abraham pursued the captors, and at great risk to himself succeeded in delivering the objects of his fraternal interest, and all that belonged to them, out of their hands. Our Divine Champion has done more than this. He has sacrificed His precious life to redeem His beloved ones from eternal captivity, and their inheritance from the confiscation of Almighty justice. The link cannot be more close or inseparable that binds them to their Deliverer and their Head. 4. Abraham obtained all that he desired—not impunity for the guilty citizens of Sodom, but safety for righteous Lot. The Lord was merciful to him (Gen. xix. 16). “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given me; for they are Thine,” and ascribe their salvation from present and eternal evil to the principle of unconditioned grace embodied in that prayer; while feeling satisfied that, as regards God’s dealing with nations or individual members of the human family, merely as such, “the Judge of all the earth will do right” (Gen. xviii. 25). (*S. A. Walker, M.A.*) *A contrast, and a resemblance:*—No scene in English history is more familiar to us from our childhood than that of Queen Philippa kneeling at the feet of Edward III. to plead for the lives of the six burgesses of Calais, who had brought the keys of the city to the conqueror, barefooted and with halters round their necks, ready, by their own deaths, to save the town from the sword. It is chiefly by contrast that this scene illustrates the wonderful narrative now before us; but there is one point of resemblance upon which I wish to lay stress. We may well contrast the cruel ferocity of King Edward, as he cries, “Call the headsman! Cut off their heads!”—sending to death venerable citizens whose only fault was that they had too bravely defended their hearths and homes—with the mingled justice and mercy of God, devoting to well-merited destruction the foulest city on earth, and yet first going down to see (ver. 21), and even willing to spare it if ten good men could be found there. We may contrast Queen Philippa’s petition that six willing martyrs might be spared, with Abraham’s petition that fifty—nay, ten—righteous lives might avail to save thousands of the ungodly. But the point of resemblance is this—that the queen’s intercession was accepted because she was the queen, and was dear to her fierce husband, and that Abraham’s was accepted because he was in a peculiar sense the friend of God. The petitioner in each case had access to the throne, and

could draw near to Him that sat on it. (*E. Stock.*) *The tone of Abraham's intercession*:—The tone of Abraham's intercession may teach us how familiar the intercourse with the heavenly Friend may be. The boldest words from a loving heart, jealous of God's honour, are not irreverent in His eyes. This prayer is abrupt, almost rough. It sounds like remonstrance quite as much as prayer. Abraham appeals to God to take care of his name and honour, as if he had said, If Thou doest this, what will the world say of Thee, but that Thou art unmerciful? But the grand confidence in God's character, the eager desire that it should be vindicated before the world, the dread that the least film should veil the silvery whiteness or the golden lustre of His name, the sensitiveness for His honour,—these are the effects of communion with Him; and for these God accepts the bold prayer, as truer reverence than is found in many more guarded and lowly sounding words. Many conventional proprieties of worship may be broken just because the worship is real. "The frequent sputter shows that the soul's depths boil in earnest." We may learn, too, that the most loving familiarity never forgets the fathomless gulf between God and it. Abraham does not forget that he is "dust and ashes"; he knows that he is venturing much in speaking to God. His pertinacious prayers have a recurring burden of lowly recognition of his place. Twice he heralds them with "I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord"; twice with "Oh let not the Lord be angry." Perfect love casts out fear and deepens reverence. We may come with free hearts, from which every weight of trembling and every cloud of doubt has been lifted. But the less the dread, the lower we shall bow before the loftiness which we love. We do not pray aright until we tell God everything. The boldness which we as Christians ought to have, means literally a frank speaking out of all that is in our hearts. Such "boldness and access with confidence" will often make short work of so-called seemly reverence, but it will never transgress by so much as a hair's-breadth the limits of lowly, trustful love. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Abraham's persistency*:—Abraham's persistency may teach us a lesson. If one might so say, he hangs on God's skirt like a burr. Each petition granted only encourages him to another. Six times he pleads, and God waits till he has done before He goes away; He cannot leave His friend till that friend has said all his say. What a contrast the fiery fervour and unwearied pertinacity of Abraham's prayers make to the stiff formalism of the intercessions one is familiar with! The former are like the successive pulses of a volcano driving a hot lava stream before it; the latter, like the slow flow of a glacier, cold and sluggish. Is any part of our public or private worship more hopelessly formal than our prayers for others? This picture from the old world may well shame our languid petitions, and stir us up to a holy boldness and insistence in prayer. (*Ibid.*) *A good man the protection of his country*:—It was the poet's vain and groundless conceit of Hector, that so long as he lived Troy could not be destroyed, terming him the immovable and inexpugnable pillar of Troy. But well it may be said of a faithful man that he is a mighty stay and strength, a main defender and upholder of the place where he liveth; for whose sake, for whose presence and prayers, out of the Lord's abundant kindness to all His, even the wicked are often within the shadow of God's protection, and spared. (*J. Spencer.*)

Ver. 25. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?—*God in human history*: I. GOD WORKS IN HUMAN HISTORY. 1. He originates all the good. 2. He controls all the evil. II. GOD WORKS RIGHTEOUSLY IN HUMAN HISTORY. Abraham meant either that God ought to do right, or that He will do right. Both are true. (*Homilist.*) *The Judge of all the earth doth right*:—I. THE LORD IS JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH. 1. The Lord is a judge. (1) He sees and knows all things (Prov. xv. 3). (2) He weighs human actions in the balances of justice (1 Sam. ii. 3). (3) He rewards the good and punishes the bad, in some instances even in this world. 2. He is the Judge of all the earth. 3. He will finally judge the world in the last great day (Acts xvii. 31). That judgment will be solemn, grand, awful, equitable, and final. II. IT IS CERTAIN THAT THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH DOETH RIGHT. 1. There is nothing wrong in any voluntary action, but what may be traced up to the following principles: it proceeds, in all instances, either from ignorance or from wickedness. 2. He cannot do wrong for want of knowing better. Speaking after the manner of men, all things, whether past, present, or future, are fully known to Him. 3. He is perfectly holy, and cannot do wrong from any evil principle. "Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with Thee" (Psa. v. 4).

Viewing His infinite wisdom, and His transcendent purity, we are constrained to say, He cannot do wrong. 4. He doth what is right to men, in all their temporal affairs. 5. He doth right to men in all their spiritual concerns. All men fell in Adam, and all have been redeemed by Christ. 6. He will do right in the eternal rewards and punishments of men. III. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON THIS IMPORTANT SUBJECT. 1. Pious men, of widely different sentiments on the purposes and decrees of God, meet on this ground, and, while they sincerely acknowledge that the Judge of all the earth doth right, may cordially embrace each other in the arms of Christian love. 2. While we are piously impressed with the great truth, that the Judge of all the earth doth right, we shall submit ourselves to Him, in all the varying circumstances of life. 3. We should walk before the Judge of all the earth with circumspection, carefully avoiding everything that is offensive in His sight, and steadily pursuing those things which He approves. 4. While we conduct ourselves on this plan, and at the same time rely on the merits of Christ for salvation, we may safely leave all our affairs in the hands of our Judge. 5. This is matter of great joy to holy men. They may be accused and slandered, but God will vindicate their character; and they may suffer with Christ, but they shall also reign with Him. 6. But this subject is truly awful and alarming to the wicked. They may be suffered to prosper in this world. There are weighty reasons for this in the Divine mind; but they stand in slippery places, and ere long will be cast down into destruction. (*Sketches of Sermons.*)

The moral rectitude of God.—I. GOD IS A BEING OF MORAL RECTITUDE. 1. God ought to be a Being of moral rectitude. He knows what is right and wrong respecting His own conduct, and respecting the conduct of all other moral beings in the universe. He ought therefore to feel and act according to His moral discernment of what is right in the nature of things. And as He feels much more sensibly His obligation to moral rectitude than any other being, so we have far more reason to believe that He possesses moral rectitude, than that any other being in the universe does. 2. God claims to be a Being of moral rectitude. When Moses requested Him to show him His glory, "The Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." 3. God has made His rational creatures capable of discerning His moral as well as natural attributes. He has implanted in their minds a moral sense, by which they can distinguish moral beauty from moral deformity in moral characters. But can we suppose that He would have done this, if He knew that His own moral character would not bear examination? 4. God has not only made us capable of judging of His moral rectitude, but commanded us to do it. "Judge, I pray thee, between Me and My vineyard." "Are not My ways equal? are not your ways unequal? saith the Lord." His knowledge of His own moral perfections is the only ground upon which He can, with propriety, or even safety, appeal to us in respect to His moral rectitude. 5. God has not only commanded His intelligent creatures to judge of His moral rectitude, but has placed them under the best advantages to judge. He has placed them all in a state of trial, and in different parts of the universe, where they have had great opportunities and strong inclinations to examine His conduct with the strictest scrutiny. Now, if the greatest and best of God's intelligent creatures, after their strictest scrutiny of His conduct in the various parts of the universe, have not been able to discover the least moral defect or imperfection in His character and conduct, we may confidently believe that He possesses the perfection of moral rectitude. And to close this connected train of reasoning, I would observe—6. That God has appointed a day for the very purpose of giving all His intelligent creatures the best possible opportunity of judging of His moral rectitude. The day of judgment is called the day of "the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." II. HOW ABRAHAM COULD KNOW THAT GOD IS A BEING OF MORAL RECTITUDE. 1. Abraham could not know the moral rectitude of God by knowing what God would do to promote the highest happiness of the universe. 2. Abraham could not know the moral rectitude of God by knowing that the punishing of the innocent would not promote the highest good of the universe. 3. Though Abraham could not know what would be right or wrong for God to do, either by knowing what had a direct tendency to promote the highest good of the universe, or what had an indirect tendency to promote that great and important object, yet he could know what was right or wrong for God to do to answer any purpose whatever, by knowing that right or wrong or moral good and evil are founded in the nature of things. Moral good, which consists in true benevolence,

is morally right in its own nature. And moral evil, which consists in selfishness, is morally wrong in its own nature. **IMPROVEMENT.** 1. If God be a Being of moral rectitude, then He can never do evil that good may come. 2. If God be a Being of moral rectitude, then He can never approve of His creatures' doing evil that good may come. 3. If God be a Being of moral rectitude, then He will not punish the finally impenitent the less, on account of the good they have done in the world. 4. If God be a Being of moral rectitude, then it is morally impossible that He should ever injure any of His creatures. 5. If God be a Being of moral rectitude, then all the objections which have been made or can be made against His conduct are altogether groundless. For He has always acted agreeably to the moral rectitude of His nature. 6. Since God is a Being of perfect moral rectitude, all His works will eventually praise Him. They will deserve and receive the approbation and praise of all His holy creatures. 7. If God be a Being of moral rectitude, then the weight of His wrath will be insupportable to the finally miserable. They will know that He does not punish them from malice, revenge, or malevolence, but from true, pure, disinterested benevolence and justice. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *Justice* :—I. Notice the grand fundamental truth that the ways of God are ways of righteousness. II. That the impartiality of God's dispensations is evident from the fact that the entire field of judgment is subject to His control, "all the earth." III. That God's dealings with men are not partial in this life; *i.e.*, they do not involve injustice here to be counterbalanced and rectified by the judgment which is to be hereafter. IV. That while justice must be tempered with mercy, every appeal for mercy should be grounded on an underlying principle of justice. (*The Lay Preacher.*) *The moral government of God* :—I. By the moral government of God is meant HIS GOVERNMENT OF INTELLIGENT AND ACCOUNTABLE CREATURES ACCORDING TO PRINCIPLES OF MORAL RECTITUDE. It implies a government similar to that which a civil magistrate exercises over his subjects. All government supposes a law, together with an obligation on the part of the governed to obey it, and power lodged with the magistrate to enforce the obligation. In moral governments it is essential that the law should be righteous, and its administration just. An arbitrary and lawless government may inflict punishment where it is undeserved, and confer rewards where they are unmerited; but a righteous governor will regulate his conduct towards his subjects by the moral quality of their characters. He will reward the good; he will punish the wicked. The law of his empire will have its foundation in righteousness, and his subjects will know that instead of being liable to the effects of misrule and caprice, they will be treated with a uniform regard to truth and justice. Such is the notion we form of the moral government of God. II. And now, having thus explained what is meant by His moral government, I may proceed to point out to you SOME OF THOSE PROOFS AND ILLUSTRATIONS OF ITS EXISTENCE AND ADMINISTRATION WHICH MAY SERVE THE PURPOSES OF GENERAL IMPROVEMENT. 1. Man is a moral agent. A moral agent is a being capable of those actions which are properly the subjects of commendation or of censure, which are either laudable or worthy of blame. He is endowed with intellectual and moral powers. He can distinguish between good and evil. He has a capacity of choice, guided by understanding and reason; a will governed by moral motives and inducements; and a power of acting according to his determination and pleasure. These are some of the most essential and distinguishing attributes of moral agency. Such a being is man. Since, then, the natural constitution of man is so framed—since there is obviously everything in his mental character to render him a fit subject for moral government, it is reasonable to conclude that such a government is actually established over him. 2. The same thing is to be inferred from the supremacy of conscience. It is the office of conscience to preside over and control all the other faculties of our moral nature. To direct the will, to curb the passions, and to regulate the conduct, belongs to conscience. To conscience also it belongs to judge what propensities may be indulged, and in what degree, and which ought to be restrained. Conscience is set up within us as the arbiter of our actions, the superintendent of our senses, affections, and appetites; and the judge who shall bestow commendation or censure on all our principles and motives. 3. The tendency of mankind to institute moral governments among themselves is an argument in favour of the moral government of God. Such a tendency, from its almost universal development, may be considered as among the original properties of our nature. It seems to fall in with man's natural perceptions of the fitness of things, not only that he should live in society with his fellow-men, but that society should be so framed as to involve moral subordination and supremacy—that, in other

words, there should be governors and the governed. 4. The course of events in the present dispensation of Providence, is upon the whole so ordered as to indicate on the part of the Supreme Disposer a preference for virtue in distinction from vice. In this constitution of things, therefore, we have a declaration from Him who orders all the arrangements of providence, and presides over the course of natural events, which side He is of, and what part He takes in the great conflict between moral good and evil. In the struggle which is carrying on between these opposite and contending principles, He determines to give no countenance to vice. The worker of iniquity shall have no sanction from Him; but if a man will be true to virtue, to veracity and judgment, to equity and charity, and to the right of the case in whatever he is concerned, he shall have the righteous God to be the Protector of his integrity, and the whole weight of His moral administration to countenance and uphold it. For the voice of nature, and the events of providence, concur to proclaim aloud that "the Lord loveth the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked He turneth upside down." 5. The moral government of God is the only proper basis upon which religion can be made to rest with security. If men can once discard from their minds the fact of their responsibility to their Creator, nothing will remain upon which to build any sense of piety, or by which to enforce the claims of religious faith and duty. 6. The moral government of God has received its grand proof and establishment in the scheme of human redemption. True it is, that the prevailing character in the mediatorial economy is mercy. It is a dispensation of grace. Its design is to pardon the guilty, to save the lost. But, in making its wonderful provision for the spiritual exigencies of man, it does no violence to the righteous claims of God. If it had, such a circumstance would have been conclusive against it. It would then have been a method of salvation upon which no satisfactory or enlightened dependence could be placed. But it is now "worthy of all acceptation," being alike honourable to justice and mercy. "If grace reigns," "it reigns through righteousness." (E. Steane.)

*The principles of God's government:—*I. In the first place, THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD PROCEEDS ON PRINCIPLES OF PURE COMPASSION AND LOVE. II. THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD IS NOT LESS MARKED BY PRINCIPLES OF PURITY AND JUSTICE THAN BY THOSE OF COMPASSION. III. THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT GOES ON THE PRINCIPLE OF PREVENTION. IV. OBSERVE THE SPIRIT OF REFORMATION AND AMENDMENT WHICH PREVAILS THROUGHOUT THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD. (J. W. Cunningham, M.A.)

*Abraham's intercession, or, doubt and confidence:—*Observe the great honour which the Lord conferred upon His faithful servant. Surely this signal recognition of personal worth and faithful service speaks volumes of the esteem in which the Lord holds His servants. Observe, again, the unselfish use which Abraham made of the wonderful interview with which he was honoured. Men of the world, when ushered into the presence of royalty, only think of their own interest; they consider well how such an opportunity may be improved for their own personal advantage. How very different the conduct of Abraham! Observe, again, the nature of the plea which Abraham sets up for the preservation of the city. He points out the claims of righteousness, which the Lord, as a righteous judge, could not less than respect. "Wilt Thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" And the Lord readily admitted the validity of his plea, for He said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then will I spare all the place for their sakes." Thus the only thing which God values in man is righteousness, purity of character; compared with this, the accidents of birth, possessions, attainments, are utterly insignificant in His eyes. In the conversation which followed, Abraham not only showed his intimate knowledge of God's merciful disposition, but showed also that this intimate knowledge was far from being perfect. Let us contemplate the words—I. AS AN EXPRESSION OF DOUBT. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" With regard to what the Judge of all the earth ought to do, there can be but one opinion. The position of any judge is one of dignity, authority, and responsibility; he cannot, therefore, maintain his position for a single day unless he do right, and execute justice, and act impartially. Nevertheless, a superficial view of the condition of this world—a world so full of confusion, disorder, and lawlessness—have led some to doubt the righteousness of its great Judge and Governor. Let us now glance, for a moment, at some of the circumstances which give rise to these distressing thoughts. 1. When right is defeated, and wrong is triumphant. In this world, it is might that triumphs, and not right. Read the records of the past, and see how empires grew, waxed strong, and acquired wealth. In very many instances it was the work of the

sword, the result of military skill, valour, and power. What was Alexander the Great? What was Julius Cæsar? What was Napoleon Buonaparte? What was the nature of the work which they severally accomplished? They were neither more nor less than conquerors; men who established the dominion of might. They may have sometimes been the champions of right, and used their splendid victories for the best purposes. Look at individuals. The mighty, the powerful, the strong, have it all their own way; while the weak are ruthlessly trampled under foot. And many a down-trodden weak one, knowing the righteousness of his cause, whispers in the bitterness of his soul, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" 2. When wickedness prospers and virtue fails. There can be no dispute whatever as to which ought to prosper, and which ought to fail. It is only reasonable to suppose that the order of things established by a Creator who is infinitely wise and good, should discountenance vice and favour virtue. 3. When what we conceive to be strict order is displaced by what seems to be utter confusion. Can you look back upon the experience of a single day, and say that all things have been conformable to your own notions of propriety? Does not the most superficial review suggest many improvements? It was strange to see King Edward the Sixth, under whose beneficent reign England began to enjoy the blessings of freedom, enlightenment, and true religion, cut off a tender youth, to make room for the tyrannical and bloodthirsty Mary, who brought upon the land darkness, oppression, and despair. The only child of rich parents, who have more possessions than they can possibly use, is carried away by death, while their poor neighbour, who finds it a difficult matter to earn the bare means of existence, is allowed to rear a numerous family. Is this the way we should have arranged matters? II. AS AN EXPRESSION OF CONFIDENCE. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" There can be no doubt whatever that Abraham used them in this sense—to express his unlimited confidence in the wisdom and righteousness of God. Having trusted God, he trusted Him altogether; and never allowed even the shadow of a doubt to darken the brightness of his faith. Many considerations might be suggested here which are adapted in the highest degree to hush our doubts, and to inspire our confidence. Consider—1. That in this world we know God's ways only in part. What may be the entire bearing, or the ultimate issue of any event, we have no means of ascertaining. 2. That whenever we have understood the whole bearing of mysterious events, we have been compelled to admit their wisdom. 3. That things which are apparently evil and unnecessary, may be really good and necessary. (*D. Rowlands, B.A.*) *God makes no mistakes*:—There is here a young man of about thirty, of fine talents and capabilities for active life, but for years a cripple, paralytic and helpless. He would starve if left alone, a friend was commiserating his condition, when, with deep earnestness, he exclaimed, as he slowly raised his withered hand, "God makes no mistakes." How noble the sentiment! "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" This is piety. Only a heart divinely taught could thus speak. (*Dr. Talmage.*)

Ver. 27. But dust and ashes.—*Abraham interceding*:—I. THE TRUE POSTURE FOR A SINNER, AT THE THRONE OF GRACE. He must lie low, and aim high. You see this in the behaviour of Abraham on the present occasion. Though honoured by a fresh token of the Lord's confidential friendship, he has—1. Low thoughts of himself. He cannot forget who and what he is: "I am but dust and ashes!" The expression is singular. It alludes, I think, first to the meanness of his origin. What was Abraham—what are all men—but "dust"? But this expression of Abraham may allude, secondly, to the corruption of his nature. "Dust" is what God made it; but "ashes" have had a value, which is now departed from them. Thus man, however mean, was yet not offensive, till he "corrupted his way" before God. 2. High thoughts of God: high thoughts, first, of His equity; "The Judge of all the earth," he is persuaded, must and "will do right." Any other supposition, indeed, were an affront to the Lord. But, secondly, let Abraham teach you also to entertain equally high thoughts of His mercy. Be not backward to ask of God, what you are unable to claim. II. THE GENEROUS CHARACTER OF TRUE GODLINESS. For whose welfare does Abraham make this urgent intercession? Two parties were included in it, neither of whom had very greatly deserved such kindness at his hands. 1. Lot his nephew, though not named, had (we may suppose) the foremost place in his good wishes. He was a pious person; and "wilt Thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" 2. The people of Sodom, on the other hand, are expressly named. Abraham knew that they "were wicked, and

sinners before the Lord exceedingly." Yet even for them he prays. III. THE EFFICACY OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER is another lesson taught us by this narrative. IV. A FAINT TYPE OF OUR GREAT INTERCESSOR, JESUS THE SON OF GOD. 1. Was Abraham's a generous interposition? That of Jesus is far more unmerited. He intercedes for enemies! 2. Did Abraham appear to have some weight, as "the friend of God"? Far more authoritative is the mediation of Jesus. He stands in His own name, and on His own merits; not as a servant, high in favour indeed at court—but as the King's Son. 3. Did Abraham persevere, with an earnestness which, in his own eyes, seemed almost to border upon presumption? The event showed, notwithstanding, that he left off too soon. This will never be said of our Divine Intercessor. "He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He have set judgment in the earth"—till He have fully accomplished all His purposes of grace. 4. Once more: let Abraham intercede as he might, whether on this or on subsequent occasions, yet his good offices were sure to be terminated, sooner or later—"not being suffered to continue, by reason of death." After death—as the rich man in torments found—he neither can nor will interpose. But Jesus "ever liveth to make intercession for us." (*J. Jowett, M.A.*) *How may we have suitable conceptions of God in duty?*—That which we have more especially to take notice of is, with what apprehensions or conceptions of God Abraham did speak to God, did deport himself towards God, did manage this great undertaking with God: concerning which, four things present themselves for our observation:—1. That those apprehensions or conceptions [which] Abraham had of God, did highly exalt and magnify the greatness and excellency of God in his heart: "Behold, now I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord"; One who hath excellency, and sovereignty, and majesty, and dominion, and power, and glory. 2. That they were such conceptions of God as did humble, vilify, and abase Abraham in himself in comparison of God: "I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes"; a sinful, weak, worthless, frail piece of vanity and mortality. 3. That they were such conceptions of God as did represent Him gracious, propitious, benevolent to the creature, notwithstanding the greatness and excellency of God, and the meanness and unworthiness of the creature: thus much seems to be comprehended in the note of admiration, "behold!" O what admirable condescension is this in the great God! O what wonderful mercy and grace is this, that such a poor vile creature should have liberty to speak to Him, to parley with Him! 4. That they were such apprehensions of God as did beget in Abraham a faith of acceptance with God in the performance of that duty, without which it had been dangerous presumption in him, "who was but dust and ashes, to take upon him to speak unto the Lord." DOCTRINE: THAT SUCH AS SPEAK TO GOD OR SPEAK OF GOD, SUCH AS DRAW NEAR TO GOD OR HAVE TO DO WITH GOD IN ANY PART OF DIVINE WORSHIP, MUST MANAGE ALL THEIR PERFORMANCES WITH RIGHT APPREHENSIONS AND DUE CONCEPTIONS OF GOD. 1. The first proposition is this: That we cannot have any true, right apprehensions or conceptions of God, except we have a true knowledge of Him. Such as have not known God, have slighted Him: "Who is the Lord," saith Pharaoh, "that I should obey His voice? I know not the Lord" (Exod. v. 2). Such as know not God, nor desire to know Him, are so far from drawing near to God, that they drive Him as far from them as they can; they say unto the Almighty, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways" (Job xxi. 14). 2. The second proposition is: That we cannot know anything savingly of God, further than He is pleased to manifest and make known Himself to us. No man can make known God but God Himself. Moses, who had seen as much of God's glory as any man, when he desired a further manifestation of God's glory, in a higher measure or degree than formerly he had seen, he goes to God Himself for it: "I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory" (Exod. xxxiii. 18). 3. The third proposition is: That the clearest manifestations of God to us, and such as can beget in us right apprehensions and due conceptions of Him, are made out to us in and by Jesus Christ. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him" (John i. 18). Therefore no man ever did or can apprehend anything of God truly, that is, upon a saving account, but in and by Jesus Christ. The Divine Essence or Godhead "no man hath seen, nor can see" in itself (1 Tim. vi. 16). In the works of creation, God is a God above us; in His works of providence, a God without us; in the law, a God against us; in Himself, a God invisible to us. Only in Christ He is Emmanuel, "God manifested in our flesh," God in us, "God with us," God for us. 4. Hence follows the fourth proposition: That the manifestations of God to us in Christ are

those which alone can beget those due apprehensions and right conceptions of God, with which we must draw near to Him, and perform all our worship to Him. As Abraham is held forth to us a pattern of faith; so he may be to us a pattern of worship, inasmuch as all true worship to God is performed by faith, by faith in Christ. (1) Those apprehensions Abraham had of God did beget, as we have shown, high thoughts of God. With such apprehensions of God we must perform all our worship. See what high thoughts of God His people have always had in worshipping Him: Neh. ix. 5, 6; 1 Tim. i. 17; vi. 16. (2) Abraham had such conceptions of God as humbled, emptied, and abased him in himself in comparison of God. And with such apprehensions of God must we perform all our worship to Him. We are exhorted to "come and worship, and bow down, and kneel" (Psa. xcv. 6). In all worship we are to testify, as our absolute subjection to God, so our humblest submission to Him. Observe what self-abasing thoughts the apprehension of God's goodness wrought in David when he went to worship before the Lord (2 Sam. vii. 18-20). (3) Abraham had such conceptions of God as did represent Him gracious, propitious, benevolent to the creature, a bountiful rewarder of him that serveth Him, notwithstanding the greatness of God, or the unworthiness of the creature. Such apprehensions we must have of God in all our approaches to Him, in all our performances of duty and worship. (4) Abraham had such apprehensions of God as did beget a comfortable persuasion of faith for his acceptance with God in that his drawing near to Him. Now, such apprehensions of God as beget a faith of acceptance with God in our approaches to Him, can spring only from the manifestations of God to us in Christ. The use I shall make of this point is, to inform Christians how much it concerneth us to acquaint ourselves more intimately with God as He hath manifested Himself in Christ Jesus; in whom alone we can have right apprehensions and due conceptions of God; without which we cannot perform aright any kind of worship to God. 1. Without due apprehensions and conceptions of God, we cannot perform any part of that natural worship we owe to God. We cannot love Him, fear Him, trust in Him, pray unto Him, praise Him, &c. 2. Without the right apprehensions and due conceptions of God in Jesus Christ, we cannot perform aright any part of His instituted worship. (1) For all the ordinances of God's instituted worship (as the sacrifices and sacraments under the law, so the sacraments and other ordinances under the gospel) seem to have immediate relation to, and near dependence on, Christ. "God manifested in the flesh." (2) The Divine Essence or Godhead in Jesus Christ seems to be the proper object of all worship. This Divine Essence is wholly in Christ: "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. ii. 9). (3) The flesh or humanity of Christ is the medium or mean by which we have access to God in all our worship.—This is expressed: "Having boldness to enter into the holiest," where the Divine glory appeared between the cherubims on the mercy-seat, "by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh" (Heb. x. 19, 20). (*T. Mallery, D.D.*)

Dust and ashes.—1. The first thing that occurs, is the lamentable folly of those who cry up the dignity of human nature: for neither revelation nor reason discovers any nature to us, but such as is mortal and sinful; and there is no dignity either in sin or mortality. 2. Secondly, the fearful effects of sin are displayed to us by this subject in a very particular manner. Why does the body, so wonderfully formed by the Divine wisdom, return again to its original dust, but because that which has taken root in it cannot otherwise be extracted? Why are we under condemnation, and liable to be reduced to ashes, but because sin has kindled the flames of the Divine wrath? How odious then must sin be in itself, and how contrary to the nature of God, if it compels His justice to destroy the work of His hands! Lastly, they who have ears to hear, will learn from this subject, not to set their affections upon a world, which is under sentence of condemnation, and whose end is to be burned. (*W. Jones, M.A.*)

Necessity of humility.—The grandest edifices, the tallest towers, the loftiest spires, rest upon deep foundations. The very safety of eminent gifts and pre-eminent graces lies in their association with deep humility. they were dangerous without it. Great men do need to be good men. Look at this mighty ship, a leviathan on the deep. With her towering masts, and carrying a cloud of canvas, how she steadies herself on the waves, and walks erect upon the rolling waters, like a thing of inherent, self-regulating life! When the corn is waving, and trees are bending, and foaming billows roll before the blast and break in thunders on the beach, why is she not flung on her beam ends, sent down foundering into the deep? Why, because unseen, beneath the surface, a vast well-ballasted

hull gives her balance, and taking hold of the water, keeps her steady under a press of sail, and on the bosom of a swelling sea. Even so, to preserve the saint upright, erect, and safe from falling, God gives him balance and ballast, bestowing on the man to whom He has given lofty endowments, the grace of a proportionate humility. *Humility in prayer*:—Artabanus, one of the military officers of the Athenians, was applied to by a certain great man, who told him that he desired an audience of the king. He was answered that before it was granted, he must prostrate himself before him, for it was a custom of the country for the king to admit no one to his presence who would not worship him. That which was an arrogant assumption in an earthly king, is a proper condition of an approach to the King of kings. Humility is the foundation of an intercourse with Him. We must bow before His throne. No sinner who is too proud to yield obedience to this law need expect any favours from His hands.

Ver. 32. **I will not destroy it for ten's sake.**—*The incalculable worth of good men*:—This narrative teaches—1. The highest development of genuine philanthropy. Importunate intercession with Heaven on behalf of humanity. 2. The mysterious power of intercessory prayer. 3. The incalculable worth of good men, however few in number. I. That good men in a community, however few, are HIGHLY ESTEEMED OF GOD. 1. Because of the tender relationship they sustain to Him. His children. 2. Because of the critical position in which they are placed in this life. 3. Because of the beneficent influences they are capable of exercising upon the race. II. That good men in a community, however few, are of INEXPRESSIBLE SOCIAL WORTH. 1. Prize good men more than all others. 2. Seek to multiply good men. (1) By endeavouring to convert bad men to goodness by the gospel of Christ. (2) By indoctrinating the rising generation with the principles and spirit of Christ. (*Homilist.*) *God's willingness to save*:—Those who censure this narrative, asserting that it represents God as wavering and undetermined, should observe that His resolution was not yet taken (ver. 21); and even if this had been the case, that it is indeed always open to the repentance and prayer of those whom it concerns; God has no delight in punishing and destroying; He tried the hard-heartedness of Pharaoh by ten successive plagues; He accepted the repentance of the wicked Ninevites; and He ordered a systematic ritual of sacrifices, solely intended to furnish to man the means of restoring his peace with Himself. If we banish this "vacillation" from the attributes of God, man may tremble before His will; but he can never love Him. But the truth, that the principles on which His government is based are eternal and unalterable, is expressed many times with singular emphasis: "God is no man that He should lie, nor a son of man that He should repent." God is, indeed, said to have repented that He had created man, and that He had appointed Saul king over Israel; but these are strong expressions denoting how unworthy the former had proved to bear the Divine image; and the latter, to be the representative of Divine sovereignty. (*M. M. Kalisch, Ph.D.*)

CHAPTER XIX.

VERS. 1-3. **And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom.**—*The eve of judgment to the righteous*:—I. THE RIGHTEOUS MAN IS FOUND IN THE WAY OF DUTY. 1. The duty of his calling. 2. The duty arising from the relations of human life. II. THE RIGHTEOUS MAN IS SEPARATE FROM SINNERS. In the world, but living above it. This separateness, which is necessarily the mark of the righteous character, involves:—1. Sorrow for the spiritual state of men alienated from God. 2. A principle which regulates choice of companionship. A good man will avoid the contagion of evil example, and be attracted to that which is most God-like. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Angel work in a bad town*:—I. THE REASONS WHICH JUSTIFIED THIS SUPREME ACT OF DESTRUCTION. 1. It was a merciful warning to the rest of mankind. 2. Moreover, in this terrible act, the Almighty simply hastened the result of their own actions. 3. Besides, this overthrow only happened after careful investigation. 4. There is this consideration also—that, during the delay, many a warning was sent. 5. It is worthy of notice that God saved all whom He could. II. THE MOTIVES OF THE ANGELS' VISIT. 1. The proximate or nearest cause was their own

love to man. 2. The efficient cause was Abraham's prayer. 3. The ultimate cause was God's mercy. III. THE ANGELS WENT TO WHERE LOT WAS—to Sodom. As a ray of light may pass through the foetid atmosphere of some squalid court, and emerge without a stain on its pure texture, so may angels spend a night in Sodom, surrounded by crowds of sinners, and yet be untainted angels still. If you go to Sodom for your gains, as Lot did, you will soon show signs of moral pollution. But if you go to save men, as these angels did, you may go into a very hell of evil, where the air is laden with impurity and blasphemy, but you will not be befouled. No grain of mud shall stick. IV. THEY WERE CONTENT TO WORK FOR VERY FEW. It has been said that the true method of soul-winning is to set the heart on some one soul; and to pursue it, until it has either definitely accepted, or finally rejected, the Gospel of the grace of God. We should not hear so many cries for larger spheres, if Christians only realized the possibilities of the humblest life. Christ found work enough in a village to keep Him there for thirty years. Philip was torn from the great revival in Samaria to go into the desert to win one seeker after God. V. THEY HASTENED HIM. Let us hasten sinners. Let us say to each one: "Escape for thy life; better lose all than lose your soul. Look not behind to past attainments or failures. Linger nowhere outside the City of Refuge, which is Jesus Christ Himself. Haste ye; habits of indecision strengthen; opportunities are closing in; the arrow of destruction has already left the bow of justice; now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." (F. B. Meyer, B.A.) I. THE WARNING. 1. How given. The messenger an angel! The deliverance of one man from a temporary calamity worthy of an angel's powers. The great privilege of those who are permitted to save souls from eternal death. We have had many warnings. Prophets, apostles, &c., &c. "If the word spoken by angels was steadfast," &c. 2. To whom given. Lot. Even he, an imperfect man, shall be saved. "Not one of these little ones shall perish." "None shall by any means pluck you out of My Father's hand." 3. Its nature. Unprecedented. Startling. Life and death. Several cities to be destroyed. 4. When given. On the eve of the event predicted. No time for saving property. Life the only thing to be carried away. Presently the time will come when we can carry nothing away with us. Are we now prepared? We may have but a short warning, or none at all. II. THE ESCAPE. 1. Lot receives the warning. Informs his sons-in-law. They ridiculed it. Scoffers. Many make a mock at sin. Still worse to make a mock of religion. Many do even this. Their "day is coming." Was there any cause in Lot for their scoffs? Had they not sufficient reason, in his known character, to believe him? Imperfect piety has little influence. Probably his influence in Sodom was not very great. 2. He lingered. (1) The time. Not a moment to be lost. (2) The place. Sodom. Sinful and doomed. (3) The reason. Did not doubt the warning. Not doubt, but sinful attachments. Had friends and property in this wicked place. 3. Compulsion was needful. The angels had to lead him forth. Strange that men need to be coerced into accepting a great deliverance. Yet this brand was plucked from the burning. Men have to be compelled to come in, &c. 4. Even then Lot did not wish to go as far as he could from destruction, but to remain as near as possible. III. THE JUDGMENT. 1. The people were employed, as usual, in their pleasures, labours, or sins. Did not think their end was so near. So will it be at the judgment of the world. Death may overtake us unawares. 2. Lot being at a safe distance, the fearful tempest commenced. Fire destroyed the city, and water soon flowed over and submerged the smoking ruins. 3. Lot's wife, looking back, was changed into a pillar of salt. None who are on the way to heaven can look back longing on the world they leave without injury. Old attachments are thereby strengthened, and new occupations, &c., are made distasteful. Such declension displeasing to God. 1. The wonderful mercy of God for even imperfect Christians. 2. The duty of thankfully receiving the warning He sends. 3. The duty that lays upon us of warning men "to flee from the wrath to come." 4. God's great love in providing a deliverer for us. (J. C. Gray.) Angels' word to Lot:—1. Their humanity. (1) They showed themselves susceptible of human influence. (2) They appeared in human form. (3) They partook of human food. 2. Their power. I. THAT THEY HAVE A NATURE SUPERIOR TO HUMAN INFIRMITIES. II. THAT THEY REGARD PARENTS AS ESPECIALLY BOUND TO SEEK THE WELFARE OF THEIR FAMILIES. III. THAT THEY REGARD SIN AS TOUCHING THE HEART OF THE GREAT GOD. 1. God being omniscient is cognisant of every sin. 2. God being holy must be pained by every sin. IV. THAT THEY REGARD THEMSELVES AS DIVINELY COMMISSIONED TO INFLICT CALAMITIES WHERE THERE IS SIN. Conclusion: 1. Life is solemn. 2. God is great. 3. Sin is ruinous. (Homilist.) The

character of Lot:—Lot's character is a singularly mixed one. With all his selfishness he was hospitable and public-spirited. Lover of good living, as undoubtedly he was, his courage and strength of character are yet unmistakable. His sitting at the gate in the evening to offer hospitality may fairly be taken as an indication of his desire to screen the wickedness of his townsmen, and also to shield the stranger from their brutality. From the style in which the mob addressed him it is obvious that he had made himself offensive by interfering to prevent wrong-doing. He was nick-named "the Censor," and his eye was felt to carry condemnation. It is true there is no evidence that his opposition had been of the slightest avail. How could it avail with men who knew perfectly well that, with all his denunciation of their wicked ways, he preferred their money-making company to the desolation of the hills, where he would be vexed with no filthy conversation, but would also find no markets? Still it is to Lot's credit that in such a city, with none to observe, none to applaud, and none to second him, he should have been able to preserve his own purity of life and steadily to resist wrong-doing. It would be cynical to say that he cultivated austerity and renounced popular vices as a salve to a conscience wounded by his own greed. That he had the courage which lies at the root of strength of character became apparent as the last dark night of Sodom wore on. To go out among a profligate, lawless mob, wild with passion and infuriated by opposition—to go out and shut the door behind him—was an act of true courage. His confidence in the influence he had gained in the town cannot have blinded him to the temper of the raging crowd at his door. To defend his unknown guests he put himself in a position in which men have frequently lost life. In the first few hours of his last night in Sodom there is much that is admirable and pathetic in Lot's conduct. But when we have said that he was bold and that he hated other men's sins, we have exhausted the more attractive side of his character. The inhuman collectedness of mind with which, in the midst of a tremendous public calamity, he could scheme for his own private well-being is the key to his whole character. He had no feeling. He was cold-blooded, calculating, keenly alive to his own interest, with all his wits about him to reap some gain to himself out of every disaster; the kind of man out of whom wreckers are made, who can with gusto strip gold rings off the fingers of doomed corpses; out of whom are made the villains who can rifle the pockets of their dead comrades on a battle-field, or the politicians who can still ride on the top of the wave that hurls their country on the rocks. (*M. Dods, D.D.*) *Lot's hospitality*:—Lot would fain have been as hospitable as Abraham. Deeper in his nature than any other consideration was the traditional habit of hospitality. To this he would have sacrificed everything; the rights of strangers were to him truly inviolable. Lot was a man who could as little see strangers without inviting them to his house as Abraham could. He would have treated them handsomely as his uncle; and what he could do he did. But Lot had by his choice of a dwelling made it impossible he should afford safe and agreeable lodging to any visitor. He did his best, and it was not his reception of the angels that sealed Sodom's doom, and yet what shame he must have felt that he had put himself in circumstances in which his chief virtue could not be practised. So do men tie their own hands and cripple themselves so that even the good they would take pleasure in doing is either wholly impossible or turns to evil. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 4-11. But the men put forth their hand, and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut to the door.—*The eve of judgment to sinners*:—I. **THEIR WICKEDNESS IS UNABATED.** 1. It extends to all classes of the community. 2. It includes the most shameful lusts. 3. It opposes the righteous to the last. II. **THEY EXPOSE THEMSELVES TO INFLECTIONS WHICH FORESHADOW FUTURE JUDGMENTS.** Blindness—moral as well as physical. III. **THEIR CONDUCT OFTEN BECOMES A SOURCE OF DANGEROUS PERPLEXITY TO THE RIGHTEOUS** (see vers. 5, 8). Lot was prepared to violate one duty in order to maintain another. Let a man do right, and put his trust in God. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Shamelessness of sinners*:—Their shameless speech to have the men brought out that they might know them, very notably discovereth unto us the impudency that sin effecteth in time, when it once getteth rule. Surely it taketh all modesty, and shame, and honesty away, and proveth the saying to be most true: *Consuetudo peccandi tollit sensum peccati*. The custom of sin taketh away all sense and feeling of sin. At the beginning men shame to have it known what they do, though they fear not to do it, and they will use all cloaks and covers that possible they can to hide their wickedness. But at last they grow bold and

impudent, as those men did, even to say what care we. And why? Certainly because this is the course of sin in God's judgment, that it shall benumb and harden the heart wherein it is suffered, and so sear up the conscience, and conceit in time, that there shall be no shame left, but such a thick vizard pulled over the face, that it can blush at nothing, either to say it or do it. Behold these brazen-browed wretches here, who, after long use of sin (no doubt at first more secret), are now come to require these men openly and to tell the cause, that they might know them without all shame or spark of shame, in, and at so horrible abomination. Marvel not then any more, that the adulterer blusheth not, the drunkard shameth not, nor the blaspheming swearer hideth not his face. You see the reason; custom to do evil in that kind hath utterly bereaved him of feeling and shame as it did these Sodomites. A heavy and fearful case for God's plague is even at the door of such people, as you see it was here for these Sodomites. It was well said of him that said it, if God take from a man his bodily eye that he cannot see, or his bodily ear that he cannot hear, every man seeth the judgment and perceiveth the loss; but when God in wrath taketh away the inward eye and ear of the mind and heart, that what sin soever he committeth, he neither seeth, nor heareth, nor feeleth, no man thinketh this a plague, or any rod of God. But O fearful plague! &c. (*Bishop Babington.*) *Mild speech to pacify.*—In Lot's going out to them, shutting the door after him, and calling them brethren, we may note a godly discretion and wisdom in dealing to pacify outrageous beasts. Fire quencheth not fire, but milder and softer speeches many times, and most times appeaseth disorder, though here it could not, for the strength of sin that had so mightily possessed them. To brute beasts are overcome with fair speeches, and become tame; a soft answer breaketh anger, when a cutting tongue stirreth up wrath. Full of grace is that man and woman that can be mild and sweet to effect goodness. (*Ibid.*) *Blindness.*—*Blindness.*—1. Physical. They lost the power of distinct vision. 2. Mental. They were the subjects of illusions. The imagination was diseased, so that they were deceived by false appearances. They acted as distracted persons. 3. Moral. They madly persisted in their designs, though an act of Providence had rendered it impossible of accomplishment. *Judgment at hand.*—The Scriptural signs that the judgment is near are:—1. That God abandons men or communities to out-breaking and presumptuous sins. 2. That warnings and chastisements fail to produce their effect, and especially when the person grows harder under them. 3. That God removes the good from any community—so, before the flood, so before the destruction of Jerusalem. 4. The deep, undisturbed security of those over whom it is suspended. (*Gosman.*) *God's time to strike.*—Many a one is hardened by the good word of God, and, instead of receiving the counsel, rages at the messenger; when men are grown to that pass, that they are no whit better by afflictions, and worse with admonitions, God finds it time to strike. (*Bishop Hall.*)

Ver. 12. *Hast thou here any besides?*—*A solemn inquiry concerning our families.*—I. Such a question as this APPEALS TO OUR NATURAL AFFECTION. Surely, unless we have lost manhood, we love our kindred and desire their good. We have not yet become like the ostriches in the wilderness, which care not for their young. Our flesh has not congealed into marble, nor are our hearts become like millstones; we have a very tender concern for those united to us by ties of nature, and esteem them as parts of ourselves. What parent is not glad to see his children in good health? We will watch them all through the weary night when they are ill, and can we not pray for them when they are sick with sin? Parents, be parents indeed. Brothers, act a true fraternal part. Sisters, let your tender love find a fitting channel. Husbands and wives, let your conjugal union awaken you to tenderest emotions. Let every fond relationship stir us to care for others, while the inquiry is made: "Hast thou here any besides?" II. The question is one which AROUSES HOLY SOLICITUDE. To provoke you to earnest solicitude this morning, let me remind you of times when we should be anxious about our friends and children. 1. When first we ourselves look to Christ, we should care for others. We would not eat our morsel alone, lest it grow stale through our selfishness. This wood drops with honey; we cannot eat it all, let us call others to taste its sweetness. 2. Then there are times of Christian enjoyment. 3. Methinks when we are downcast, when our soul is filled with bitter trouble, then also is an appropriate season to pray for others. God turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends, and he may turn our captivity when we do the same. 4. It may also help to stimulate this holy solicitude, to think of how we shall feel

in regard to our children and friends when they come to lie sick. Can we gaze upon their pallid countenances without bitter reproaches for our past supineness? 5. Think, again, how you would care for your friends if you were yourself this morning very nigh unto death. You cannot come back from heaven; if you have neglected a duty, you cannot leave heaven to perform it. III. Such a question as this is calculated to EXCITE US TO ANXIOUS EFFORT; for mere solicitude without effort is not genuine. A man must not pretend that he cares for the souls of others so long as he leaves one stone unturned which might be the means of blessing them. 1. It seems to me, then, that if we are in a right state of heart this morning, one of the first things we shall do will be to tell those dear to us of their danger. Let not thy friend perish through ignorance. Tell him that whosoever cometh unto Christ He will in no wise cast out; that there is life in a look at the crucified Saviour; that whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God. Preach no salvation by works; but preach faith, and works only as the fruit of faith; and let the doctrine that Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost be clearly set before thy friend's face. 2. Remember it is not enough coldly to warn them of danger and doctrinally to teach the remedy. There are many who will go so far; but I hold, my brethren and sisters, that we are bound to use a constraint with our friends. Do not misunderstand me—only a loving and a tender constraint, such as these angels used with Lot. Press them, plead with them, take them by the hand. I remember an old man who was a nursing-father to all the young men in the parish where he lived. This one thing he used to do; there was scarcely a lad whom he would not know and speak to, and there was a time with most of the lads when he specially sought to see them decided. Suppose one of them was going away to London, he would be sure to ask him to have a cup of tea with him. "You are going away, John," he would say; "I should not like you to go without spending an evening with me." If it was a fine sunshiny evening, he would say, "You know I have often talked to you about the things of God, and I am afraid that as yet there has been no impression produced. You are going to London, and will meet with many temptations, and I fear you may fall into them, but I should like to pray with you once before you go. Let us walk down the field together." There was a tree, an old oak tree, in a solitary place, where he would say, "To help you to recollect my words better, we will pray under this tree." The young and the old knelt together, and the old man poured out his soul before God; and when he had wrestled with God, and talked with his young friend, he would say, "Now, when I am dead and gone, you will perhaps come back to the place where you lived when a youth; let that tree be a witness between God and your soul, that here I wrestled with you; and if you forget God, and do not give your heart to Christ, let that tree stand to accuse your conscience till it yields to the entreaties of Divine love." Now here was a using of what I have styled constraint; but it is not a constraint, as physical force; of course that is never to be used; but the constraint of spiritual force, Divine love, and earnestness. May I ask whether we have all done our duty in this matter? IV. Our text FOSTERS A VERY CHEERING HOPE. It says, "Hast thou here any besides?" as much as if it would say, "Hope for them all. Why should they not all be brought out of Sodom? Why should one be left behind?" V. The text suggests A VERY SOLEMN FEAR, namely, that there may be some in our households who will not be saved. Ah! young men and women; ah! you who are fathers of Christian children, but not converted yourselves; you who are godless daughters and unregenerate sons of Christian people, you are lost now, you may be lost for ever! Lot's sons-in-law were consumed, and why not you? Saved shall the patriarch be, but not saved the patriarch's son, except he shall flee out of Sodom. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Lessons*.—1. While God blinds the wicked, He maketh way for His servants to escape. 2. Sweet is the providence, and solicitous is the care of God by His angel over His saints to save them. 3. Sons and daughters fare the better with God for being related to holy parents. 4. God calleth His, and all that are near and dear to Him, out of the place upon which vengeance is determined (Rev. xviii. 4). 5. Approaching vengeance discovered should make saints quit themselves from among the wicked (ver. 12). 6. When the cry of sins groweth great against God's face, it is time for saints to haste from thence. 7. Jehovah commissions destroyers to blot out the wicked in the earth. 8. Good angels are sometimes commissioned to destroy the wicked as well as to save the righteous. (G. Hughes, B.D.)

Ver. 14. He seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law.—*Danger despised* :

—I. LET US ATTEND TO THE EXHORTATION ADDRESSED BY LOT TO HIS SONS-IN-LAW. THERE IS A CLOSE PARALLEL BETWEEN THEIR SITUATION AND OUR OWN. 1. We are living, like them, amongst wicked men. 2. We are exposed, like them, to Divine judgment. 3. We are plied, like them, with overtures of mercy. II. LET US ATTEND TO THE MANNER IN WHICH THE SONS-IN-LAW OF LOT RECEIVED HIS EXHORTATION. THERE IS A CLOSE PARALLEL BETWEEN THEIR CONDUCT AND THAT OF MANY OF OURSELVES. 1. Like them, we reject as mockery the demonstration of our danger. 2. Like them, we reject as mockery the offer of a method of escape. 3. Like them, we reject as mockery all earnestness in pressing on our attention the means of deliverance. III. LET US ATTEND TO THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE MANNER IN WHICH THE SONS-IN-LAW OF LOT RECEIVED HIS EXHORTATION. THERE IS A CLOSE PARALLEL BETWEEN THEIR DOOM AND OURS IF WE DIE IN A STATE OF UNBELIEF. Here we may appeal—1. To the declarations of the Almighty. 2. To the facts of history. The old world. The cities of the plain. 3. To the dictates of reason. 4. To the attributes of God. His truth and holiness. (*G. Brooks.*) *Lot's message to his sons-in-law: an illustration of the preacher's message to the ungodly world:*—The context strikes several things forcibly on our attention. 1. The incongruity between the material and moral departments of existence in this world. In Sodom we find natural beauty and harmony in conjunction with moral deformity and discord. 2. The amazing power which prayer has with the Governor of the world (*Gen. xviii. 23–33*). 3. The existence of a moral government in connection with the conduct of man. 4. The deep interest of angelic intelligences in human history. I. LOT'S MESSAGE TO HIS SONS-IN-LAW WAS ALARMING IN ITS NATURE. "The Lord will destroy the city." 1. Their peril was great. 2. Their peril was the result of sin. 3. Their peril was just at hand. 4. Their peril at this moment was unavoidable. II. HIS MESSAGE TO HIS SONS-IN-LAW WAS FOUNDED ON THE DIVINE AUTHORITY. 1. The danger of which the gospel preacher warns the unconverted is not a dream of his own; it is a fact of Divine revelation. 2. The proclamation of this danger to the unconverted is not optional on the preacher's part; he is bound by heaven to do it. III. HIS MESSAGE TO HIS SONS-IN-LAW WAS SCPTICALLY RECEIVED. 1. The appearance of things remaining unchanged. "Since the fathers fell asleep," &c. 2. The force of old associations. 3. A false trust in the mercy of God. (*Homilist.*) *Disregard of religion and its consequences:*—Lot's sons-in-law were probably void of faith and of the fear of God, minding only the things of this world, and resolved not to leave the possessions and conveniences which they enjoyed in that wicked country. And if so, they might easily frame to themselves objections to their father's counsel, and a plea for their own conduct. But they learned, when it was too late, that his advice was sober and true. I. NOTHING IS MORE IMPORTANT AND SERIOUS, AS NOTHING IS MORE CERTAIN, THAN ARE THE TRUTHS WHICH RELIGION PRESENTS TO OUR CONSIDERATION. II. And yet, secondly, THERE ARE MANY WHO TREAT RELIGION WITH DISDAIN AND DISREGARD. In worldly affairs persons are not to act usually with attention and earnestness; they made a due use of their reason, and consider what they are about. Thus they act, not only in things of great consequence, relating to their life, their health, their liberty, their fortunes, their family, their honour and credit, but even in slighter matters, to obtain a small profit, or to escape a small inconvenience. Nothing is neglected, nothing is put off to an uncertain day; instruction is attentively received and put in execution. But as to religion, there is not this zeal and activity; it is not carefully weighed, scarcely can it obtain a fair hearing; favourable opportunities are neglected, opportunities which slip away, and are never to be recalled, and everything that should be done is left undone. III. Let us consider, thirdly, WHENCE PROCEEDS THIS STRANGE INDIFFERENCE AND NEGLECT. It proceeds in a great measure from want of faith, which is an evil more common than is imagined. Some men there are who have received good natural abilities, which they employ to bad purposes. Of these talents God giveth them the use, and the devil teacheth them the application. They argue themselves out of their religion, and then apply themselves to debauch the minds of others, and to treat serious and sacred things with levity, licentiousness, and ridicule. Pernicious books and corrupt conversation spread the contagious disease. (*J. Jortin, D.D.*) *On the guilt and the consequences of despising the Divine threatenings:*—1. Let us, in the first place, ATTEND TO THE EXHORTATION ADDRESSED BY LOT TO HIS SONS-IN-LAW. "Up; get you out of this place: for the Lord will destroy this city." Consider what was the situation of these men. They dwelt in a city subject to the dominion of sin. They dwelt in a city which, in consequence of its sinfulness,

deserved immediate destruction; in a city which, when time and opportunity abundantly sufficient for trial and repentance had been afforded, was devoted to immediate destruction. The Divine mercy still extended to them one respite, one opportunity, one warning more. Such, then, is your situation. Such is the situation of every one who hears the sound of the gospel. Contagion surrounds you; destruction lies before you. You are defiled, miserable, and helpless. Yet still there is a call of mercy; still there is a way to escape. The God whom you have offended places deliverance within your reach. The Son of God becomes man, and gives His life to purchase your salvation. II. Consider, in the next place, THE MANNER IN WHICH THE SONS-IN-LAW OF LOT RECEIVED HIS AWFUL ADMONITION. He seemed unto them as one that mocked. Their conduct discloses to us their character. They had evidently set their hearts on the worldly advantages which, in their apprehension, attended the place where they resided; and they made little account of its wickedness. In many respects the conduct of a large portion of the world bears at this day a close resemblance to that of the sons-in-laws of Lot, and arises from the same principles. When the great doctrines of the gospel are proposed as comprehending and disclosing the appointed method of salvation; what numbers disregard or despise them! When the holy commandments of God are explained and enforced as indispensable and in every particular binding upon every man, what numbers withhold their assent from the strictness of such interpretations of the Scriptures! When the terrors of the world to come are displayed, when the wrath and vengeance of God are revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, what numbers refuse to credit the tremendous truth! The minister of the gospel seemeth unto them as one that mocketh. III. Consider, in the third place, THE CONSEQUENCES OF TREATING AS AN IDLE TALE, AS THE WORDS OF ONE THAT MOCKETH, THE DECLARATIONS OF ALMIGHTY GOD. They brought ruin upon themselves and their posterity. (*T. Gisborne, D.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. Good fathers make haste in midst of dangers to keep their children from destruction, being forewarned of God's judgments. 2. Gracious parents are earnest with children to press on counsels for their good and safety. 3. Near relations in the flesh, though wicked, yet are dear unto gracious souls to save them. 4. Faith concerning God's judgments revealed will put gracious hearts upon hastening others out of them. 5. Places of habitation when they be places of vengeance, as well as of sin, must be abhorred and forsaken by God's saints. 6. Cities though ever so strong and stately cannot secure sinners from ruin. It and they shall perish. 7. Jehovah is the author of destruction upon places of wickedness, who cannot be resisted. 8. God sends messengers of salvation sometimes to the vilest of men, to Lot's sons, &c. 9. God, His messengers, and His messages of vengeance, are all but scorns and derisions to wicked men. 10. Secure scorning of destruction from God is the immediate forerunner of it, as here. (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *The last night in Sodom*:—If you had been in Sodom on that solemn, awful evening you would never have suspected it. There was nothing outwardly to show that terrible scenes were at hand, even at the door. No weird omens were observed that night; no strange sounds disturbed the superstitious. No fiery sword was seen hanging over the city, in token that the sword of the Almighty's wrath was at last unsheathed. No signs appeared in the sun as he sank peacefully to rest. The cattle came lowing home from the fields, and the sheep-dogs barked, and the voices of children at play were heard. And then darkness fell; and the chirping of a myriad insects rose on the stillness of the Eastern night; and the stars looked down upon the quiet scene; and the moon shone, for the last time, on the great doomed city. But within Lot's dwelling a solemn conference was being held, and Lot's heart was heavy and disturbed. Full of sadness was he for the heedless, unrepenting people; full of anxiety for those dear to him in that place. And then he hurried out in the darkness to warn his relatives, and to urge on them immediate flight; and they—how true to life it all is!—laughed at him! They treated the matter as a fine joke, and the more earnest his entreaties, the more boisterous grew their mirth. And so the night wore on, and then the day began to break, and the angels hurried, nay, forced Lot out of the city. But with the morning light the scoffer waxed bolder still. "What of thy coward fears of the night, O righteous Lot?" he mockingly begins, but the words die away on his lips. Ah! what means this strange, unearthly gloom—this lurid, awful flame, in which earth and heaven seem joined in one? What this terrible sense of suffocation—this scorching, choking downpour? The lightning plays, and the thunder rolls—shock upon shock is felt—shriek rises upon shriek—confusion, horror, uproar! Woe! woe! woe! . . . A few hours later, and a silence

still more awful. . . . And the sun, as he rides high in the heavens, looks down upon a smoking mass of desolation—"And the smoke of the city went up as the smoke of a furnace!" (*J. B. O. Murphy, B.A.*) *Warnings disregarded by sinners*:—What a chance (which never came again) the sons of Lot missed that evening! But do you know what they said? They said he was an alarmist! "The old man is in his dotage," laughed one, "and some one has been frightening him." "Never heed him," cried another, "he is ever thus, croaking about the wickedness of the place, and telling us we are all going to be destroyed. He has been saying it for years—and nothing has ever happened yet!" Ah, that's just where it is! "Nothing has ever happened yet!" And so, when the preacher warns the open sinner of his danger, and urges him to escape from his sin—to escape for his life—he is laughed at, and he is called an alarmist. But every one who has ever tried to press home a truth that has been unwelcome—to warn people of a danger that they would rather believe to be impossible—has been called an Alarmist. Noah was an "Alarmist." Lot was an "Alarmist." The prophets who foretold the destruction of Jerusalem were "Alarmists," and many a one who foresaw and foretold the Indian Mutiny of 1857 was called an "Alarmist." And so, at the risk of being called an "Alarmist," I would take up and echo this cry. Art thou living in a Sodom of wilful sin—a Sodom of uncleanness, or drunkenness, or not?—then "Escape for thy life!" (*Ibid.*) *As one that mocked*:—Look at Lot going through the streets of Sodom at midnight to warn his sons of the approaching destruction of the city, only to be reviled and mocked by them. Mr. Moody once said that he remembered being in an American city a few years ago, and there came unto the after-meeting an old grey-headed man, who for years had been wandering from God. In early life that old man had walked with God, and had found fellowship with Him; but for a number of years past he had been wandering in the darkness and agony of sin. He (Mr. Moody) said to him, "God is very merciful, and He will forgive you," and gave him a number of passages of Scripture, and sat up with him until midnight. About that hour the light broke in upon the old man, and the Lord restored to him the joy of his salvation, and the old man went on his way rejoicing. The next night the old man came into the meeting looking the very picture of despair; he did not think he had ever seen a sadder countenance, and he asked him what his trouble was. The old man replied that he had spent the most wretched day of his life. His family had grown up and lived in that city. He had that day wandered from house to house, and had not seen a child who did not mock him. The old man added that he now realized what he had done; he had taken his children into the world, and could not get them out again.

Ver. 15. When the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot.—*Hastening Lot*.—I. THE RIGHTEOUS NEED TO BE HASTENED. 1. In what? (1) In matters of obedience to their Lord. (2) In coming out from the world. (3) In seeking the good of their families (ver. 12). (4) In general quickness of movement in spiritual things (vers. 17, 22). 2. Why? (1) The flesh is weak. (2) Perseverance is difficult. (3) Sodom has a sluggish influence. (4) When our worldly occupation is incessant, and takes up most of our thoughts, we are hindered from decision. (5) Idle leisure is still worse. Men with nothing to do in the world seldom do anything in religion. 3. By what means? (1) By reminding them of their obligations, their opportunities, and the days already wasted. (2) By leading them to consider the flight of time and brevity of life. (3) By warning them of the sure ruin of their impenitent friends. (4) By setting before them the fact that delay in duty is sin, and leads to other sins. II. THE SINNERS NEED TO BE HASTENED. 1. Sinners are very slow, and apt to linger. (1) They have settled down in the Sodom of sin. Like the sluggard, they desire "a little more folding of the arms to sleep." (2) They are bound by many ties to the City of Destruction. (3) They do not believe our warning (ver. 14). (4) They trifle with our message when they dare not contradict it. (5) Delay is Satan's grand device for their ruin. (6) Procrastination baffles our persuasions. Delays act like bales of wool dropped over the wall of a besieged city to deaden the blows of a battering-ram. Felix quieted his conscience by the idea of "a more convenient season." 2. Our business is to hasten them. (1) We must be in earnest ourselves, as these angels were. (2) We must also be patient, and repeat our pleadings. (3) We must be resolute, and lay hold on their hands. 3. We have many arguments with which to hasten them. May the Holy Spirit make them see—(1) Their imminent danger while lingering. (2) The sin of loitering when God

commands them to escape for their lives. (3) The fitness of the present above any possible future. (4) The uncertainty that any available future will come. (5) The supreme necessity of immediate decision with some; for it may be "now or never" with them; they will "die in their sins" if they do not hear the voice of God to-day. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The lingerer*.—I. WHY IS IT, THAT IN THE ESCAPE OF THE SOUL, MEN SO LINGER? 1. The first cause is the entanglement of their affections with worldly things. 2. Another cause of Lot's irresoluteness would be the refusal of his sons-in-law and of their wives, his daughters, to escape with him. 3. Other causes of lingering there may be peculiar to yourselves. (1) Perhaps you have not fortitude enough to brave the ridicule or the persecution that you will be exposed to. (2) Perhaps you are but half-persuaded of your peril. Acknowledging in general terms your sin, you do not realize the possible imminency of its punishment. You presume upon a longer probation. You put off Christ with a promise. "Be ye, therefore, ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh." II. Need I point out to you THE PERIL OF LINGERING? It is strikingly illustrated by the narrowness of Lot's escape. How nigh he was to the fate that overtook his wife! How closely his reluctance, which the angels had to force, must have approached to her disobedience, which they had to punish! And how affecting this separation! She who left Sodom with him was not to enter Zoar with him. (H. Allon.) *A reason for haste*.—A Christian tradesman bethought him that he had never spoken to a certain regular customer about his soul, though the man had called at his shop for years. He determined to plead earnestly with him the next time he came in his way. There was no next time; his customer died suddenly, so that he saw him no more. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Spiritual concerns first*.—When a young man made an open profession of the gospel, his father, greatly offended, gave him this advice: "James, you should first get yourself established in a good trade, and then think of the matter of religion." "Father," said the son, "Jesus Christ advises me differently; He says, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God.'" (Ibid.) *Urgency needed*.—"Brother," said a dying man, "why have you not been more pressing with me about my soul?" "Dear James," replied the brother, "I have spoken to you several times." "Yes," was the answer, "you are not to blame; but you were always so quiet over it; I wish you had gone on your knees to me, or had taken me by the neck and shaken me, for I have been careless, and have nearly slept myself into hell." (Ibid.) *No time to lose*.—The poor needle-woman with her inch of candle has work to finish. See how her fingers fly, for she fears lest she should be left in darkness, and her work undone. (Ibid.) *Inducement to hasten*.—Do not some professors cause sinners to loiter by their own loitering? A man taking a seat at the Tabernacle came to the minister and said, "Sir, do I understand that if I became a seat-holder I shall be expected to be converted?" "Yes," was the reply, "I hope you will, and I pray that it may be so. Do you object?" The answer was, "Oh, sir, I desire it above everything." Was not the man hastened by the general feeling of hopefulness which pervaded the Church? Assuredly there is much in the atmosphere which surrounds a man. Among warm-hearted Christians it is hard for the careless to remain indifferent. (Ibid.)

Ver. 16. *He lingered*.—*Perilous procrastination*.—I. I MUST BEGIN BY SPEAKING TO THE PERSON WHO IS LINGERING HIMSELF. I should like to ask you, my beloved friend, if this matter about which you are still hesitating is not of vital importance to you? Do you think you ought to put off all preparation for the future that awaits you? If I knew that some one was about to defraud you of your estate, and that unless you were diligent about it you would lose all your property, I think I should say to you, "Bestir yourself." If I knew that some deadly disease had begun to prey upon your constitution, and that if neglected it would soon gain an ascendancy with which 'twere hard to grapple, I think I should say, "Go to the physician. Do not delay; for bodily health is a boon to be prized." I can scarcely recall the details of a little incident in Russian history which might illustrate the emergency: but the fact, as far as my memory serves, was this. The Czar had died suddenly, and in the dead of the night one of the counsellors of the empire came to the Princess Elizabeth and said to her, "You must come at once and take possession of the crown." She hesitated, for there were difficulties in the way, and she did not desire the position; but he said, "Now, sit down, Princess, for a minute." Then he drew her two pictures. One was the picture of herself and the Count thrown into prison, racked with tortures, and presently both brought out to

die beneath the axe. "That," he said, "you can have if you like." The other picture was of herself with the imperial crown of all the Russias on her brow, and all the princes bowing before her, and all the nation doing her homage. "That," said he, "is the other side of the question. But, to-night, your Majesty must choose which it shall be." With the two pictures vividly depicted before her mind's eye she did not hesitate long, but cast in her choice for the crown. If you decide for Christ, and trust in Him, you shall enter into the bliss of those who for ever and for ever, without admixture of grief, enjoy felicity before the throne of God. To my mind, there ought to be no halting as to the choice. II. LET ME REMIND THE LINGERER THAT WHILE HE LINGERS HE ENDANGERS THE SOULS OF OTHER PEOPLE. When Lot lingered—he was defeating his own purpose, and doing the worst imaginable thing, if he wanted to convince his sons-in-law that he spake the truth; for while he lingered, they would say, "The old fool does not believe it himself, for if he did believe it, he would pack up and haste away; nay, he would take his daughters by the hand and lead them out of the city at once." But, hark ye, man, with what face dost thou reprove others whilst thou art not decided thyself? Where is thy consistency? Let me venture to make one other observation here. I should not wonder if the death of Lot's wife might not partly be attributed to Lot himself. If you think that this is a severe reflection, I would remind you that she must have seen her husband hesitate. Oh, undecided father! I should dread to have thee think, in years to come, "The loss of my children's souls was due to my procrastination." Alas, it may be so—it may be so! III. THE MEANS BY WHICH GOD IS PLEASED AT TIMES TO ROUSE THE LINGERERS. Let us pray for them, that they may by some means be hastened. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Lingerers hastened*.—I. First, I have to speak to God's MESSENGERS. I hope they are very numerous in this church. Every believer should be an ambassador from heaven. 1. I speak solemnly to you who have wept over Jerusalem, and who are proving your true love to souls by your exertions for them, and I remind you, in the first place, that it is a glorious work to seek to save men, and that for its sake you should be willing to put up with the greatest possible inconveniences. The angels never hesitated when they were bidden to go to Sodom. They descended without demur and went about their work without delay. 2. Note again—I still speak to those who are messengers of God to men's souls—when you go to lost souls, you must, as these angels did, tell them plainly their condition and their danger. "Up," said they, "for God will destroy this place." If you really long to save men's souls, you must tell them a great deal of disagreeable truth. 3. When we have affectionately and plainly told the sinner that the wages of his sin will be death, and that woe will come upon him because of his unbelief, we must go farther, and must, in the name of our Lord Jesus, exhort the guilty one to escape from the deserved destruction. Observe, that these angels, though they understood that God had elected Lot to be saved, did not omit a single exhortation or leave the work to itself, as though it were to be done by predestination apart from instrumentality. How impressive is each admonition! What force and eagerness of love gleams in each entreaty! 4. Learn, still further, from the case before us, where words suffice not, as they frequently will not, you must adopt other modes of pressure. The angel took them by the hand. I have much faith under God in close dealings with men; personal entreaties, by the power of the Holy Spirit, do wonders. 5. I thought, as I read my text, that it gave us a striking example of doing all we can. Lot and his wife, and the two daughters—well, that was four—the angels had only four hands, so that they did all that they could—there was a hand for each. You notice the text expressly says, they took hold of the hand of Lot, and the hand of his wife, and the hand of his two daughters. There were no more persons, and no more helping hands, so that there was just enough instrumentality, but there was not a hand to spare. I wish there were in this church no idle hands, but that each believer had both hands occupied in leading souls to Jesus Christ. 6. Observe, also, that as those angels set us an example in using all their power, so they also encourage us to perseverance, for they ceased not to exhort till they had brought Lot out of danger. We must never pause in our efforts for any man till he is either saved or the funeral bell has tolled for him. 7. I will say no more to these messengers of God except this, that we ought to remember that we are the messengers of God's mercy to the sons of men. The text tells us, "The Lord being merciful unto him." The angels had not come to Lot themselves; they were the embodiment and outward embodiment and outward display of God's mercy. Christians in the

world should view themselves as manifestations of God's mercy to sinners, instruments of grace, servants of the Holy Spirit. Now, mercy is a nimble attribute. Justice lingers; it is shod with lead, but the feet of mercy are winged. Mercy delights to perform its office. So should it be with us a delight to do good to men.

II. TO YOU, O LINGERERS, I NOW SPEAK, hoping to be the means, by God's grace, of driving you out of this lingering. 1. I shall begin—O you that are halting between two opinions—by asking you, Wherefore do you linger? Lot, I think, loitered because he had much property in and around the city. As to Lot's daughters, I know not why they lingered, but, peradventure, there were some very dear to them in the city. Do you reply that you do not believe in the danger? Then am I indeed sorry for you, for the danger is none the less sure. Do you linger because you doubt the way of escape? Or, perhaps, you think you do not need it. It is possible that the reason why you linger is, that you indulge some favourite sin. Yet, perhaps, I have not touched the right reason for your lingering. You, perhaps, are subject to an idleness of spirit, a natural inaction and lethargy. I think in most cases this is the root of the matter. You are not bestirred about soul affairs, you are too idle to come to decision. But you must come to it or die. I fear me, that in some cases, though I know not of many in this place, I fear me that this whole matter is despised. If religion be a lie, do not pretend to believe it; say so, and be honest, and take the consequences; but, if it be true, act upon it. 2. Well, I have put the question, Wherefore do you linger? but now I want to say two or three words to you, and they shall be to this effect—Wherewith shall we hasten you? These few considerations, hurriedly offered, I hope will not be forgotten. (1) Time is short. Young people do not believe this, but you, who have reached thirty or forty, know it. (2) Moreover, life is uncertain. Some of you know this by painful experience. You have recently lost friends. Hale, and in strong health, they have been smitten down. Others of you have been accustomed to attend the dying-bed, or you often see the hearse go by the windows; or you are sick, and you carry death in your bowels. Wherefore do you linger? (3) If this will not quicken you, let me tell you, that if you were now to believe in Christ you would be no loser. Present salvation would be present happiness. (4) Beside that, you are now, at this moment, in danger. (5) There is one terrible reflection which I cannot help mentioning, namely, that with some of you it ought to be an alarming fact, that the means of grace are losing all effect. You used to feel them much more than you do now. (*Ibid.*)

Lot: a beacon:—

I. WHAT LOT WAS HIMSELF. 1. Lot was a true believer—a converted person—a real child of God—a justified soul—a righteous man. Is any one of my readers a traveller in the narrow way which leads unto life? So also was Lot. (1) One evidence is, that he lived in a wicked place, “seeing and hearing” evil all around him (2 Pet. ii. 8), and yet was not wicked himself. Now to be a Daniel in Babylon—an Obadiah in Ahab's house—an Abijah in Jeroboam's family—a saint in Nero's court, and a “righteous man” in Sodom, a man must have the grace of God. Without grace it would be impossible. (2) Another evidence is, that he “vexed his soul with the unlawful deeds” he beheld around him (2 Peter ii. 8). He was wounded, grieved, pained, and hurt at the sight of sin.

2. Before we pass on, let us remember that a true Christian may have many a blemish, many a defect, many an infirmity, and yet be a true Christian nevertheless. We do not despise gold because it is mixed with much dross. We must not undervalue grace because it is accompanied by much corruption.

II. WHAT THE TEXT TELLS US ABOUT LOT'S BEHAVIOUR. “He lingered.” Now, there are many Christian men and Christian women in this day very like Lot. There are many real children of God who appear to know far more than they live up to, and see far more than they practise, and yet continue in this state for many years. Wonderful that they go as far as they do, and yet go no further! They hold the Head, even Christ, and love the truth. They like sound preaching, and assent to every article of Gospel doctrine, when they hear it. But still there is an indescribable something which is not satisfactory about them. They believe in heaven, and yet seem faintly to long for it; and in hell, and yet seem little to fear it. They love the Lord Jesus; but the work they do for Him is small. They hate the devil; but they often appear to tempt him to come to them. They know the time is short; but they live as if it were long. They know they have a battle to fight; yet a man might think they were at peace. They know they have a race to run; yet they often look like people sitting still. They know the Judge is at the door, and there is wrath to come; and yet they appear half asleep. Astonishing they should be

what they are, and yet be nothing more! And what shall we say of these people? They often puzzle godly friends and relations. They often cause great anxiety. They often give rise to great doubts and searchings of heart. But they may be classed under one sweeping description—they are all brethren and sisters of Lot. They linger. III. THE REASONS THAT MAY ACCOUNT FOR LOT'S LINGERING. 1. He made a wrong choice in early life. 2. He mixed with sinners when there was no occasion for his doing so. IV. WHAT KIND OF FRUIT LOT'S LINGERING SPIRIT BORE AT LAST. 1. He did no good among the inhabitants of Sodom. 2. He helped none of his family, relatives, or connections towards heaven. 3. He left no evidences behind him when he died. (*Bishop Ryle.*) *Lessons:—* 1. Saints by infirmity may delay their own salvation, when hastened by the messengers of God. Flesh may hinder and delay. 2. Providence orders His angels to take hold of hands to deliver, when they cannot persuade hearts. Works shall do what words did not. 3. God's angels leave not the conduct of His saints until they set them without danger. 4. God's free grace and mercy to His servants is the only cause of all their deliverance by angels (ver. 16). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Folly of procrastination:—*The Spanish proverb says, "That which the fool does in the end, the wise man does in the beginning." The wise with a good grace what the fool with an ill; the one to much profit, what the other to little or none. A word worth laying to heart; for, indeed, that purchase of the sybilline books by the Roman king, what significant symbol it is of that which at one time or another, or, it may be, at many times, is finding place in almost every man's life; the same thing to be done in the end, the same price to be paid at the last, with only the difference that much of the advantage, as well as grace, of an earlier compliance, has passed away. (*Archbishop Trench.*) *Impious lives contagious:—*The impious lives of the wicked are as contagious as the most fearful plague that infects the air. When the doves of Christ lie among such pots, their yellow feathers are sullied. You may observe that in the oven the fine bread frequently hangs upon the coarse, but the coarse very seldom adheres to the fine. If you mix an equal portion of sour vinegar and sweet wine together, you will find that the vinegar will sooner sour the wine than the wine sweeten the vinegar. That is a sound body that continues healthful in a pest-house. It is a far greater wonder to see a saint maintain his purity among sinners than it is to behold a sinner becoming pure among saints. Christians are not always like fish which retain their freshness in a salt sea; or like the rose which preserves its sweetness among the most noisome weeds; or like the fire which burns the hottest when the season is coldest. The Lord's people, by keeping evil company, are like persons who are much exposed to the sun—inensibly tanned. (*J. Secker.*) *Golden moments:—*In the life of every individual there are moments of such transcendent interest that they may be called golden. Several years ago the writer heard an aged minister state that, while Dr. Dwight was president of Yale College, two young men who listened to those masterly discourses which have since been published, were deeply impressed with a sense of their sinfulness and peril. One proposed to the other that they should call on the Doctor, and talk with him. They started arm-in-arm. When they reached the doctor's house, one refused to enter. The other went in. He who remained out of doors returned to his room, but from that time ceased to manifest any interest. "He who entered," said the speaker, "became a Christian and a minister, and is now addressing you." He improved the golden moments, while his bosom-friend permitted them to roll by unheeded, little imagining they exerted upon his destiny an influence undying. In the great revival of 1831, a gentleman of my acquaintance, who had been a sea-captain, and could use more profane language in an hour than any other man I ever knew, became impressed with a sense of his sinfulness. He felt that the time had come when he must decide whether the prayers of his wife should be answered, or not. He was doing an extensive mercantile business, but he sent a note to his partner, stating that he should be detained at home, and should not be at the store, and did not wish to be disturbed. He shut himself in his room, determined not to leave it till he had settled the all-important question to his own satisfaction. Golden moments were passing through his hour-glass, while in one room his wife was pouring out her earnest supplications, and in another he thought on his ways and turned his feet to the testimonies of God, and made haste to keep His commandments. When he left that chamber the question was settled aright, and settled for ever. His face shone like that of Moses. He had been in communion with the Most High. In that same year a lawyer was convicted of his sinfulness, and was anxious to be a

Christian. On a certain evening he attended a cottage prayer-meeting, and took a seat by the side of the writer. He had been in the meeting but a few moments, when he became exceedingly agitated, and very soon took his hat and left the house. Towards the close of the meeting he returned. He soon arose and said: "I wish to be a Christian. I am determined to be one. After I entered this room, a transaction which occurred several years ago came to my mind, in which I wronged a man. My conscience, stirred by the Spirit of God, would not let me rest till the matter was settled. I have been and arranged the matter to the entire satisfaction of both parties, and I am now at peace with God and man." How golden were the moments he spent in being reconciled to the man whom he had injured! During those few moments his destiny was sealed. Had he not improved them aright, he would not have known the pleasure of having a conscience void of offence, nor the comforting assurance of God's favour. In that same year a young man who had been halting between two opinions for a length of time attended a religious meeting in Albany, and heard one of the impassioned discourses of Dr. Kirk. He left the church in company with an earnest Christian friend. They walked along in silence till they reached a street corner, where they were to separate. On parting the friend asked, "What is your decision?" The answer was, "I will serve the Lord." That young man became a Christian, and at length a minister of the gospel. Never did he regret the decision he made on that street corner while the golden moments were rolling along. Were not the moments golden which were spent by Queen Esther while pondering the question whether to go in unto the king at the risk of her life? Who can estimate the influence and the importance of that decision! Had she not employed those moments aright, her life and the lives of her nation would have been sacrificed. (*American Sunday School Times.*)

Benefits of discipline:—But, O what followeth in the next words: As he prolonged the time, they caught him by the hand and brought him out. So, so, it is a thousand times needful that we should be drawn violently, when we will not come willingly. And then see here a secret, and lay it to your heart. Your riches, your honours, your friends, pleasures, wife, children, and such like, are taken from you in part or in all. You marvel at it, and think, peradventure, you are quite out of the Lord's favour, for else this great change in your estate would not be. But fear not—rather remember what you read here: Lot prolonged to do what he should, as his case was, and the Lord caught him by the hand and brought him out. Haply as your case hath been, you have prolonged to do what the Lord willed you, and these things that you have lost were some let unto you to hold you back; the Lord, careful that you should not perish, has in this your change, done no other to you than He did to Lot when He caught him by the hand. Verily He hath even so caught you to bring you by this means, from what and whence He would have you come, because whilst you enjoyed these, you forgot yourself, prolonged and trifled the time, and danger grew on; that it must be otherwise with you, or else the Lord's judgment light upon you, amongst others whom His justice would punish, and that God would not, and therefore hath rid you thus away—even thus I say, draw you more forcibly by the want of these benefits, because as long as you enjoyed them, words would not work with you. Be not afraid, then, of adversity, but be schooled by it, to get you out of Sodom, and to obey the Lord's will and bidding: for to this end hath He caught you by the hand, effectually, though not bodily, if you be His. And when once you are out, you shall find Him slack His force again most certainly, and comfort you as shall be good, with riches, honours, friends, pleasures, wife, children, and every needful blessing. Then shall you find it true, what the prophet Daniel assureth you, No good thing verily shall be withheld from them that live a godly life. (*Bp. Babington.*)

The Lord being merciful unto him.—*Lot's escape from Sodom:*—I. It is natural to speak, first, of THE NEED LOT HAD TO ESCAPE; OR, OF THE JUDGMENT BY WHICH THE CITY WAS OVERTAKEN. It is God's way to be long-suffering. Judgment is a work He does not love. His will is that none should perish. But the cup of Sodom was now overflowing; nor was there any longer hope of its repentance. It was fully time that God's abhorrence of iniquity should be made to appear. Mercy to surrounding tribes and succeeding generations in danger of falling into like depths demanded this. When nations, cities, families, or individuals become hopeless in their impiety and corruption, when remedial agencies no longer promise good, what, then, shall a just, righteous, and good ruler do? Is it not a startling warning of the just judgment sure to overtake all sin unpardoned, because unconfessed and unforsaken? II. But we must pass to consider, next, WHY IT WAS THAT

OF ALL THE INHABITANTS OF THAT WICKED CITY, LOT SHOULD BE PERMITTED TO ESCAPE. "The Lord being merciful to him." "Thou hast magnified Thy mercy, which Thou hast showed unto me in saving my life." Poor as was the quality of Lot's religion, he had some measure of that which is real. He did not lose all faith in the true God. III. Thus we are brought to speak of some things which appear with respect to THE MANNER OF LOT'S ESCAPE. 1. With very great difficulty. To the very last God's messengers must use urgency and compulsion! So He must, and does, with many an irresolute believer. Often He graciously applies the rod. 2. But Lot's escape was not only with great difficulty, it was also with much bitter sorrow and painful loss. IV. The narrative thus briefly considered abounds in LESSONS OF THE GREATEST PRACTICAL IMPORTANCE. 1. The long-suffering of God may be worn out. Judgment is then sure. 2. None whom mercy can rescue will be suffered to perish. Lot, the most imperfect of believers, was saved. 3. To subordinate religious fidelity to worldly advantage or pleasure is always a costly and often a fatal mistake. 4. In rescuing others, one may sometimes have to use a sort of loving violence; "pulling them out of the fire." 5. It is possible to be "almost saved, but lost." (*H. M. Grout, D.D.*) *The deliverance of the righteous in the time of judgment*:—I. GOD MAKES KNOWN TO THEM THE WAY OF DELIVERANCE. 1. God's way of deliverance is often against our will. (1) We forget what should be our chief care. (2) We are paralysed by fear. 2. God's way of deliverance does not destroy the necessity for our own exertion. 3. God's way of deliverance is only effective through His mercy. II. GOD IS READY TO DELIVER OTHERS FOR THEIR SAKES. 1. Hence the righteous can offer salvation to the last. 2. Our efforts may be unavailing. III. IN THE MIDST OF ABOUNDING CORRUPTION ONLY THE FEW ESCAPE. 1. The tremendous power of evil. 2. God's great judgments upon mankind. IV. THE RIGHTEOUS CAN ONLY BE SAVED OUT OF THE SCENES OF INIQUITY, NOT IN THEM. (*T. H. Leale*.) *Lot's escape from Sodom*:—I. THE FORBEARANCE OF GOD. This is seen—1. In the patience of God with the Sodomites, in sparing them so long. 2. In the willingness to save these wicked cities for even ten righteous persons. 3. In the question (ver. 12). 4. In the loving compulsion by which Lot and his family were urged to escape. 5. In the condescension manifested in granting Lot's request. 6. Such forbearance is very noticeable in view of the terrible doom with which it was connected. II. THE PERVERSITY OF MAN. This is seen—1. In the continued hardness of the Sodomites. 2. In the mocking unbelief of Lot's sons-in-law. 3. In the hesitancy of both Lot and his family to leave the doomed city. 4. In Lot's lack of faith in God's power to keep him in the mountain as well as in Zoar. III. THE CONDITION OF SALVATION. The answers to the following questions will reveal it: 1. Why were not Lot's sons-in-law saved from the doom of Sodom? 2. Why was not Lot's wife caught in the destruction of Sodom? 3. How did Lot and his daughters ultimately escape the fate of the Sodomites? LESSONS: 1. Lot, in the choice of Sodom for a residence, furnishes an example of the folly of worldly wisdom. 2. Lot's sons-in-law furnish an example of the inevitable doom that awaits all who scorn the warnings of God's messengers. 3. Lot's wife is an example of the inevitable fate of those who outwardly, but reluctantly, conform to the requirements of the gospel, but whose heart is in the world. 4. The destruction of Sodom is an illustration of the doom that awaits this world and every impenitent soul. 5. The urgency to flee to the Divine refuge is graphically portrayed in the impassioned words of the angels (ver. 17). (*D. C. Hughes, M.A.*) *Three stages in Lot's life*:—I. LOT GOING IN THE DIRECTION OF SODOM. People generally go in the direction of that which is wrong before they thoroughly go into it. II. LOT DWELLING IN SODOM. III. THE omnipotent mercy of God Almighty, DELIVERING HIM OUT OF SODOM. (*M. Rainsford, B.A.*) *Lot's flight from Sodom*:—I. WE ARE HERE TAUGHT THE REALITY AND MAGNITUDE OF THE DANGER TO WHICH THE SINNER IS EXPOSED. The reality of the sinner's danger is proved by the express statements of the Word of God, and by the struggles of conscience, as the Almighty's viceroy, even in the unregenerated heart. II. THE MEANS EMPLOYED BY GOD TO AWAKEN THE SINNER TO A TRUE SENSE OF THE REALITY AND MAGNITUDE OF HIS DANGER. Holy Spirit is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last in the work of arousing from their death-like lethargy the prison-bound thralls or slaves of Satan. At one time He comes upon the sinner as an armed man, and attacks directly the stronghold of infidelity in the heart, and throws down every barrier by which it was guarded. At another time—and this is the more usual mode of His operation—the Sanctifier executes His office of bringing transgressors out of darkness into His marvellous light through the instrumentality

of the dispensations of God's providence, and of the faithful preaching of the Word by his called, tried, and appointed messengers. III. THE STATE OF THE SINNER'S MIND WHEN HE HAS BEEN AWAKENED, IN THE MANNER ALREADY POINTED OUT, TO A RIGHT SENSE OF HIS LOST AND DESPERATE CONDITION (see 2 Cor. vii. 11). IV. THE ENLIGHTENING AND QUICKENING SPIRIT HAVING BEGUN THE GOOD WORK, IS PLEDGED TO CARRY IT ON AND COMPLETE IT. (*R. Jeffrey.*) *Lot's deliverance*.—I. THE PRELIMINARIES OF THE DELIVERANCE. II. THE MANNER OF THE DELIVERANCE. III. THE SEQUEL TO THE DELIVERANCE. (*R. S. Candlish, D.D.*) *The folly of lingering*.—When a man hath to go over a river, though he ride once and again into the water and come out, saying, I fear it is too deep for me, yet, considering that there is no other way for him, he resolves to venture, for, saith he, the longer I stay the higher the waters will rise, and there is no other way for me—I must go through at the last, why not at the first? And so he ventures through. Thus it is with you. You say, "Oh, but my heart is not humbled; oh, but I am a great sinner; and should I venture upon Jesus Christ?" Will this heart be more humbled by keeping from Jesus Christ, and wilt thou be less a sinner by keeping from Him? No, certainly, for the longer you stay from Christ, the harder it will be to venture on Him at the last. (*W. Bridge.*) *The danger of delay*.—"Serious things to-morrow," said a distinguished individual against whose life a plot was laid. One of the confederates, relenting, had sent a notice of the plot by a messenger who had particular instructions to deliver it personally, and to state that the letter must be read immediately, as it was on a very serious matter. The messenger, however, found the person against whose life the plot was laid in the midst of a convivial feast. The letter and message were both faithfully delivered; but the man of mirth and wine laid it aside, saying, "Serious things to-morrow!" The morrow he never saw, for that night the assassin plunged the deadly weapon into his heart. So many put away from them the serious warnings of the gospel, and perish in their sins.

Ver. 17. *Escape for thy life; look not behind thee.—Delays are dangerous*.—I. AN ALARM. "Escape for thy life." 1. Lot's life was in imminent danger. So is the life of every unconverted man. 2. But Lot had timely warning to escape from the impending storm, and so has every sinner. 3. Lot's escape was to be effected in haste; and if he had not left the place at that time, he would have been destroyed with the wicked. II. A CAUTION. 1. "Look not behind thee." (1) To consult the world. (2) To confer with flesh and blood. (3) To reason with the devil. 2. "Neither stay in all the plain." (1) Of carnal security. (2) Of desire. (3) Of procrastination. (4) Of good resolution. (5) Of despondency and unbelief. III. AN EXHORTATION. "Escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." 1. Those who flee to Christ find a place of safety. 2. Those who escape to Jesus Christ shall find rest. 3. Those who escape to Christ are blessed with peace. (*Benson Bailey.*) *Delay in religion*.—I. THE GREAT CRISIS IN THE HISTORY OF THE SOUL. 1. We illustrate this by the case of Lot, as here described. 2. We apply this to the case of undecided persons. II. THE CAUSE OF THIS LINGERING IN RESPECT TO RELIGION. 1. The cause of Lot's lingering is evident. (1) Worldly attractions. (2) Domestic ties. 2. The reason why some linger on the subject of religion. (1) Taken up with the pleasures and vanities of the world, its gratifications, enjoyments, amusements. (2) Influenced by the consideration of worldly gain. (3) Influenced by relations and associations. III. THE SIN AND DANGER OF LINGERING, AS IT RESPECTS RELIGION. 1. The sin committed against God. 2. The dangerous consequences of this halting in religion. (*The Evangelical Preacher.*) *The awakened sinner*.—I. I wish to speak of the MEANS by which a sinner is awakened from his spiritual slumber—from that deathly lethargy in which every human being lies by nature. The means, I hesitate not to consider, is the Word of God. Other things may assist in giving entrance to the Word, but it is by the Word, as a rule, that God's Holy Spirit works in convincing the sinner of his sin. It matters not how the sinner gets the Word, so that he do get it. II. Having spoken of the means employed to awaken the sinner's conscience, we proceed to consider the ANXIETY which is the result. A sense of sin is produced; and sin is felt to be as a heavy burden pressing upon the soul. III. How important that such an anxious soul should receive proper INSTRUCTION! How precious, then, the opportunity of meeting with a Christian friend! I have said that it is by means of the Word of God that the sinner is awakened, that the Holy Spirit proceeds in commencing that process whereby we are brought "out of darkness into marvellous light"; let me add, that there is a connection between the Bible and human agency. God's

plan of converting the sinner is by the preaching of the Word; and it is in this way generally that conversions are effected. IV. We suppose the awakened sinner, thus instructed, to make his **ESCAPE**. He has many temptations to remain. But one thought, one anxiety, overpowers all; life, eternal life, is his motive and his object. (IV. M. Whittemore.) *Run for your life*:—1. My text, in the first place, suggests urgency on the part of all those who would induce people out of their sins. Why was not the angel more polite? Why did he not coolly and formally invite Lot and his wife to leave that city? The angel was in earnest. 2. My subject also suggests that the mere starting gives no security. Lot had started out of the city, but he might have perished half-way before he got to the mountains. Men start for heaven, but do not always get there. If my house be burning, and I take a bucket of water and put out the flames in this, and that, and yonder room, while I leave the flames in another room, I might as well have wasted no strength and brought no buckets of water at all. And if a man is only half saved, he is not saved at all. 3. The text suggests further, that a man, after being persuaded out of sin, sometimes looks back. 4. My text suggests that some men, having started, loiter by the way. They tarry in the plain. They are too lazy to get on. You know that men, in order to get on in this world, must deny themselves, and work hard; must go through drudgery, that after awhile they may have luxuries. If we get to heaven it will be by gathering up all the energies of our souls and hurling them ahead in one persistent direction. In mid-ocean, on the *China* going out at midnight, the "screw" stopped. "What's the matter?" everybody cried. People rushed out to see why the "screw" had stopped in mid-ocean. Something wrong, or it would not stop in the middle of the Atlantic. So it is a bad sign when men voyaging towards heaven stop half-way. It is a sign of infinite peril. (Dr. Talmage.) *The angels' admonition to Lot*:—I. "Escape for thy life." This was the general admonition. It was not a small matter which was at stake. It was his life. II. "Escape for thy life." Are you aware of the guilt and danger of a sinful, worldly life? Remember the treasure which you have at stake; even your life; not the life merely of your body, but the life of your soul; the everlasting happiness of your immortal spirit. Be in earnest in this great work of saving your precious, your immortal soul. Be active, be diligent. Let nothing turn you from your purpose. Lay hold on eternal life. Attend especially to the three directions attached to the general admonition. 1. "Look not behind thee." Renounce for ever all thoughts of returning to that state of sin and death from which you are beginning to escape. Suffer not your mind, even for a moment, to reflect with complacency on those pursuits, pleasures, or companions, from which you must for ever separate. Having once set your face toward heaven, O! look not back on Sodom. "Remember Lot's wife." 2. "Neither stay thou in all the plain." Think it not enough to have escaped from Sodom, but remove to the greatest possible distance from everything connected with that devoted place. Think it not enough to have renounced old habits of sin, to have broken off from the commission of gross offences, from openly profane and irreligious practices: but have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. Allow not yourself to remain within the forbidden regions of self-indulgence and worldly gratification. 3. "Escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." If there were no place of safety to which you could flee, and be at peace, then indeed would your efforts to escape be in vain, and my endeavours to assist you fruitless. But, blessed be God! there is a place of safety, a refuge provided for you, where you may be secure from the impending ruin, and may delight yourself in the abundance of peace. Lot was directed to a mountain whither he might escape and be in safety. You are directed not to a mountain, but to Jesus Christ: He is a hiding-place from the storm, a covert from the tempest. Would Lot be safe if he should flee to the mountain? Whosoever flees to Jesus Christ shall be delivered from the wrath to come. He shall be delivered from all the consequences of sin, from the punishment which it has incurred, from the power which it has obtained in the heart. Do you ask how you are to flee to Christ? You are to flee to Him in your mind, with your heart, with all the desires and affections of your soul. You are to flee to Him in faith, believing His word and promises, and casting yourselves upon His mercy and power. (E. Cooper, M.A.) *The last night of Sodom*:—"Tarry all night": "Escape for thy life." The words of man and the words of angels. The man, a master of courtesy and hospitality; the angels, ministers of mercy and of vengeance. The man speaks of house and home and feasting and rest; the angels speak of impending

wrath and swift destruction. The man persuades to the enjoyment of a quiet evening in a luxurious clime, and promises the return of a beautiful day; the angels would hasten an escape from a scene of enchantment and delight, at the sacrifice of all earthly possessions. The man speaks from mere feeling and a vivid impression of things as they are passing before his eyes; the angels speak of things as they are—and behind the calm and peaceful aspect of the closing day, they see the fiery tempest of the coming morn. Such is the contrast between feeling and fact, shadow and substance, appearance and reality. So unlike and allied to each other are the sensual and the spiritual; the earthly and the heavenly; the aspect of peace and safety, and the near approach of danger and destruction. Such is the difference between the judgment of man, who is all involved in the cares and toils and pleasures of the passing day, and the judgment of beings who stand outside the range of our mistakes and temptations, and who see the affairs of time in the light of eternity. . . . This awful lesson in sacred history may be all summed up in two words. The one is from man and the world; the other is from heaven and God. One says to the careless and the worldly, "Tarry, be at ease, enjoy yourself while you can"; the other says, "Escape for thy life." One says, "Wait, be not alarmed; make yourself comfortable where you are"; the other says, "Haste, look not behind thee; flee to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." One says, "Soul, take thine ease; eat, drink, and be merry"; the other says, "Thou fool! this night thy soul may be required of thee." The question which every one must answer for himself is always this, Which of these two voices shall I obey? To many it seems like mockery to talk of danger to the young and the gay, the healthful and the happy. But who was the mocker on the peaceful night when the cities of the plain rioted in pleasure for the last time? All the seductions and falsehoods of temptation, and all the dangers and sorrows of perdition, are bound up in that one word—wait. The voice of love speaks to the careless in terms of terror and alarm. God's patience will not always last. The day of grace must have an end. And with many it is much shorter than they expect. (D. Marsh, D.D.)

Illustration of the sinner's state, duty, and prospects:—I. THE DANGER TO WHICH THE SINNER IS EXPOSED. 1. It is real. Not imaginary. 2. It is imminent. Not distant. Nearer and nearer every day. 3. It is tremendous. Not slight. II. THE POSSIBILITY OF ESCAPE FROM THE DANGER TO WHICH THE SINNER IS EXPOSED. 1. It is proved by the invitations addressed to him in the Bible. Numerous, earnest, pathetic. 2. It is proved by the revelation of the work of Christ, on which these invitations are founded. That work is a mountain, if that be the proper emblem of strength, stability, immutability. 3. It is proved by the experience of all believers. Fire-escape. Life-boat. III. THE NECESSITY OF PROMPT AND DECISIVE ACTION ON THE PART OF THE SINNER, IF HE WOULD ESCAPE FROM THE DANGER TO WHICH HE IS EXPOSED. 1. His flight must be instantaneous. Without procrastination. 2. His flight must be rapid. No delay. 3. His flight must be persevering. The city of refuge. IV. THE URGENCY OF THE MOTIVES BY WHICH THE SINNER SHOULD BE INDUCED TO ESCAPE FROM THE DANGER TO WHICH HE IS EXPOSED. 1. The magnitude of the interests at stake. "Life! life! eternal life!" 2. The exclusiveness of the gospel method of salvation. No other name. 3. The happiness of escape. Beneficial results to ourselves and others. Address (1) Those who are at ease in Sodom; (2) Those who are lingering and deferring their flight; (3) Those who are daily running in the way prescribed. (G. Brooks.) *Escape for thy life:*—I. You must escape for your life—THE LIFE NOT OF THE BODY BUT OF THE SOUL. 1. The everlasting welfare of your soul is in danger. 2. To effect your deliverance you must escape yourselves. 3. You must be in earnest. 4. You must sacrifice everything that stands in your way. II. LOOK NOT BEHIND. 1. He who has once left this sinful world ought to give up all thoughts of return. 2. Look not behind you for the sake of your former companions. 3. Look not back to relieve yourself of the sense of guilt which weighs upon you. 4. Look not behind lest you should never advance beyond your present position. III. STAY NOT IN ALL THE PLAIN. Delay not—1. In hope of a better opportunity. 2. In reliance upon your good intentions. 3. Because you have begun to attend to religion. 4. Though you have been brought to feel deeply about religion. 5. For a more thorough conviction of sin. 6. Through discouragement and despondency. 7. Because you hope you are a Christian. (J. Day, D.D.) *Saved as by fire:*—There is such a fate as being saved, yet so as by fire, going into the brightness with the smell of fire on your garments. (A. MacLaren, D.D.) *Escape for thy life:*—When danger is behind us we should strain all our powers to escape from it

as Indians or settlers do to escape from the prairie fires in America. A tribe of Indians, who were swift of foot, once gave a white man they intended to kill a chance to escape by running whilst they all pursued him. He ran with such mad haste that he managed, though with great difficulty, to escape. Look not behind thee, . . . lest thou be consumed (Gen. xix. 17). *Look not behind:*—The ancients told a fable about Orpheus who, they said, could move men and beasts, birds and fishes, and even trees and rocks by his wonderful music; that when his wife Eurydice was bitten by a serpent and had died, then Orpheus followed her into the infernal regions and there played his music with such exquisite skill that even Pluto (who was said to be the stern and inexorable king of hell) and his grave wife Proserpina were moved to such pity that they gave Orpheus leave to take his wife back to the world again on condition that he did not look around whilst they ascended. As, however, they were rising, the fable says he looked round, either from love, or doubt, or forgetfulness. The result was he saw his much-loved wife for a moment, but then she vanished from his sight for ever. If we look and turn back to the world or sin, we shall lose God's favour and blessings, and we may lose our souls for ever. *No time for delay:*—A man was once shut up in prison, loaded with chains, and condemned to be hung. He had been taken a prisoner in war by a cruel tyrant, and knew that there was no hope for him if he could not in some way make his escape. In the dead hour of night, when all his guards were sound asleep, and not a footstep was to be heard around his prison, the door of his dungeon was opened, his general entered and took off his chains, and said to him, "Haste thee, escape from this place. I have, at immense expense and terrible exposure of my life, entered this prison to save you. Follow me, and I will guide you safely. But you have not a moment to lose. An hour's delay may prove for ever too late." What will you think when I tell you that the prisoner said, "Let me think about it—wait a little while"; and then actually refused to go with him? Who was to blame for that man's death, but himself? This is precisely the way that sinners, condemned and bound by Satan to be shut up in the dark prison of despair, act when Jesus, the great Captain of our salvation, comes to set them free. A great warrior was once persuaded by his enemies to put on a beautiful robe which they presented him. Not suspecting their design, he wrapped himself tightly in it, but in a few moments found that it was coated on the inside with a deadly poison. It stuck to his flesh as if it had been glued. The poison entered into his flesh so that in trying to throw off the cloak he was left torn and bleeding. But did he for that reason hesitate about taking it off? Did he stop to think whether it was painful or not? Did he say, "Let me wait and think about it awhile"? No, he had more sense than that. He tore it off at once, and threw it from him, and hastened away from it to the physician. Sinner, this is the way you must treat your sins if you would be saved. And do it now. "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation." A sprightly boy, who was the pride of his master, who was loved by all his fellow-servants, once came to me to talk about his soul's salvation. He had heard that to live in sin was to live in rebellion against God and in great danger. He felt that he was a sinner. He knew that he ought to forsake his sins. He talked freely with me about himself. Before we parted he promised to begin the service of God the next day. He went off to his business. I saw no more of him for about three months. As I was riding along one day his master met me and asked me to go in and see William, for that was his name, who was very sick. I found him very ill, and about to die. Surely, said I to myself, he is prepared and willing to go, for I remember his promises and good resolutions to begin the next day. I said to him, "William, I hope Christ is precious to you now?" "Oh! sir," said he, "I have no hope in Christ! I fear I am lost. I resolved when I saw you last to repent and be a Christian the next day. But the next day brought something that prevented me, and caused me to put it off till the next day still, and so I thought at the end of every day that I would begin the next day. But every day passed on and closed in the same way. And here I am yet, a hardened sinner, and in the arms of death." I tried to tell him about Jesus as his Saviour. I prayed for him. And while I was repeating some precious promises from the Word of God, he turned to me and said, "Oh! sir, it is too late; I am lost. I cannot be saved now. Tell my fellow-servants not to put off another day making their peace with God." Scarcely had he given this testimony of the danger of delay, when he was overcome by stupor and delirium, and thus died in darkness and impenitence. (Bp. Meade.) *Escape for thy life!*—"For thy life!" Ah, brethren, were it only the life of your body that you

knew to be in jeopardy, you would not hesitate, you would not tarry. You would escape from a burning house, you would leap from a sinking ship, and leave all you have in the world behind you. "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life." One instance of the truth of these words. A young officer doing duty with an Indian cavalry regiment when tiger shooting one day, "missed his mark," and soon found himself in the tiger's clutches. It was an anxious moment—few of his friends being at hand. As a sportsman of experience the young man knew well that his best course was to lie quietly and sham death. The tiger surveyed his prey, looked around, and thinking all was safe, set to work to make its meal. Taking the young officer's hand in his mouth he deliberately devoured it, and the arm was eaten to the elbow before help arrived. Had the victim moved, or uttered even a groan, the tiger would have put an end to his existence before going on with his repast. Of course the shattered arm had to be removed from the shoulder, but that brave officer lives, and holds at this present moment a post of honour under the Government. Now imagine the suffering endured by him whilst lying, quite conscious, in the power of a voracious "man-eater"! Why do I tell you this? To ask you what it was that strengthened him to such an act of heroism. It was love of life—it was "for his life"! (*J. B. C. Murphy, B.A.*) *Escape*:—It is a rather popular word with young people. At the head of a newspaper paragraph or of a chapter in a story it instantly commands attention. We at once think of a convict's escape from prison, or a backwoodsman's escape from Indians, or a mail-steamer's escape from icebergs. But observe—what are all these escapes from? The convict escapes from weary confinement; the backwoodsman from hated foes; the mail-steamer from dreaded peril. No necessity to urge escape from these. (*E. Stock.*) *Look not behind thee*:—This demand seems somewhat strange to us; for we would rather expect that the angels would summon them to look at the cities while God was executing judgment on their wicked inhabitants, in order to show them His power. But the words of the angels to Lot rest on a certain idea found among many ancient nations. To witness with human and profane eyes God's holy acts was regarded as fatal to the beholder. We find this fact as it existed among the old Hebrews expressed in many passages of the Old Testament. Moses, as soon as he hears the voice, "I am the God of thy father," out of the burning bush, hides his face, being afraid to look upon Eloheem. When the Lord revealed Himself in fire and smoke on Mount Sinai, the children of Israel were forbidden to break through the bounds to gaze on the Lord, lest they perish. Gideon (*Judg. vi. 22*) and Manoah (*Judg. xiii. 22*) feared that they might die because they had seen the angel of the Lord. Even Isaiah, when about to be consecrated by Jehovah for his prophetic office, exclaims, in the aspect of the throne and of the all-covering magnificent garment of God: "Woe is me! for I am undone, for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Indeed, the Divine holiness is a devouring fire to men regarded as sinners (*Isa. xxxiii. 14*). Even the seraphim, according to the immense contrast between the Creator and His creatures, cannot stand the holy God and cover their face (*Isa. vi. 2*). Similar to the Jewish is this conception among heathen nations. The Greeks and Romans were not accustomed to look back while performing certain sacred rites; and the classical legends are full of examples in which this ceremony is observed. Tiresias, the famous diviner of Thebes, consulted by Alcmena, daughter of Electryon, king of Mycenæ (now partly re-excavated), ordered her to burn the two dreadful dragons which her son, a boy of only ten months, had killed, and to send the ashes over the river. There the servant should spread them in the clefts of the rocks, and after that come back without turning his back. Thus Theocritus tells us in the twenty-fourth book of his idylls. Another case is recorded by Ovid. When Deucalion and Pyrrha, the only two persons who were saved out of the deluge according to the Greek tradition, consulted the ancient oracle of Themis regarding the restoration of mankind, they received the answer: "Depart from the fane, veil your heads, loosen your girded vestments, and cast behind you the great bones of your parent" (that is, the stones of the earth). And in one of the most beautiful of the old myths the turning back of the person in question was not less fatal than in the case of Lot's wife. Orpheus, who struck the lyre so wonderfully as to move the very rocks and trees, mollified even the rulers of the lower regions, and obtained permission to take back to the world of light his beloved wife, the nymph Eurydice, who had died from the bite of a serpent, on the condition that he was not to look back before reaching the confines of the Hades. But curious, like the wife of Lot, Orpheus broke this

condition shortly before his wish was fulfilled, and Eurydice vanished from his sight to return to the kingdom of darkness. (*H. V. Hilprecht, D.D.*) *Escape from destruction*:—It is related that once the city of Pleurs stood in a quiet valley of the Alps, beneath the shadow of the snow-covered mountains, a pleasant and prosperous town. Above it hung the avalanche threatening destruction. One night a wakeful man heard the ominous sound breaking on the still air, which heralds the descending mass of ice. Starting from his repose, he awoke his daughter, and with her hastened towards the city gate. There she recollected that her casket of jewellery had been left in the house, and turned back to secure the treasure. In another moment the overwhelming deluge of the avalanche fell with the voice of thunder between father and daughter, burying the city beneath it. When the morning dawned, the spires of the churches alone rose above the cold, white grave of the just before busy town. The maiden perished with her idol, while he who sought to save her escaped. (*Tract Journal.*)

Vers. 18-22. And Lot said unto them, Oh ! not so, my Lord.—*The infirmities of the heirs of salvation*:—I. THESE INFIRMITIES ARE SEEN DURING THE PROGRESS OF THEIR DELIVERANCE. 1. The infirmity of fear (ver. 19). 2. Wilfulness (ver. 20). 3. Forgetfulness of past mercies. 4. A lingering selfishness. II. GOD IS GRACIOUS TOWARDS SUCH INFIRMITIES (ver. 21). III. THERE ARE CERTAIN CONDITIONS WHICH FIT THEM FOR SUCH MERCIFUL INDULGENCE. 1. When they have already commenced the flight from danger. 2. When, though they have not reached it, they are still seeking a sure refuge. 3. When they are satisfied not to rest in anything short of God's command. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Lessons*:—1. Gracious souls in their weaknesses will acknowledge the freeness and greatness of God's mercy to them. 2. Infirmity yet turns such confession aside, to a wrong use, even to desire things against God's will. 3. Saving souls alive in the midst of destructions is a free and great mercy. 4. Weakness of faith and strength of sense may make God's Word seem impossible unto His servants. 5. Infirmity of faith creates many fears of evil even against God's promise. 6. Saints through infirmity apprehend death where God clearly promiseth and giveth life. (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Lot's prayer as contrasted with that of Abraham*:—Abraham had never prayed for himself with a tithe of the persistent earnestness with which he prayed for Sodom—a town which was much indebted to him, but towards which, for more reasons than one, a smaller man would have borne a grudge. Lot, on the other hand, much indebted to Sodom, identified indeed with it, one of its leading citizens, connected by marriage with its inhabitants, is in no agony about its destruction, and has indeed but one prayer to offer, and that is, that when all his fellow-townsmen are destroyed, he may be comfortably provided for. While the men he has bargained and feasted with, the men he has made money out of and married his daughters to, are in the agonies of an appalling catastrophe and so near that the smoke of their torment sweeps across his retreat, he is so disengaged from regrets and compassion that he can nicely weigh the comparative comfort and advantage of city and rural life. One would have thought better of the man if he had declined the angelic rescue and resolved to stand by those in death whose society he had so coveted in life. And it is significant that while the generous, large-hearted, devout pleading of Abraham is in vain, the miserable, timorous, selfish petition of Lot is heard and answered. It would seem as if sometimes God were hopeless of men, and threw to them in contempt the gifts they crave, giving them the poor stations in this life their ambition is set upon, because He sees they have made themselves incapable of enduring hardness, and so quelling their lower nature. An answered prayer is not always a blessing, sometimes it is a doom: "He sent them meat to the full: but while their meat was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them and slew the fattest of them." Probably had Lot felt any inclination to pray for his townsmen he would have seen that for him to do so would be unseemly. His circumstances, his long association with the Sodomites, and his accommodation of himself to their ways, had both eaten the soul out of him and set him on quite a different footing towards God from that occupied by Abraham. A man cannot on a sudden emergency lift himself out of the circumstances in which he has been rooted, nor peel off his character as if it were only skin deep. Abraham had been living an unworldly life, in which intercourse with God was a familiar employment. His prayer was but the seasonal flower of his life, nourished to all its beauty by the habitual nutriment of past years. Lot in his need could only utter a peevish, pitiful, childish cry. He had

aimed all his life at being comfortable, he could not now wish anything more than to be comfortable. "Stand out of my sunshine" was all he could say when he held by the hand the plenipotentiary of heaven, and when the roar of the conflict of moral good and evil was filling his ears—a decent man, a righteous man, but the world had eaten out his heart till he had nothing to keep him in sympathy with heaven. Such is the state to which men in our society, as in Sodom, are brought by risking their spiritual life to make the most of this world. (*M. Dods, D.D.*)

Ver. 20. **Is it not a little one?**—*Is it not a little one?*—God warns us to flee from the low level life of sin to the mountain of purity and peace. A word spoken by a friend, something read in a letter or book, joy, sorrow, anything God can use as His angel or messenger to call us away from the land of sin. And we are willing to do so on condition that we may keep that one little sin that doth so easily beset us. There is one habit which conscience tells us is not quite right, but which could only be broken by a painful struggle. Oh, let me keep this sin (is it not a little one?), and all other sins I shall put away! But this sort of compromise is impossible. The contagion of any one conscious sin, however small, will poison the whole soul. God will have all of a man's heart, or none of it. Let us think of some of the reasons why we should try by God's grace to put away those little sins which we have been comparing to the little Zoar for which Lot pleaded. 1. The first reason is because in God's sight there is no such thing as a little sin. He is of purer eyes than to behold with tolerance any evil. Then we ought to reflect that doing conspicuous good actions and abstaining from great sins cannot prove our love to God as much as doing small duties and abstaining from little sins. The test, therefore, of a fine character is attention to what are called the small matters of conduct. 2. Another reason why we should be afraid to harbour little sins is because they lead to great ones. The very absence of crime and great sin which, if present, might have shocked us into repentance, may lull us into a sleep of fatal security and self-righteousness. To prevent this, let us adopt a high standard of Christian excellence, and endeavour to reach it by attention to small things. Every one who is at all in the habit of self-examination must be conscious of such within him—indolence, vanity, ill-temper, weakness, yielding to the opinion and ridicule of the world, the temptation of bad passions, of which we are ashamed, but by which we are overcome. Let each of us consider what his peculiar infirmity is, and though the Zoar be a little one, and though it be hard to part with, resolutely determine to give it up to destruction. Let us remember, that if ever we are to have a character capable of enjoying the mountain of holiness, we must not now despise the day of small things. Character is built, like the walls of an edifice, by laying one stone upon another. A mountain is ascended by setting one footstep after another up its steep face; if there be an occasional backward slip, a lesson of caution is learned, and the lost path is regained with determination. Holiness is not a rapture; it is a steady living to God, one step at a time, and every one higher up. (*E. J. Hardy, M.A.*) *Little sins*:—The most lamentable consequences in a Christian's life often date their origin from some small act which is suffered to grow into a principle; from some incidental occurrence which ministered temptations that were heedlessly encouraged; or from a failure in habitual watchfulness in something which was considered unimportant in its influence. I. THIS INATTENTION TO LITTLE THINGS WILL BE DISCOVERED IN THE FREQUENT EXCITEMENTS OF A NATURALLY IRRITABLE TEMPER. That ardour of temperament which gives the ability for great achievements, opens also the source of great sorrows. Our trials of temper are usually found in small incidents; chiefly in the little and private concerns of domestic life. II. THIS DISREGARD OF LITTLE THINGS WILL BE EXHIBITED IN THE MANY SMALL AND UNNECESSARY INDULGENCES WHICH CHRISTIANS TOO OFTEN ALLOW THEMSELVES FOR APPETITE OR EASE. How often are such indulgences made the substance of a permanent and unchangeable habit? III. THIS INATTENTION TO SMALLER THINGS WILL BE DETECTED IN THE LIGHT AND UNIMPROVING RECREATIONS AND AMUSEMENTS, WHICH ARE OFTEN ALLOWED. IV. YOU MAY DISCOVER THIS INATTENTION TO SMALLER MATTERS IN RELIGION, IN AN INCREASING SPIRIT OF IDLENESS AND SLOTH. The Zoar of indolence will be no refuge. It may be made the prison of bondage. It can never be the abode of peace. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Little things*:—This is the question which we are always asking with regard to the events of our lives. Something crosses the stream of our existence and diverts its current into another channel, a trifle we call it, in our blindness; but it is no such thing, there are no such things as trifles; little things make up the history of mankind and the history of individuals, but they are not

trifles; the vast machinery of the universe turns upon very little wheels, but they are none the less important for all that. A little message flashed along the telegraph wire plunges two great nations into war, and dislocates half Europe; a little word spoken in anger makes a man a murderer, or loses a prodigal an inheritance; a little look of penitence, a single tear from remorseful eyes, heals the breach between two friends and make them one again; a little plaything or a little trouble alters the whole current of a child's thoughts, so a little larger plaything or a little deeper trouble sweetens or embitters the life of men who are but children of a larger growth. Never, then, underrate the importance of little things; they are to your lives and fortunes what the acorn is to the forest oak, what the little spring in the Cotswold Hills is to the great river at your doors. Look at the little troubles of life; they cause more of the grumbling in the world than its great trials. It is marvellous how wretched and discontented a little change of weather makes us, a shift of wind, a change of temperature paralyzes one, and makes another ill-tempered. God's hand is concerned in the little things, remember, as well as in the great. He makes the grain of sand as well as the mountain, the same hand lets the sparrow fall to the ground, and destroys the armies in the war. Little sins are the most dangerous of all sins, just as some tropical reptiles are the most deadly because difficult to detect from their smallness. Let me try to bring some of these little sins under the microscope, that you may see how dangerous and ugly they look. Grumbling we have spoken of; next look at thoughtlessness, and little sins of commission and omission constantly excused with the words, "is it not a little one?" or "I never thought of it." Again, there is procrastination—some duty is to be done, a little one, some small debt is to be paid, some small memorandum to be put down, some visit to be made, and we put it off till to-morrow, till the to-morrow which never comes, and when some calamity or loss arises from the neglect our pitiful plaint is "I never thought of it." So with little unkindness; it is not often, I believe, that we wound and injure people of deliberate malice, but many a fair fame is tarnished, many a happy home broken up, many a life-long quarrel caused by thoughtlessly-uttered words about our neighbours. We cannot be too careful in judging or giving an opinion of the qualities of others. Let us bring another sin beneath the microscope—bad temper. I know not if I may safely call it a little one, it has an ugly aspect and is capable of an endless amount of mischief. In many a household there is this little bitter drop of bad temper spoiling all the meals, blackening all the social pleasures, fading all the flowers of joy and happiness. It is easy to call it an infirmity of temper, or to say it is only a manner, but it is an infirmity which, if neglected, grows to great lengths, and a manner is all by which we can judge most people; it is the outward man which is presented to us, and although a man's heart may be very kindly disposed to us, it is scarcely likely for us to know it or appreciate it if his manner be unkind. This manner is one of the little things which is of vast importance. Another of the little sins which affect the home circle greatly is want of forbearance; bear and forbear is the best maxim for home; "let them first learn to show piety at home" is the best text. Close akin to this last sin is that of censoriousness, of finding fault perpetually with the details of your home life. There is yet another so-called little sin, of which I must speak—the breaking and re-forming of good resolutions. This is no little sin, believe me, it is the sin which has ruined millions, the sin of trusting in ourselves instead of in God's constant help. But I pass on to say a word, in conclusion, on the exceeding danger of little sins as regards our spiritual life. They sap and undermine it, just as the constant fretting of a tiny stream of water will wear away stone and wooden piers; just as tiny insects will eat through a ship's timbers and destroy her. If a man procrastinates, habitually defers any duty, how will he prepare for the great day, when will he begin to set his house in order? If we indulge in unkindly judgments and remarks about our neighbours, how can we approach the Holy Communion when we are told to be in love and charity with our neighbour; how, if we continually break our good resolutions, can we be said "to intend to lead a new life"? How can we come to Church in a proper frame of mind, how can we hope to get any good from the services, if we have just left a scene of ill-temper, harsh language, and bitter thoughts at home? No, such things cannot be. (*H. J. Wilmot Buxton, M.A.*) *Little sins*:—1. With regard, then, to this temptation of Satan concerning the littleness of sin, I would make this first answer: the best of men have always been afraid of little sins. You may have read of that noble warrior for Christ, Martin Arethusa, the bishop. He had led the people to pull down the idol temple in the city over which he presided;

and when the apostate emperor Julian came to power, he commanded the people to rebuild the temple. They were bound to obey on pain of death. But Arethusa all the while lifted up his voice against the evil they were doing, until the wrath of the king fell upon him of a sudden. He was, however, offered his life on condition that he would subscribe so much as a single halfpenny towards the building of the temple; nay, less than that, if he would cast one grain of incense into the censer of the false God he might escape. But he would not do it. He feared God, and he would not do the most tiny little sin to save his life. They therefore exposed his body, and gave him up to the children to prick him with knives; then they smeared him with honey, and he was exposed to wasps and stung to death. But all the while the grain of incense he would not give. He could give his body to wasps, and die in the most terrible pains, but he could not, he would not, he dared not sin against God. A noble example! Now, brethren, if men have been able to perceive so much of sin in little transgressions, that they would bear inconceivable tortures rather than commit them, must there not be something dreadful after all in the thing of which Satan says, "Is it not a little one?" Men, with their eyes well opened by Divine grace, have seen a whole hell slumbering in the most minute sin.

2. We all see in nature how easily we may prove this—that little things lead to greater things. If it be desired to bridge a gulf, it is often the custom to shoot an arrow, and cross it with a line almost as thin as film. That line passes over and a string is drawn after it, and after that some small rope, and after that a cable, and after that the swinging suspension bridge, that makes a way for thousands. So it is oftentimes with Satan.

3. Another argument may be used to respond to this little temptation of the devil. He says, "Is it not a little one?" "Yes," we reply, "but little sins multiply very fast." Like all other little things, there is a marvellous power of multiplication in little sins. Years ago there was not a single thistle in the whole of Australia. Some Scotchman who very much admired thistles—rather more than I do—thought it was a pity that a great island like Australia should be without that marvellous and glorious symbol of his great nation. He therefore collected a packet of thistle-seeds, and sent it over to one of his friends in Australia. Well, when it was landed, the officers might have said, "Oh, let it in; 'is it not a little one?' Here is but a handful of thistle-down, oh, let it come in; it will be but sown in a garden—the Scotch will grow it in their gardens; they think it a fine flower, no doubt—let them have it, it is but meant for their amusement." Ah, yes, it was but a little one; but now whole districts of country are covered with it, and it has become the farmer's pest and plague. It was a little one; but, all the worse for that, it multiplied and grew. If it had been a great evil, all men would have set to work to crush it. This little evil is not to be eradicated, and of that country it may be said till doomsday—"Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth." Happy would it have been if the ship that brought that seed had been wrecked. No boon is it to those of our countrymen there on the other side of the earth, but a vast curse. Take heed of the thistle-seed; little sins are like it.

4. Once again; little sins, after all, if you look at them in another aspect, are great. A little sin involves a great principle. Suppose that to-morrow the Austrians should send a body of men into Sardinia. If they only send a dozen it would be equal to a declaration of war. It may be said "Is it not a little one?"—a very small band of soldiers that we have sent?" "Yes," it would be replied, "but it is the principle of the thing. You cannot be allowed with impunity to send your soldiers across the border. War must be proclaimed, because you have violated the frontier, and invaded the land." It is not necessary to send a hundred thousand troops into a country to break a treaty. It is true the breach of the treaty may appear to be small; but if the slightest breach be allowed, the principle is gone. The principle of obedience is compromised in thy smallest transgression, and, therefore, is it great. Now I am about to speak to the child of God only, and I say to him, "Brother, if Satan tempts thee to say, 'Is it not a little one?'" reply to him, "Ah, Satan, but little though it be, it may mar my fellowship with Christ." Is it a little one, Satan? But a little stone in the shoe will make a traveller limp. A little thorn may breed a fester. A little cloud may hide the sun. A cloud the size of a man's hand may bring a deluge of rain. Avaunt Satan! I can have nought to do with thee; for since I know that Jesus bled for little sins, I cannot wound His heart by indulging in them afresh. Ah, my friends, those men that say little sins can have no vice in them whatever, they do but give indications of their own character; they show which way the stream runs. A straw may let you know which way the wind blows, or even a floating feather; and so may some little sin be an indication of the pre-

vailing tendency of the heart. An eternity of woe is prepared for what men call little sins. It is not alone the murderer, the drunkard, the whoremonger, that shall be sent to hell. The wicked, it is true, shall be sent there, but the little sinner, with all the nations that forget God, shall have his portion there also. Tremble, therefore, on account of little sins. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

*The danger of little sins:—*I. LITTLE SINS LEAD ON TO GREAT ONES. Some years ago the Bradfield reservoir sprang a tiny leak. It was so small that it was disregarded. Neglected, it grew larger, until one night the bank was swept away, and a mighty torrent let loose that destroyed houses and mills, an immense amount of property and many lives, flooded the town of Sheffield, and has left a burden of debt on that town to this day. Not long ago a gentleman, hurrying along one of the streets of Manchester, slipped and fell, slightly grazing one of his fingers. He saw the wound, but thought it too slight for care. The blood was poisoned by contact with some rubbish on which he had fallen, and in a few weeks his whole system became charged with it, and he expired in terrible agony. Little sins indulged, spared, neglected, have shown equal power of growth. A little leaven has leavened the whole lump. Learn the story of the inmates of our jails, workhouses, lunatic asylums, and you will see how little sins end in great sins; in poverty, crime, insanity and utter ruin. II. LITTLE SINS DESTROY OUR PEACE AND HINDER OUR GROWTH IN GRACE. A little splinter of wood, a tiny thorn buried in the flesh and neglected will produce intense agony. The story is told of a whole train being stopped on the railway between Perth and Aberdeen by the loss of one little pin. And equally sad results are produced in us by little sins. III. LITTLE SINS DESTROY OUR INFLUENCE. We are Christ's "living epistles," known and read of all men. Many a man has lost all influence for good, undone his own efforts, through little slips and want of care about the minor moralities. It was not the Philistines but Delilah that robbed Samson of his power. IV. LITTLE SINS NEED MORE EFFORT AND WATCHFULNESS TO OVERCOME THAN GREAT ONES. (*J. Ogle.*)

*Lot's false reasoning:—*The natural conclusion from God's mercy, which he acknowledges, would have been trust and obedience. "Therefore I can escape," not "but I cannot escape," would have been the logic of faith. The latter is irrationality of fear. When a man who has been cleaving to this fleeting life of earthly good wakes up to believe his danger, he is ever apt to plunge into an abyss of terror, in which God's commands seem impossible, and His will to save becomes dim. The world first lies to us by "You are quite safe where you are. Don't be in a hurry to go." Then it lies, "You never can get away now." Reverse Lot's whimpering fears, and we get the truth. Are not God's directions how to escape promises that we shall escape? Will He begin to build, and not be able to finish? Will the judgments of His hand overrun their commission, like a bloodhound which, in his master's absence, may rend his friend? "We have all of us one human heart," and this swift leap from unreasoning carelessness to as unreasoning dread, this failure to draw the true conclusion from God's past mercy, and this despairing recoil from the path pointed for us, and craving for easier ways, belong to us. "A strange servant of God was this," say we. Yes, and we are often quite as strange. How many people awakened to see their danger are so absorbed by the sight that they cannot see the cross, or think they can never reach it? God answered the cry, whatever its fault, and that may well make us pause in our condemnation. He hears even a very imperfect petition, and can see the tiniest germ of faith buried under thick clouds of doubt and fear. This stooping readiness to meet Lot's weakness comes in wonderful contrast with the terrible revelation of judgment which follows. What an idea of God, which had room for this more than human patience with weakness, and also for the flashing, lurid glories of destructive retribution! Zoar is spared, not for the unworthy reason which Lot suggested,—because its minuteness might buy impunity, as some noxious insect too small to be worth crushing; but in accordance with the principle which was illustrated in Abraham's intercession, and even in Lot's safety; namely, that the righteous are shields for others, as Paul had the lives of all that sailed with him given to him. God's "cannot" answers Lot's "cannot." His power is limited by His own solemn purpose to save His faltering servant. The latter had feared that, before he could reach the mountain, "the evil" would overtake him. God shows him that his safety was a condition precedent to its outburst. Lot barred the way. God could not "let slip the dogs of" judgment, but held them in the leash until Lot was in Zoar. Very awful is the command to make haste, based on this impossibility, as if God were weary of delay, and more than ready to smite. However we may

find anthropomorphism in these early narratives, let us not forget that, when the world has long been groaning under some giant evil, and the bitter seed is grown up into a waving forest of poison, there is something in the passionless righteousness of God which brooks no longer delay, but seeks to make "a short work" on the earth. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Wedges*:—"When a man cleaves a block he first pierces it with small wedges, and then with greater; and so doth the devil make entrance into the soul by degrees. Judas first purloineth and stealeth out of the bag; then censureth Christ as profusely lavishing. What needs this waste? This was not only a check to the woman, but to Christ Himself. Lastly, upon Christ's rebuke, he hates Him, and then betrays Him to His enemies." There is no dealing with the devil except at arm's length. Those little wedges of his are terribly insinuating because they are so little. Keep them out or worse will follow. Occasional glasses lead on to drunken orgies; occasional theatre-going grows into wantonness and chambering; trifling pilfering soon grows to downright theft; secret back-slidings end in public abominations. The egg of all mischief is as small as a mustard-seed. It is with the transgressor as with the falling stone—the further he falls the faster he falls. Again we say beware of the little wedges, for they are in crafty hands, and our utter destruction may be compassed by them. Even iron safes have been forced when little wedges have made room for the burglar's lever. Take heed of the plea, "Is it not a little one?" O my Saviour, let me not fall little by little, or think myself able to bear the indulgence of any known sin because it seems so insignificant. Keep me from sinful beginnings, lest they lead me on to sorrowful endings. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Dangerous to remain in the neighbourhood of old sins*:—Camping down upon the edges of a sin from which a man has just escaped, is dangerous work. A person in such a position is like one who, upon finding himself in the running current of a river which is rising, swollen by heavy rains, struggles desperately until he reaches its banks, and there settles himself in false security. In the morning the waters of the freshet are booming about him, and he flies to the meadow, a little higher. But the floods are out, and they rise and rise, faster than he can run, and the man who, by fleeing at once to the mountains when he came up from the river, would have been saved, by tarrying upon the lowlands, perished. (*H. W. Beecher.*)

VERS. 23. The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar.—*The lessons of a day*:—I. **THE ABSURDITY OF LETTING SECULAR MOTIVES GOVERN MEN'S CONDUCT.** Lot went to Sodom because he thought it a secularly desirable place. (*Gen. xiii. 10.*) He went there, and there his own piety was injured, his own children contaminated, and the partner of his own bosom became a victim of Divine judgment. The beauty of his home was his curse. The spirit of Lot is still common. II. **THE INCONGRUITY BETWEEN THE PHYSICAL AND MORAL SCENERY OF THE WORLD.** 1. The abnormal state of human society. 2. The necessity of a retributive period. 3. A man's external circumstances are no true signs of character. III. **THE TREMENDOUS FORCE OF OLD ASSOCIATIONS.** 1. The local. 2. The social. 3. The secular. IV. **THE FUTILITY OF HUMAN REASONING CONCERNING THE WAYS OF GOD.** 1. God may deviate from the laws of nature; He cannot from His word. 2. God has deviated from the laws of nature; He has never from His word. V. **THE DETERMINED ANTAGONISM OF THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT TO SIN.** (*Homilist.*) *The forbearance of God*:—I. Sunshine and midnight are alike great opportunities of God. They are as the pillar of fire and pillar of cloud to the whole race of man. By their dumb mouths God speaks to us, and their silent movement, without a sound, warns us of His presence, His love, and His providence. It was when God's servant, weak, failing, and infirm, shattered and broken, in deep sorrow, led by an angel, had placed his trembling foot-steps on the rock; it was then, when he had come safely out of the blazing city, and the lurid fires glared in the sky; when at last, though oh! how long, how lingeringly, the aged patriarch had emerged from his deep trouble; then the sun arose upon the earth. 2. Few characters in the Bible are more full of comfort than Lot's. Weak in disposition, faulty in his general life, erring after repeated warnings, irresolute even when he stood on the verge of ruin, God was yet willing to save him. 3. In the beginning he showed tendency, distinct and clear. He loved ease, comfort, wealth, worldly possessions, and beauty. He followed disposition. That disposition was not sinful—it was weak. It erred on the side of what multitudes (and those the good) admire—kindness, easiness, gentleness, affability, lack of severity. It was exactly the reverse of the disposition of Abraham. All doubt as to the end of Lot, and his

position in eternity, is removed by the verse which declares, on the warrant and in the words of St. Peter, that "God delivered just Lot," who was "a righteous man." His escape is called a deliverance, and the act of God is spoken of as a means used to remove Lot from the sinful examples of Sodom and Gomorrah. (*E. Monro, M.A.*) *The righteous delivered*.—Thus, in times of public calamity, there is often some little Zoar provided for them that love God, where they are wonderfully preserved from the judgments that fall on their country and their kindred. The Roman armies which surrounded Jerusalem, to execute on it the vengeance predicted, drew off, in an unaccountable manner, as if their design had been to give the Christians contained within its walls an opportunity of withdrawing to a little adjoining city, called Pella, which proved a Zoar to them, from whence they beheld the Roman eagles fly again to the destined prey, to be left no more till they had devoured it. And what is the church upon earth, but a Zoar, a little city (is it not a little one?) spared at the intercession of its Lord? Here the penitent, not yet strong enough to escape to the heavenly mountain, findeth rest and refreshment, and is invigorated to pursue his journey. Hither let him escape, and his soul shall live. But let him bear in mind, that in making his escape, perseverance alone can secure him. "He that endureth to the end," and he only, "shall be saved." (*Bishop Horne.*)

Vers. 24, 25. Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven.—*The destruction of Sodom*.—I. DIVINE JUDGMENT IS DISCRIMINATIVE.—The Scripture will not have us fall into the belief that there is no radical difference between the good and the evil. It would have us know that they are as unlike as the wheat and the chaff. Divine judgments are a winnowing-fan to separate the two. If the sifting and winnowing process which goes on in this world is only partially accomplished, yet it is carried far enough to let us know that some time it will be completed. II. DIVINE JUDGMENT, THOUGH LONG DELAYED, IS AT LAST PRECIPITATED BY PRESUMPTUOUS SINS. The men of Sodom, lusting after God's messengers, launched upon themselves the fire and brimstone. They hastened and fixed the city's doom. No doubt, God's judgments are exactly timed. The hour and minute of visitation are determined. But the timing has been done by One who foreknows the moral history of men. He has set a bound for human iniquity. It cannot be passed. He knows at what hour it will be reached. Until that hour judgment impends; then it falls. Let Joab escape punishment for the murder of Abner, and, so far from coming to repentance, he will be found reddening his hand with the blood of Amasa. Yet his second crime hastens on the time when the horns of the altar will not be for him a sanctuary of refuge. Let Napoleon III. succeed in his transcendent crime of founding the Second Empire in France, and thereafter he will despise the will of the people, in destroying the freedom of the press, and will hasten the hour of doom by all the surprising splendours and follies of the Imperial court at Compiègne. The Bible reiterates the lesson for all rulers, all governments, all individuals: that a limit of transgression has been fixed, beyond which judgment waits. Presumptuous sins, therefore, hasten the hour of judgment. III. AMONG PRESUMPTUOUS SINS WE MUST NUMBER DISOBEDIENCE TO THE LORD'S DIRECT COMMAND. This was the sin of Lot's wife. No doubt she loved Sodom. IV. DIVINE JUDGMENT, WHICH IS PRECIPITATED BY ACTS OF PRESUMPTUOUS SIN, IS SOMETIMES AVERTED FOR THE SAKE OF THE RIGHTEOUS. What would have been realized in Sodom, had ten righteous men dwelt there, was done in Zoar when Lot and his two daughters made it a place of refuge. The little city of Zoar was saved for their sake. A leaven of goodness saved it. V. THE DIVINE JUDGMENTS OF THIS WORLD ARE NOT FINAL. We might be inclined to say, in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, that their wickedness was sufficiently punished. The sweeping tempest of fire did its strange work thoroughly, but our Lord has left some sobering words (Matt. x. 15) to teach that this sudden, awful event was not the day of judgment for Sodom. In that day it shall be "more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for some who, despising the sin of the Sodomites, have yet sinned against greater light." (*W. G. Sperry.*) *The destruction of the cities of the plain*.—I. IT WAS SUDDEN. 1. As regards the object of it. 2. Not as regards the Author of it. II. IT WAS THE DIRECT ACT OF GOD. 1. The destruction was predicted. 2. The destruction was, in its nature, extraordinary. III. IT WAS COMPLETE. Utter ruin, and absolutely without remedy. Learn: 1. That God's judgments, though deserved, tarry long. 2. That without timely repentance, His judgments are sure to fall. (*T. H. Leale.*) *The overthrow of Sodom*.—The

"brimstone" of the Authorized Version is probably rather some form of bituminous matter which could be carried into the air by such an escape of gas, and a thick saline mud would accompany the eruption, encrusting anything it reached. Subsidence would follow the ejection of quantities of such matter; and hence the word "overthrew," which seems inappropriate to a mere conflagration, would be explained. But, however this may be, we have to recognize a supernatural element in the starting of the train of natural causes as well as in the timing of the catastrophe, and a Divine purpose of retribution, which turns the catastrophe, however effected, into a judgment. So regarded, the event has a double meaning. I. In the first place, it is a revelation of an element in the Divine character and of a feature in the Divine Government. To the men of that time, it might be a warning. To Abraham, and through him to his descendants, and through them to us, it preaches a truth very unwelcome to many in this day—that there is in God that which constrains Him to hate, fight against, and punish evil. The temper of this generation turns away from such thoughts, and, in the name of the truth that "God is love," would fain obliterate the truth that He does and will punish. But if the punitive element be suppressed, and that in God which makes it necessary ignored or weakened, the end will be a God who has not force enough to love, but only weakly to indulge. If He does not hate and punish, He does not pardon. For the sake of the love of God, we must hold firm by the belief in the judgments of God. The God who destroyed Sodom is not merely the God of an earlier antiquated creed. "Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also." Again this event is a prophecy. So our Lord has employed it; and much of the imagery in which the last judgment is represented is directly drawn from this narrative. So far from this story showing to us only the superstitions of a form of belief which we have long outgrown, its deepest meaning lies far ahead, and closes the history of man on the earth. We know from the lips which cannot lie, that the appalling suddenness of that destruction foreshadows the swiftness of the coming of that last "day of the Lord." We know that in literality some of the physical features shall be reproduced; for the fire which shall burn up the world and all its works is no figure, nor is it proclaimed only by such non-authoritative voices as those of Jesus and His apostles, but also by the modern possessors of infallible certitude—the men of science. We know that that day shall be a day of retribution. We know, too, that the crime of Sodom, foul and unnatural as it was, is not the darkest, but that its inhabitants (who have to face that judgment too) will find their doom more tolerable, and their sins lighter than some who have had high places in the church, than the Pharisees and wise men who have not taken Christ for their Saviour. (*A. MacLaren, D.D.*)

Lessons from the destruction of Sodom:—I. WHAT AN EVIL IS SENSUAL AND SEXUAL POLLUTION. It is remarkable that God has severely punished the cities most chargeable with these sins. Lucknow is said to be the Sodom of India, and it has of late been terribly punished, although through the instrumentality of hands many of them unclean themselves. Some of the cities in the West Indies and South America, which have been destroyed by earthquake, were peculiarly stained by such pollutions; and if accounts be true, Cuba, on this principle, may well stand in awe of the judgments of God. Of all the cities on the continent, the two which have suffered most in war have been its two most licentious cities, namely, Vienna and Paris. II. *HOW MUCH STILL DEPENDS UPON A FEW IN A LARGE CITY, AS WELL AS IN A COUNTRY.* "Ye are the salt of the earth." Even Omnipotence pauses, in its path of just vengeance, till the righteous are out of its way (ver. 22). Let the thought that there are still so few righteous in the earth exert a humbling influence on our minds. We know not what is God's required proportion now, it was in Sodom's day tens to tens of thousands; perhaps it is so still, and how serious the question. Is it because the required proportion of righteous is found, or is it out of mere forbearance that God does not arise terribly to punish the world, and how long, if it be mere forbearance, may this forbearance last? III. *LET US FLEE TO THE ZOAR OF CHRIST.* (*G. Giffillan.*) *Destruction a moral necessity:—*To find out whether the judgment is right we must find out the moral conditions which called it forth. And first, it is important to observe that this judgment was preceded by an inquiry of the most unquestionable completeness and authority. Hear this (Gen. xviii. 20, 21). You see, therefore, that we are only following the Lord's own example, in asking for information as to moral conditions. It is, then, deeply satisfactory to know that the judgment was preceded by inquiry. In the next place, the revelation made respecting the moral condition of Sodom is appal-

ling and revolting, beyond the power of words to describe. Let us put the case before ourselves in this way : Given a city that is full of corruption, which may not be so much as named ; every home a den of unclean beasts ; every imagination debauched and drunk with iniquity ; every tongue an empoisoned instrument ; purity, love, honour, peace, forgotten or detested words ; judgment deposed, righteousness banished, the sanctuary abandoned, the altar destroyed ; every child taught the tricks and speech of imps ; prizes offered for the discovery of some deeper depth of iniquity or new way of serving the devil ;—given such a city, to know what is best to be done with it ? Remonstrate with it ? Absurd ! Threaten it ? Feeble ! What then ? Rain fire and brimstone upon it ? Yes ! Conscience says Yes ; Justice says Yes ; concern for other cities says Yes ; nothing but fire will disinfect so foul an air, nothing but burning brimstone should succeed the cup of devils. Just as we grasp the moral condition with which God had to deal do we see that fire alone could meet wickedness so wicked or insanity so mad. This view is important not only historically as regards Sodom, but prospectively as regards a still greater judgment. This is no local tragedy. The fire and brimstone are still in the power of God ; not a spark has been lost ; it is true to-day and for ever that “our God is a consuming fire” ! (J. Parker, D.D.)

*The probable physical causes of the destruction of the cities of the plain :—*With reference to the causes of the destruction of the cities, these are so clearly stated in a perfectly unconscious and incidental manner in Genesis xix., that I think no geologist, on comparing the narrative with the structure of the district, can hesitate as to the nature of the phenomena which were presented to the observation of the narrator. Nor is there any reason to suppose that the history is compounded of two narratives giving different views as to the cause of the catastrophe. On the contrary, the story has all the internal evidence of being a record of the observations of intelligent eye-witnesses, who reported the appearances observed without concerning themselves as to their proximate causes or natural probability. We learn from the narrative that the destruction was sudden and unexpected, that it was caused by “brimstone and fire,” that these were rained down from the sky, that a dense column of smoke ascended to a great height like the smoke of a furnace or lime-kiln, and that along with, or immediately after the fire, there was an emission of brine or saline mud, capable of encrusting bodies (as that of Lot’s wife), so that they appeared as mounds (not pillars) of salt. The only point in the statements in regard to which there can be doubt, is the substance intended by the Hebrew word translated “brimstone.” It may mean sulphur, of which there is abundance in some of the Dead Sea depths ; but there is reason to suspect that, as used here, it may rather denote pitch, since it is derived from the same root with Gopher, the Hebrew name, apparently, of the cypress and other resinous woods. It is scarcely necessary to say that the circumstances above referred to are not those of a volcanic eruption, and there is no mention of any earthquake, which, if it occurred, must in the judgment of the narrator have been altogether a subordinate feature. Nor is an earthquake necessarily implied in the expression “overthrown,” used in Deut. xxix. Still, as we shall see, more or less tremor of the ground very probably occurred, and might have impressed itself on traditions of the event, especially as the district is subject to earthquakes, though it is not mentioned in theological narrative. The description is that of a bitumen or petroleum eruption, similar to those which, on a small scale, have been so destructive in the regions of Canada and the United States of America. They arise from the existence of reservoirs of compressed inflammable gas, along with petroleum and water, existing at considerable depths below the surface. When these are penetrated, as by a well or borehole, the gas escapes with explosive force, carrying petroleum with it, and when both have been ignited the petroleum rains down in burning showers and floats in flames over the ejected water, while a dense smoke towers high into the air, and the in-rushing draft may produce a vortex, carrying it upward to a still greater height, and distributing still more widely the burning material, which is almost inextinguishable and most destructive to life and to buildings. We have thus only to suppose that, at the time in question, reservoirs of condensed gas and petroleum existed under the plain of Siddim, and that these were suddenly discharged, either by their own accumulated pressure, or by an earthquake shock fracturing the overlying beds, when the phenomena described by the writer in Genesis would occur, and after the eruption the site would be covered with saline and sulphurous deposit, while many of the sources of petroleum previously existing might be permanently dried up. In connection with this there might be subsidence of the ground over the now exhausted reser-

voirs, and this might give rise to the idea of the submergence of the cities. It is to be observed, however, that the parenthetic statement in Gen. xiv, "which is the Salt Sea," does not certainly mean under the sea, and that it relates not to the cities themselves but to the plain where the battle recorded in the chapter was fought at a time previous to the eruption. It is also to be noted that this particular locality is precisely the one which, as previously stated, may on other grounds be supposed to have subsided, and that this subsidence having occurred subsequently may have rendered less intelligible the march of the invading army to later readers, and this may have required to be mentioned. It seems difficult to imagine that anything except the real occurrence of such an event could have given origin to the narrative. No one unacquainted with the structure of the district and the probability of the bitumen eruptions in connection with this structure, would be likely to imagine the raining of burning pitch from the sky, with the attendant phenomena stated so simply and without any appearance of exaggeration, and with the evident intention to dwell on the spiritual and moral significance of the event, while giving just as much of the physical features as was essential to this purpose. It may be added here that in Isa. xxxiv. 9, 10, there is a graphic description of a bitumen eruption, which may possibly be based on the history now under consideration, though used figuratively to illustrate the doom of Idumea. In thus directing attention to the physical phenomena attendant on the destruction of the cities of the plain, I do not desire to detract from the providential character of the catastrophe, or from the lessons which it teaches, and which have pervaded the religion and literature of the world ever since it occurred. I merely wish to show that there is nothing in the narrative comparable with the wild myths and fanciful conjectures sometimes associated with it, and that its author has described it in an intelligent manner, appearances which he must have seen or which were described to him by competent witnesses. I wish also to indicate that the statements made are in accordance with the structure and possibilities of the district as now understood after its scientific exploration. From a scientific point of view it is an almost vague description of a natural phenomena of much interest and very rare occurrence. Nor do I desire to be understood as asserting that Sodom and its companion cities were unique in the facilities of destruction afforded by their situation. They were no doubt so placed as to be specially subject to one particular kind of overthrow. But it may be safely said that there is no city in the world which is not equally, though perhaps by other agencies, within the reach of Divine power exercised through the energies of nature, should it be found to be destitute of "ten righteous men." So that the conclusion still holds—"except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." (*Sir J. William Dawson.*) *The destruction of Sodom by God through natural agencies:*—A man goes now to the scene of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and tries to establish the fact that it was nothing but a natural volcanic eruption; and by getting rid of the supernatural agency he thinks he has got rid of God Himself. Another goes to the same place, and in his zeal for the supernatural wishes to make out that the veracity of the Bible depends on this kind of occurrence never having happened before. Do we mean, then, that only the marvellous incidents of nature—the fall of a Sodom and Gomorrah taking place at an appointed time—only the positive miracles, are God's doing, and not the common-place events of every-day life? Nay, God holds all the powers of nature in His hand; small events may be so directed by Him that we shall think them accident; but for all this it is no less certain that the most trifling act of every-day life is directed by Him. What we have to say is this: we agree with the supernaturalist in saying that God did it; we agree with the rationalist in saying that it was done by natural means. The natural is the work of God. (*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*) *Site of the cities of the plain:*—The question of the site of the cities of the plain is one that cannot be decided with certainty. The prevalent view is, that they were at the southern end of the sea. The correspondence of the names Usdum, Amra, and Zoghal to Sodom, Gomorrah, and Zoar, adds weight to this view. Then there is the existence of the salt mountain above alluded to. On the other hand the passage in Gen. xiii. 10-12, tends to the conclusion that the plain was to the north of the Dead Sea. Mr. Grove, in the "Bible Dictionary," points out that the mention of the Jordan confirms this: "for the Jordan ceases where it enters the Dead Sea, and can have no existence south of that point"; and on a review of the whole argument he says: "It thus appears that on the situation of Sodom no satisfactory conclusion can at present be come to. On the one hand the narrative of Genesis seems to state positively that it lay at the northern end of the Dead Sea. On the other

hand the long continued tradition and the names of existing spots seem to pronounce with almost equal positiveness that it was at its southern end." Canon Tristram, in his "Natural History of the Bible," speaks of "the great Jordan valley and Dead Sea basin" as "the most remarkable geological part of the Holy Land." He holds with M. Lartet that the Dead Sea "is the basin of an old inland sea, larger, indeed, than the present lake, but which has had no connection with the Red Sea since the continent assumed its present form." He mentions that "bitumen is sometimes found in large masses floating on the surface of the Dead Sea, especially after earthquakes"; and that "there are many hot springs and sulphur springs both on the shores of the Dead Sea and also in its basin, some of which deposit sulphur largely on the rocks around. Most of these hot springs are strongly mineral." With reference to the site of the cities, he thinks it evident on geological grounds that "the catastrophe which overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah can no more be ascribed to an ordinary volcanic eruption than can the fire and blackness of Mount Sinai. Those cities were not situated where the Dead Sea now is, nor were they swallowed up by it; but standing in the *ciccar*, i.e., the plain of Jordan, and probably somewhere between Jericho and the north end of the lake, they were destroyed by brimstone and fire rained down upon them by a special interposition of Divine power. The materials for the fire were at hand in the sulphur abounding near and the bitumen with which, dug from the pits of the plain, the houses were probably constructed, or cemented." (*W. S. Smith, B.D.*)

Ver. 26. But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.—*The cause and danger of backsliding*:—I. THE CAUSE OF BACKSLIDING. Unbelief, leading to (1) disobedience, (2) indecision. She was perplexed between God and the world. II. THE DANGER OF BACKSLIDING. 1. There is the danger of forfeiting our salvation. 2. The danger of punishment. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Lot's wife*:—I. SHE PERISHED AFTER SOLEMN WARNING. II. SHE PERISHED BY A LOOK. III. SHE PERISHED AFTER SHE HAD STOOD LONG, AND HAD ENJOYED GREAT ADVANTAGES. IV. SHE ILLUSTRATES THE ENORMOUS INFLUENCE OF WORLDLY INTERESTS AND AFFECTIONS. (*Ibid.*) *Lot's wife*:—I. A CHARACTER HIGHLY BLESSED. 1. Association with good people. 2. Remarkable interpositions of Providence on her behalf. 3. Divine aid afforded to escape the danger. II. A CHARACTER INEXCUSABLY WRONG. 1. Inasmuch as sin in its most detestable forms had been presented to her view. 2. Inasmuch as a special commandment was disregarded. 3. Inasmuch as there was no reasonable inducement to disobey. III. A CHARACTER SADLY PUNISHED. 1. Separated from the objects of her hope. 2. Held forth as a warning to others throughout the ages. 3. Lost almost within reach of safety. (*Homilist.*) *The danger of looking back*:—"Remember Lot's wife"—1. In the hour of conviction of sin. "Up! flee for your life!" is the voice of the Holy Spirit. Delay, hesitation, casting longing looks back on a life of sin, then, may be fatal. 2. In the hour of fiery temptation. The only safety is in precipitate flight. 3. When any question of duty is pressed upon you. 4. Amid the assaults of unbelief. 5. Note what Christ says in Luke ix. 62: "No man, having put his hand to the plough," &c. (1) He is not intent on the work in hand. (2) His earthly ties and interests are stronger than those which pertain to heavenly things. (3) He has really surrendered himself to temptation. (*J. M. Sherwood, D.D.*) *Lot's wife*:—I. She was made a NOTABLE AND CONSPICUOUS EXAMPLE OF JUDICIAL INFLECTION; so as to "justify the ways of God to men." Why was she overtaken by so signal a doom? She was probably not different from others, her fellow-townswomen—the votaries of fashion and the slaves of custom. We possess some intimation of the habits which then existed, and the tastes which then prevailed. "The iniquity of Sodom" was "pride, fulness of bread; and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters" (*Ezek. xvi. 49*). No encomium is pronounced on her; but how differently is her partner regarded! (2 Peter ii. 4, 7, and 8.) Probably she was frivolous, light, and careless in her conduct; her character made up of negations, rather than of positive vices; and her faults probably originated in the unfavourable influence of the society in which she mingled. "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth" (1 Tim. v. 6). We see a judicial infliction overtaking her conduct, which was marked by the following features. 1. Disobedience. It is the business of principle to obey the right and the rule. It does not matter what the law prescribes, for the majesty which invests the government of God descends on all the acts of His legislation; and it is not for us to question their greater or less magnitude, or their superior or subordinate authority. He shows us what He

wills, and it is our part to obey. In the case before us there was to be no idolatry of home—no favourite objects to preserve and bring away. They were to come out quickly and unburdened. The general command was to disregard all; and even the particular precept could not be more distinct: "Escape for thy life! Look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain! Escape thou to the mountain, lest thou be consumed" (Gen. xix. 17)! Then commenced a struggle in her mind. Here was her disobedience. Only obey the voice of God, and it shall be well; but if thou disobey, ruin will be the result. 2. Ingratitude. It was not ordinary kindness, but particular and pre-eminent that was shown to her husband, herself, and her household. "Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither" (Gen. xix. 22). As if His fury were stayed till the complete deliverance of these, His favourite charge. 3. Reluctance. Hers was an averted countenance. Are we surprised at this? Think of the awe—the panic—the agitation! Think of the natural instinct which attached her to home. Was it that her heart grudged to leave behind some favourite whose misery excited her pity and commiseration? None of these feelings are manifested. But there is a wistful and hankering look. Her eye seems enamoured of what she must abandon; the objects of vanity—her companionships—whatever she coveted—her pursuits—her friends—her abode—her flocks—all that she was leaving; and though she saved what was of greater value, her heart went after her covetousness (Ezek. xxxiii. 31); and it was all concentrated in that look. 4. Distrust. Might it not be a false alarm? Might it not be well to pause and examine? 5. Indecision. This paralyzes all, and is unaccountable in such a case as hers. See how the waves threaten to surround her! Yet she wavers, instead of hastening her retreat. II. Why are we to "Remember Lot's wife," but that there was something in her conduct to REBUKE AND INSTRUCT us? 1. How small a thing may prevent our salvation! Lot's wife may have been gay and volatile—nothing more. 2. The increased misery of perishing within the reach of recovering mercy. Lot's wife was in the track of safety. All was promise and hope. 3. The evil of a careless state of mind. Lot's wife was not fully possessed of the fear proper to her situation. Led by the example of those among whom she dwelt, she had no just view of the evil of sin. Left by her companions, she thought to return; but the resolve was too late! Advance was as helpless as retreat! 4. The misery of apostasy. Many have a disposition to what is right; but there is nothing fixed—no true change. How many have been thus hindered in their course! They were almost persuaded to be Christians (Acts xxvi. 28), but they "looked back"; and our Lord indicates that this disposition leads to condemnation (Luke ix. 62). 5. The fearful state of mind when God leaves the sinner and abandons him to his own will. In the case of Lot's wife, God could do no more, and the angels went on. The last desire for deliverance left her. She "looked back"—stopped—and stood still for ever! (R. W. Hamilton, D.D.)

Lot's wife.—I. THE TEXT SHOWS THAT ACTIONS MAY BECOME PUNISHABLE, WHICH TO US MAY SEEM MOST HARMLESS AND EXCUSABLE. No doubt there are some things which have happened in each of our lives which stand out more prominently than others, and we can remember these with ease, and with a constant recurring memory. They are the mountains and hills (so to speak) in our mind-scenery which come before us ever so plainly; but the little rivulet, or the humble stone, or the half-hidden bush is passed over and seldom thought of. And such is the case with human life, we overlook or forget the smaller things of every-day existence, while we lay a great emphasis upon what we consider more deserving of our attention. But it is the little transactions of the day which make up the character, which form it, and give to it its destiny. It is the oft-repeated habit which grows into strength, and stamps its image upon our hearts and minds, whether good or bad. It is the word of anger which, like a spark, kindles into flame our fiercest passions, while the word of kindness will soothe the feelings of ill temper and carry comfort into the most troubled bosom. A look, a simple pressure of the hand, and even sometimes a well-known footstep, will do much to change the history of a life. Yet, after all, God looks deeper into our doings than what meets the eye or falls upon the ear of sense. He is a Searcher of the heart, of its intents and motives; and according to its principles, which lie beneath the disturbed and restless surface of human actions, so does He acquit or condemn us, commend or disapprove. Thus with regard to Lot's wife, it was not the mere turning back of her body, or the look of her eye, which He condemned, but the motives which prompted these actions, and made them the instruments of her own evil wishes, and of the wrong-

ful feelings which stirred within her soul. Hence, if the eye should become the instrument of sin, pluck it out; or, if the arm should lead us to offend, cut it off. II. We observe here THAT THE SIN OF LOT'S WIFE FOUND HER OUT WHATEVER THAT SIN MIGHT HAVE BEEN. Did her heart long to remain with the people of the cities whom God had cursed? She became a fixture to the spot where such a wish was encouraged. Did she depreciate or condemn the judgment which wrapt the cities in flames? She is made to share their fate, only in another form. Would she rather return to the place from which she was commanded to flee, and so brave the curse which God had declared against it? Then let her steps be arrested in death, and her folly become a monument of warning to others who would follow her example. Did she, by looking back in direct opposition to the orders not to do so, care nothing about the interposition of angels, nought of the Divine goodness and mercy in providing for her and her household a refuge and a place of rest and security? Then let her insensibility and ingratitude become marked by turning her into a lifeless and insensible pillar of salt. And thus we often find that there is a correspondence between the act of disobedience and the judgment which follows it. III. THE FATE OF LOT'S WIFE WAS SUDDEN, QUITE UNEXPECTED. It came upon her in an instant. In the very act of turning she was struck by the hand of death. There came to her no note of warning of the calamity, and the momentary change allowed no time for thought, for reflection, or for shrinking fear. But it is not the suddenness of death we have most to dread, it is the being unprepared for such a change. It is this we have most to fear. The manner and form of the death of Lot's wife may be regarded comparatively of little consequence, but the state of mind in which the destroyer found her is of the utmost importance. IV. WE LEARN FROM OUR SUBJECT THE EVIL OF TURNING BACK IN THE PATH OF DUTY. V. The body of Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt seems to point to the COMPARATIVE INSIGNIFICANCE OF THE HUMAN BODY, AND TO CAST A SORT OF CONTEMPT UPON IT. But suppose its rigid fixture to the ground may be considered a symbol of the fixity of the human character in death! (*W. D. Horwood.*) *Lost near safety*:—In an October day a treacherous calm on the northern coast is suddenly followed by one of the fiercest storms within the memory of man. Without warning signs a squall comes sweeping down the main, and the ocean leaps in its fury like a thing of life. The heavens seem to bow themselves, and form a veil of mirk and gloom; and above the voices of the storm is heard the cry of those on shore, "O God of mercy, send us those we love!" But, alas! there are those for whom that prayer cannot now avail; for floating spars and bodies washed ashore from which all life is sucked tell too plainly that some home is desolate, some spirit crushed. And now a mighty shout is heard, and all eyes again turn towards the sea, for through the darkness of the storm a boat is seen struggling towards the shore, now lost to sight, and again borne on the crest of the wave, nearer and yet nearer the harbour's mouth. The climax now approaches in this wild race for life; and hearts are high with hope or chilled with fear, for the next wave must either bear them into safety or send them to their doom. See! there it comes, threatening in its vastness and twisting in its progress like some hideous thing of night. A cold sweat breaks out on those on shore, for the boat is lifted on its boiling crest and dashed with resistless fury against the stonework of the pier; and as a mighty cry of anguish rises, the men clinging to the wreck wave to their friends a last adieu, who, close at hand, stand agonized spectators of the scene! Yes, they have surmounted all the dangers which have proved fatal to their fellows, only to miss the friendly hands stretched out to save, and perish before the eyes, and be washed up lifeless at the very feet, of those they love. In all such cases the grief of onlookers, and of all who mourn their loss, is augmented by the thought that though so near to safety they yet were lost. Remember that to be near the harbour-mouth is not to be safe in its shelter—that though near to the kingdom of heaven you may never enter therein; and that, in so far as your final salvation is concerned, being near to Christ is no better than being far away, if it never lead to a complete surrender of your heart to Him. (*W. Landels. D.D.*) *Lot's wife: a warning*:—All which bewray and show that they were never in heart soundly reformed, how glorious soever their outward show was for a time. Fear we, then, ever to look back with Lot's wife! Fear we to return to those old vices and sinful corruptions wherewith we have been stayed! Fear we to frequent that company, to lust or long for those poisoned pleasures which heretofore have given us a fall, or at least endangered us, for as the Lord liveth that smote this woman (Lot's wife) we shall be smitten first or last, and stand as spectacles of His

wrath for evermore. Now, as you have heard what she did, so hear, I pray you, what she suffered. She looked back, and the Lord turned her into a pillar of salt. That which respecteth the punishment itself is that it was just and most due to her. For, first, she was delivered with her husband and daughters out of Sodom, and brought forth by the angels' own hands. Then she was warned that she should not look back, nor abide in all the plain, lest she perished, which was a fair warning. Thirdly, even hard by, as it were, there was appointed a city to them whither they might easily go, and should be most safe. Fourthly, she had going with her husband and children, whom, both for wife's affection and mother's, she should joyfully have accompanied. But all this she neglecteth, and therefore justly perisheth. This biddeth us to-day to beware, and, hearing the word of the Lord, not to harden our hearts. Without doubt, if we perish, we perish justly, and it is not the Lord's blame, but our own fault that it is so. "Remember Lot's wife," saith our Saviour Christ, in Luke, "and let him that is in the field not turn back to that he has left behind"; and remember Lot's wife say I to you, to continue in safety without revolting, and the Lord grant that her salt may season our lives for ever. (*Bishop Babington.*) *Lessons from the history of Lot's wife:*—I. **RELIGIOUS PRIVILEGES DO NOT CONSTITUTE SALVATION.** Never forget that. Some of us rest too much on our religious privileges. I read of Pharaoh being nine times brought under conviction, and yet he perished. I read of Judas being associated with the Christ of God for more than three years, listening to words that angels came down to listen to, and contemplating the model of human and Divine perfection, witnessing Him opening the eyes of the blind, unstopping the ears of the deaf, cleansing the lepers, raising the dead, and yet he perished. And here I read of Lot's wife, for thirty years associated with the people of God, almost pressed by angels to the very gates of Zoar, and yet she perished; and God made her a pillar of salt, to be an everlasting monument of the fact that religious privileges and associations cannot save. II. **Religious privileges, when they are not made a blessing to us, WHEN THEY DO NOT EFFECT THE END INTENDED BY THEM, INCREASE OUR CONDEMNATION AND AGGRAVATE OUR RUIN.** That is a solemn passage in 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16. I would far rather stand before the judgment-seat of God by-and-by a poor African from the barren waste of Africa, where the gospel message was never known, and the story of the blood of Christ never told, and throw myself upon His mercy, than I would take the stand of one of you professing Christians! who, in that day, will have nothing to answer when the King shall say, "Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment?" III. **TO LOOK BACK FROM THIS POSITION OF KNOWLEDGE IS TO GO BACK,** and so the Lord interprets it. To be outside Sodom is not enough, to be disentangled from the world is not enough, you must be in Christ, or you are not saved. Mechanical obedience, bodily exercise is not salvation; her body was near to Zoar, but her affections were in Sodom, and she perished—"Remember Lot's wife." (*M. Rainsford, B.A.*) *Lessons:*—1. The time of vengeance on the wicked may be that of severe judgment upon the righteous who haste not from it. 2. Nearest relations may be sometimes the greatest crosses to God's saints. 3. Rebellion against God's express commands and threatenings is a provoking evil. 4. It is very evil to have withdrawing hearts from God's salvation and inclining to the wicked's destruction. 5. God sometimes meets with rebellion and apostasy in the very act, and judgeth it. 6. Eminent sins are answered sometimes with eminent judgments. 7. God can turn flesh into salt and stones, and He alone. 8. God maketh some of His severe acts of punishment to be perpetual examples against sin in all ages. (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *The sin and punishment of Lot's wife; or, the sinner under conviction still in danger:*—Here let me tell you that conviction for sin and conversion to God are two very different things. A sinner under conviction is a sinner waked up to his guilt and danger. A sinner converted is a sinner who has hasted away to Christ for pardon and mercy, who is made safe in the strong mountain of God's love and grace. I. **LOT'S WIFE SAW HER DANGER, AND SET OUT TO ESCAPE FROM IT.** So the Holy Spirit of God makes many a man see his danger as a sinner, and strives with him, and urges him to flee away from his sins. Many a man, under the warnings of the spirit, sets off in a way to the mount of God, and yet, like Lot's wife, perishes in the way. Pharaoh; Herod; Felix; Agrippa. I called to see a faithful servant once who was lying and trembling on the verge of death. He was greatly alarmed at the thought of dying unprepared to meet God. He said that the thought of his sins gave him the deepest distress, and that all he wanted was to be a Christian. Before I left him he solemnly promised that if ever he was

raised up from that bed of sickness, he would be a Christian the rest of his days. Had he died then, his master and all of us who were there would have said that he died a Christian, and was saved in heaven. But he recovered; and, as he had always been a good and faithful servant, we expected to see the light of a good Christian shining in his life. And he did not altogether forget his promises. I went often to the house of his master, and would sometimes talk with him as he would light me to my room at night. As often as the books were brought out, and the bell rang for prayers, James would be there to join with us in family worship. This practice he kept up for several months. His master told me that during all that time he had been faithful to his promises. He seemed to be a Christian indeed, and all of us thought he would soon join the church. But at last he gradually gave up coming in to prayer. As I had not seen him for a good while, I asked one of the other servants what had become of James. He told me that, but a few days before, he was talking to him about his promises, and that James had said he did not see the use of so much religion—so much praying—and so much reading the Bible—and so much going to church—and so much hearing sermons read. In fact, James had given up all pretensions to religion. He was just the same wicked man he was before he was sick. Now, this man was like Lot's wife. He set out in the way to heaven, but he "looked back." He turned back. He did not, indeed, become a pillar of salt; but he became (what is just as bad) hardened in sin. Two years passed away, and James was taken dangerously ill again. As soon as I heard of it I went to see him. I read the Bible to him; I prayed for him; I talked to him. I did not distress him by reminding him of his old promises. I told him of Jesus, the Saviour of sinners. I begged him to remember that He was able and willing to forgive all sins. I read and explained the parable of the prodigal son. I entreated him to give up his heart to that Saviour, and put all his trust in Him. But his heart seemed to be turned to stone. "No, no," said he, "I have most wickedly broken my promises to God; I have sinned away my day of grace; He will not now have mercy on me; I have no hope; I do not and cannot feel as I did before; my mind is so dark, and my heart is so hard!" I shall never forget that scene. His fellow-servants stood round the room in silent and solemn fear. They heard his short, heavy breathing, and watched his ghastly countenance until he gave up in the death struggle, saying, with his last breath, "There is no mercy for me." He had once been keenly sensible of his guilt as a sinner; he had mourned and wept as a sinner; he had promised before God to give up his sins. Like Lot's wife, he had set off in the way to heaven. He had put his hand to the plough, but looked back. He was hardened in sin, and perished in impenitence. Then let every sinner under conviction take warning, and not rest in his fears or sorrows.

II. NOW LET ME WARN YOU AGAINST THIS FALLING AWAY—THIS BACK-SLIDING FROM CONVICTION. "Remember Lot's wife." 1. Do not linger in sin, as they did in Sodom. If you are anxious about religion, why should you remain any longer in sin? Why not rise up now, and with firm resolution escape from it? If you will not do this, you can never reach the mountain of salvation. 2. When once you have set out in religion, do not look back. Our Saviour Himself has said, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." (*Bp. Meade.*) *Looking back* :—Could God, in showing so much love, not expect faith and reliance? The trial of obedience was small and easy indeed; but it involved the proof whether the rescued family believed the angel, or required personal certainty, before they would follow his guidance; and it was a trial deemed sufficient by ancient nations under similar circumstances. When Orpheus had descended into the lower world in order to ask back his beloved wife Eurydice, Pluto, moved by the magic of his harmonies, gave him the promise that she would be restored to him under condition that he did not turn round to her till he had passed the Avernian valley; and when he disobeyed, she fell back into the regions of hell. Sacred actions, performed in reliance on the omnipotent assistance of the gods, were done with the face averted, as if symbolically to express that the believing mind requires no ocular evidence. We have, therefore, to explain the command here given to Lot from the same notions; it was a proof of faith. (*M. Kalisch, Ph.D.*) *The fate of Lot's wife* :—There was a great difference between the feelings of the elder and the younger branches of Lot's family on leaving their home. His sons and daughters left it in apparent obedience, but with the spirit of the inhabitants of the plain; it was not so with Lot's wife. It is not the character of age to accommodate itself readily to fresh circumstances. The old man does not feel inclined to launch himself afresh on the great ocean of the universe to seek

new fortunes. He does not easily make fresh acquaintances, or transplant himself quickly from old haunts and homes. To youth there is a future; to old age there remains nothing but the present and the past. Therefore, while youth went on with its usual elastic step of buoyancy and hope, Lot's wife lingered; she regretted the home of her vanity and luxury, and the lava flood overwhelmed her, encrusted her with salt, and left her as a monument. The moral we are to draw from that is not left us to choose. Christ says, "Remember Lot's wife." It is worse to turn back, when once on the safe path, than never to have served God at all. They who have once tasted of the power of the world to come, let them beware lest they turn again. Sin is dangerous, but relapse is fatal. That is the reason why God so marvellously smooths the way for youth. Early joy enables the young man to make his first steps surely, with confidence in his Maker; love, gratitude, and all his best emotions are thus called forth. But if afterwards he falls, if he sinks back again into the world of evil, think you that his feelings will spur him on again in God's cause? Nay, because at the first time there was hope, the next all the hope is washed out; the stimulus of feeling is weaker because experience has broken down hope; he knows now what those resolves were worth! There is great difficulty in quitting evil after long habit. It becomes a home, and holiness is dull, and cheerless, and dreary. Youth, then, is the time for action—earnest, steady advancement, without looking back. St. Paul says, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, "Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it"; and again he shows us the evil of drawing back—"Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him." (*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*) *Lot's wife*:—The phenomenon of her transformation remains to this day a mystery. It is believed that she was smothered and stiffened as she stood, looking back, and was overlaid with saline incrustations. Such a result is not at all incredible, apart from the sacred narrative. An atmosphere heavily charged with the fumes of sulphur and bitumen might easily produce suffocation, as was the case with the elder Pliny in the destruction of Pompeii. And as no dead body would ever decompose on the shores of this salt sea, if left in such an atmosphere it would become incrustated with salt crystals. Pillars of salt are found in the vicinity, which have formed from the spray, mist, and saline exhalations of the Dead Sea, and are constantly growing larger. Indeed, Josephus attempted to identify one of these with the wife of Lot. The spiritual phenomenon, however, presents no mystery. Lot's wife looked back. The command was explicit; it forbade looking behind, and the word for "look" implies a deliberate contemplation, steady regard, the look of consideration, desire. She looked back wistfully, longingly. The fact was, her heart was yet in Sodom, where all her treasures were. She had become identified with her home there, and even the wrath of God, poured out in a storm of fire, could not avert her eyes or quicken her steps. Abraham also "looked" toward Sodom, but the word signifies a rapid, and even unintentional or casual, glance. He glanced with grief and awe; she gazed with longing and regret. She doubtless looked back, as the Israelites did toward Egypt, longing to return, more willing to stay there amid the sins of Sodomites than to abide apart with God. And so her heart's wish became a fact; her real prayer was strangely answered; where she lingered, there she should stay. She would look back, and henceforth should never look ahead. So sins become habits, and habits encrust us with fixedness, and transform us into immovable pillars, monuments of wrath. God fixed and rooted her where she was; his curse transfixed her, as it blighted, blasted, withered, the barren fig tree; and so Lot's wife, to this day, is herself the personification of Sodom, its sins and its punishment. The only safe obedience is a prompt, implicit, and exact conformity to God's command. No part of His word can be unheeded without risk; we may run from one peril only to fall a prey to another. A divided heart is like the "double" eye, and singleness of aim is as important as singleness of vision. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. (*A. T. Pierson, D.D.*) *Followers of Lot's wife*:—Lot's wife has always had more followers than God's angels have. Look at the worldly-minded disciples in the Church to-day. Roused by fear to flee from the wrath to come, stirred by the warning of some special providence, or by the pressing entreaty of grace, they profess to leave Sodom behind. But they linger about the edge of destruction. They look back with longing, and linger and loiter on the way. And you may see them all about you, mere pillars of salt, without life or action, motion or emotion. The world has encrusted them with the salt, not of the saving and savouring sort, but that which represents sterility. If they

are saved from the fire, it is so as by fire, and their works are burned up. They have lost their testimony for God, and have become only a warning to backsliders. (*Ibid.*) *Lot's wife's tomb*:—Her backward look must have been more than momentary, for the destruction of the cities did not begin till Lot was safe in Zoar. She must have lingered far behind, and been overtaken by the eruption of liquid saline mud, which, as Sir J. W. Dawson has shown, would attend or follow the outburst of bituminous matter, so that her fate was the natural consequence of her heart being still in Sodom. As to the "pillar of salt," which has excited cavils on the one hand and foolish legends on the other, probably we are to think rather of a heap than of a pillar. The word does not occur in either meaning elsewhere, but its derivation implies something raised above the level of the ground; and a heap, such as would be formed by a human body encrusted with salt mud, would suit the requirements of the expression. Like a man who falls in a snow-storm, or, still more accurately, just as some of the victims at Pompeii stumbled in their flight, and were buried under the ashes, which still keep the outline of their figures, so Lot's wife was covered with the half-liquid slimy mud. Granted the delay in her flight, the rest is perfectly simple and natural. She was buried in a horrible tomb; and, in pity to her memory, no name has been written upon it. She remains to all generations, in a far truer sense than superstition dreamed of when it pointed to an upright salt rock as her prison and her monument, a warning of the danger of the backward look, which betrays the true home of the heart, and may leave us unsheltered in the open plain when the fiery storm bursts. "Remember Lot's wife." (*A Maclaren, D.D.*) *Lot's wife as a type*:—She is the type of a large class—persons who are convinced of the danger of their position, but not converted to God: professors who occupy a position half-way between Sodom and Zoar, thinking it enough to have got away from the corruptions of the world without having got into Christ; thinking it enough to have been brought, as it were, outside the suburbs of Sodom, without having taken refuge in the blood. She looked back from her half-way position and "became a pillar of salt." (*M. Rainsford, B.A.*)

Vers. 27–29. And Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord: and he looked toward Sodom.—*The righteous man's retrospect of God's great judgments*:—I. HE REGARDS THEM WITH SOLEMN EMOTION. II. HE IS SATISFIED WITH THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD AS SEEN IN THEM. III. HE HAS SOME COMPENSATIONS IN REGARD TO THEM. Some were delivered. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Lessons*:—1. Praying souls are early up to observe God's answer to their desires (Psa. v. 3). 2. Where souls have once met with God, well may they hasten to hear return of prayer from Him there again (ver. 27). 3. Saints under God's indulgence may be solicitous about the state of the wicked to look after them. 4. The righteous see sometimes vengeance executed upon the ungodly, notwithstanding all mediation made with God for them. 5. Where the smoke of sin hath offended God's eyes, the smoke of vengeance shall arise there. 6. In the midst of pouring out fury on the wicked, God is mindful of the mediation of His saints. 7. One righteous soul may fare the better for the intercession of another. Lot for Abraham. 8. Righteous souls may put themselves in danger of destruction by sitting down among the wicked. 9. The righteous God in His execution spareth, and destroyeth not the righteous with the wicked. 10. Some spectacles of mercy God hath made in snatching them from the midst of His overthrow, as brands out of the burning, as well as He hath made others examples of His vengeance (ver. 29). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *The smoke of their torments*:—Early in the morning Abraham sought that favoured spot where but yesterday God had been pleased to manifest Himself, and where he had been favoured with a season of extraordinary communion. Whether should the believer go, but to that choice place, dear to his heart, where he has communed with the Lord? It is a high privilege, the highest which mortals can enjoy, to talk with God, to plead with Him, to use arguments, and to prevail. Such grace had Abraham found. No marvel that he goes back to the place where God had thus drawn nigh to him. Doubtless one reason why he rose early, and went to the place, and looked towards Sodom, was an anxious desire to know how his prayers had speeded. It is remarkable that he does not appear to have observed the storm as it came down from heaven. Hence we may infer how rapid the destruction of the cities must have been. God rained fire out of heaven upon Sodom; it seems to have been done in a moment; the whole plain was destroyed; and all that Abraham saw after he rose up, which was probably just at the sun-rise, was merely the smoke that followed the conflagration. So does God

drive His enemies away. I. WITH WHAT EMOTIONS OUGHT WE TO GAZE UPON THE TORMENTS OF UNGODLY AND IMPENITENT SOULS? 1. Certainly it should always be with an humble submission to the Divine will. The assurance that God is just, even in the midst of His hot displeasure, must ever be cherished. The Judge of all the earth cannot but do right. 2. Surely, too, another emotion, which a glance towards the dreary doom of the ungodly can never fail to prompt, is that of ingratitude. "And why am I not there? They gnaw their fire-tormented tongues in vain: and why am I not there? Did they sin? I have sinned. Did they curse God and die? I, too, have cursed God; and it was a marvel that I did not die." 3. Should there not also here be deep feelings of humility? Look to the hole of the pit whence thou was digged, and the rock whence God hath hewn thee! What those sinners were, such wert thou. 4. And there is a sensation which must thrill through every nerve, and the thought will sometimes blanch our cheeks with terror, lest we also should come thither. Methinks a glance of the eye towards the smoke of Gehenna would always prompt a holy jealousy over one's own heart, and a diligent watchfulness of one's own walk. What sayest thou to this, professor? Thou seest the smoke going up for ever: what if thou shouldst come there after all? II. Look thou, Christian—if thou canst look—and see there THE EVIL OF SIN. Dost thou start? That is the true harvest of the sowing of iniquity. Come, sinner, I charge thee look at it. This is what sin brings forth; this is the full-grown child. Thou hast dandled it; thou hast kissed and fondled it; see what it comes to. Hell is but sin full-grown, that is all. 1. As the Christian, with down-cast and blushing face looks to the place where their worm dieth not and their fire is not quenched, he is awe-struck with the justice of God. "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little." 2. Another lesson now comes to us, and one which I hope will be more pleasing, and affect some minds that may not be moved by what we have hitherto said. Looking at the destruction of the wicked, this reflection crosses our minds. We, His people, have been redeemed from destruction! What a price must that have been which redeemed us from such woe and rescued us from such a place of torment! 3. That fearful vision which beclouds my eyes and makes them feel heavy, at the same time presses upon me with a tremendous weight, while I mention another truth. Behold here the solemnity of the gospel ministry, the responsibility of those who listen to it, and the need there is for earnestness in handling divine things. Have I to deal with immortal souls? Then let me not trifle. My brethren in the faith, and sisters, too, with what earnestness should this invest you! Whitfield could say, "When I think of these things, I wish I could stand upon the top of every hackney-coach in London, and preach to the passers by." We do not preach as if we meant it. I am afraid that we make infidels by our lethargy, and that you Christian people help to prevent the usefulness of the Word of God by the apparent indifference with which you treat eternal things. III. I am weary with my picture; I am weary with looking into that thick darkness. Let me turn your eyes another way. WOULD YOU BE SAVED? See yonder little hill outside Jerusalem's streets. God has become Man. He is bearing sin upon His shoulders. Wherefore do I picture this? Why, here is your salvation. You must have an interest in the sufferings of that Man, or you must suffer for yourself for ever. (C. H. Spurgeon.) God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow.—Justice blended with mercy:—I. THE TERRORS OF GOD'S JUSTICE TOWARDS THE WORLD OF THE UNGODLY. II. THE TRIUMPH OF GOD'S MERCY TOWARDS THE CHILDREN OF HIS LOVE. 1. He originates the plan of salvation. 2. He overcomes the hindrances and obstacles to salvation which arise in our minds. 3. He will surely bring us to the rest and the refuge which He has prepared for us. (T. H. Leale.)

Ver. 30. And Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain.—The folly of seeking our own choice:—Lot was bidden to go to the mountain, but requested that he might be allowed to seek refuge in Zoar. We only land ourselves in greater difficulties when we act according to the suggestions of our own human wisdom in opposition to the Divine will. Of such conduct we observe:—I. THE ROOT OF ITS UNBELIEF. Lot could not trust God fully, and therefore the infinite charity of God stooped to his infirmity. We must trust in God, with our whole heart, and lean not to our own understanding. Our faith falls short in so far as we seek to modify the commands of duty by our own wilfulness. Imperfect obedience has its bitter root in unbelief. In the instance of Lot, we see the sad consequences of this timid

and imperfect faith. Here we trace the source of the inconsistency and vacillation of his character. Our walk in the path of life and obedience is only steady and sure in proportion as our faith is clear and strong. II. WE ARE MADE BITTERLY TO REPENT OF IT. "He feared to dwell in Zoar." He was afraid that the destruction would overtake him even there. That spirit of unbelief which renders our obedience imperfect brings dread. We take alarm, for conscience tells us we have left some ground for fear. To commence following God's command, and then to impair our obedience by our own foolish will, leads in the end to doubt and uncertainty—to that sense of insecurity in which we feel that nothing is sure and safe. III. WE MAY BE COMPELLED TO ACCEPT GOD'S WAY AT LAST. Lot finds refuge, at length, in the mountain, where he had been ordered to go at first. A merciful Providence brought him up to the full measures of his duty. He finds, in the end, that it is best to fall in with God's plan. By a painful discipline we are often brought round to God's way, and made to feel that what He chooses is best. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Another wrong choice*:—On leaving Sodom he was very earnest to have Zoar granted him for a refuge, and to be excused from going to dwell in the mountain; yet now all on a sudden he went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain, and that for the very reason he had given for a contrary choice. Then he feared some evil would take him, if he went to the mountain; now he "fears to dwell in Zoar." It is well to know that the way of man is not in himself, and that it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. Our wisdom is to refer all to God, and to follow wherever his word and providence lead the way. But why did not Lot return to Abraham? There was no occasion now for strife about their herds; for he had lost all, and but just escaped with his life. Whatever was the reason, he does not appear to have made a good choice. Had he gone to the mountain when directed, he might have hoped for preserving mercy; but going of his own accord, and from a motive of sinful distrust, evil in reality overtakes him. His daughters, who seem to have contracted such habits in Sodom as would prepare them for anything, however unnatural, drew him into intemperance and incest, and thus cover his old age with infamy. The offspring of this illicit intercourse were the fathers of two great, but heathen nations; viz., Moabites, and the children of Ammon. (*A. Fuller.*) *Lessons*:—1. Man's choice of rest and safety crossing God's command will not content him long. 2. Man, upon the failing of expected comfort in his own way, may be then moved to try God's. 3. Weakness in the best of man may be such as disobediently to do that which sometimes God justly commands; so Lot goeth when God bids not to the place formerly commanded. 4. Naturally man's own will maketh him move faster than the will of God. 5. Solitary and sad may be the peregrinations and habitations of the best families here below. Lot and his daughters in a cave, not a city. 6. Fear of sin and vengeance and evil to come will make a soul fly from its desired refuge in the world. 7. A cave or den in a mountain with God is a better habitation than a palace in a city of sin. Lot chooseth so. (*G. Hughes, B.D.*)

Vers. 31-38. And they made their father drink wine.—*The lessons of Lot's dishonour*:—I. THAT SAINTS WHO HAVE BEEN THE SUBJECTS OF EXTRAORDINARY MERCY MAY YET FALL INTO SIN. II. THAT IT IS DIFFICULT, EVEN FOR THE BEST, TO ESCAPE THE EFFECT OF EVIL ASSOCIATIONS. III. THE FOLLY OF A WORLDLY CHOICE. IV. THE WISDOM OF AVOIDING THE OCCASIONS OF SIN. V. THE AWFUL DEPTHS OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY. VI. FLESHLY SINS COVER EVEN A FAIR NAME WITH DISHONOUR. VII. THE DANGER OF EXCITEMENT. VIII. THE FAITHFULNESS OF THE SCRIPTURE RECORD. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Lot's dishonour*:—The dishonourable end of this good man shows that we are never out of danger while we are upon earth. He whose righteous soul was grieved with the filthy conversation of the wicked, while in a city, is drawn into the same kind of evils himself, when dwelling in a cave! His whole history also, from the time of his leaving Abraham, furnishes an affecting lesson to the heads of families in the choice of habitations for themselves or their children. If worldly accommodations be preferred to religious advantages, we have nothing good, but everything evil to expect. We may, or we may not lose, our substance as he did; but, what is of far greater consequence, our families may be expected to become mere heathens, and our own minds contaminated with the examples which are continually before our eyes. Such was the harvest which Lot reaped from his well-watered plain; and such are the fruits very commonly seen in those who follow his example! (*A. Fuller.*)

CHAPTER XX.

VERS. 1-7. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister.—*Abraham's repetition of his old fault; the power of former temptations*:—I. THEIR POWER MAY SLUMBER LONG. In this instance, twenty-four years. Never safe from invasion of temptations once yielded to. II. CIRCUMSTANCES MAY ARISE WHICH WILL REVIVE THEIR STRENGTH. 1. Reaction after great spiritual excitement. 2. Experience of social corruption. III. THE RESULTS OF YIELDING AGAIN ARE MOST DISASTROUS. 1. The distress of anxiety. 2. Possible loss to ourselves. 3. The shame of reproof from worldly men. IV. THOSE WHO FALL UNDER THEM ARE ONLY DELIVERED BY THE SPECIAL INTERFERENCE OF GOD. 1. The infirmities of believers appeal to the Divine compassion. 2. God is concerned to maintain the promises made to faith. (*T. H. Leale.*) *A bit of the old nature*:—I. HIS CONDUCT WAS VERY COWARDLY. He risked Sarah's virtue, and the purity of the promised seed. II. IT WAS ALSO VERY DISHONOURING TO GOD. III. IT ALSO STOOD OUT IN POOR RELIEF AGAINST THE BEHAVIOUR OF ABIMELECH. Lessons: 1. We are never safe, so long as we are in this world. 2. We have no right to throw ourselves into the way of temptation which has often mastered us. 3. We may be encouraged by God's treatment of Abraham's sin. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Abraham's artifice with Abimelech*:—I. THE ATROCIOUS NATURE OF THE SIN OF ADULTERY, WHICH CONSISTS IN VIOLATING CONJUGAL RIGHTS, IS HERE REPRESENTED IN A VERY STRIKING MANNER. Though Abraham supposed that there was no sense of God and religion among the people of Gerar, yet he seems not to have entertained the least suspicion that they would insult the honour of his family, either by rape or seduction. His apprehension was that they would kill him for his wife's sake. His whole conduct, in this and the former instance, is grounded on the supposition that a ruffian, who is bloody enough to assassinate an innocent man, yet may not be so brutal as to violate a married woman. This crime has been held in detestation by almost all nations, in all ages of the world. By the ancient laws of Draco and Solon, the husband of an adulteress, if he detected her in her guilt, might immediately kill both the criminals, or stigmatise them, or put out their eyes, or might exact of the adulterer a heavy fine. But, by the law of Moses, they were both to be put to death with public infamy; and, in ordinary cases, there was no dispensation. II. THAT A SENSE OF VIRTUE AND RELIGION IS SOMETIMES FOUND WHERE WE LEAST EXPECT IT. How different was the true character of the people in Gerar, from that which Abraham's jealousy had drawn for them! There was much of the fear of God among them, though he had imagined there was none at all. III. THAT THE INDULGENCE OF TOO BAD AN OPINION OF MANKIND IS OF DANGEROUS CONSEQUENCE TO OURSELVES AND OTHERS. Had Abraham entertained a just opinion of the prince and people of Gerar, or taken pains to become acquainted with them, before he listened to the secret whispers of jealousy, he would have shunned so dangerous an artifice as to disguise his relation to his wife, and would have prevented the mischiefs which ensued, and the still greater mischiefs which threatened his own family and the house of Abimelech. It was a special Divine interposition which averted consequences of the most serious nature. IV. THAT IN THE BEST MEN THERE MAY BE GREAT INFIRMITIES AND FAILINGS. Even they whose faith is strong must guard against the prevailing influence of fear, and call into exercise that confidence in God which is the best security against the terrors of the world. In times of apparent danger, and threatening temptation, they have need to be peculiarly watchful. We are never so safe as when we invariably follow the path of virtue and integrity. He who walks uprightly, walks surely; but he who perverts his way, shall fall. Duplicity and artifice, to avoid an evil, will but embarrass us the more. (*J. Lathrop, D.D.*) *Abraham's sin repeated*:—His sin in so speaking seems to be much greater than it was before. For—1. He had narrowly escaped the first time. The repetition of the same fault looked like presuming upon Providence. 2. Sarah was now with child, and that of a son of promise; he might, therefore, surely have trusted God to preserve their lives in the straight-forward path of duty. (*A. Fuller.*) *Abimelech's plea accepted*:—The answer of God admits his plea of ignorance, and suggests that he was not charged with having yet sinned, but threatened with death in case he persisted now that he was informed of the truth. It is intimated, however, that if he had come near her he should in so doing have sinned against God, whether he had sinned against Abraham or not; and this perhaps owing to her being in a state of pregnancy, of which, in

that case, he could not have been ignorant. We see in this account—1. That absolute ignorance excuses from guilt; but this does not prove that all ignorance does so, or that it is in itself excusable. Where the powers and means of knowledge are possessed, and ignorance arises from neglecting to make use of them, or from aversion to the truth, it so far from excusing that it is in itself sinful. 2. That great as the wickedness of men is upon the face of the earth, it would be much greater, were it not that God by His providence in innumerable instances “withholds” them from it. The conduct of intelligent beings is influenced by motives; and all motives which are presented to the mind are subject to His disposal. (*Ibid.*) *Abraham's reaction after his high spiritual experiences*:—Consider this repetition of his old fault with regard to—I. Its causes. 1. Recent experience of the corruption of the world. 2. False prudence. 3. Exaggerated confidence. 4. The brotherly relation to Sarah. 5. The probable issue of the case in Egypt. II. Its natural results. 1. Anxiety and danger. 2. Shame before a heathen's princely court. III. Its gracious issue through the interference of God. (*Lange.*) *Abraham reproved for denying his wife*:—Consider—I. The offence which he committed. A very grievous sin. Look at—1. The principle from which it sprang—loss of faith. 2. Its natural and necessary tendencies. 3. The fact of its having been before practised by him, and reproved. II. The rebuke given him on account of it. In this we observe much that was—1. Disgraceful to Abraham. 2. Honourable to Abimelech: (1) Moderation. (2) Equity. (3) Virtue. Application—(a) Shun every species of deception. (b) Guard against relapses into sin. (c) Be thankful to God for His protecting grace. (d) Strive to the uttermost to cancel the effects of your transgressions. (*C. Simeon, M.A.*) *Abraham and Abimelech*:—The thing that is most remarkable in the whole story is that God should apparently have taken Abraham's part instead of humbling and punishing him in the sight of the heathen. 1. Observe, first of all, that if the Divine purpose was to be turned aside by the fault or blemish found in individual character, the Divine government of man is at an end, and human progress is an impossibility. Adam failed, so did Noah, so Abraham, so did Lot. It was not Adam that sinned, or Noah, or Abraham, it was human nature that sinned. Pharaoh seemed to be a better man than Abraham, but he was not so in reality. You say that Abimelech was better than Abraham; now let me ask you what you know about Abimelech? Nothing but what is stated in this chapter. Very well. You are so far right. You have seen Abimelech at his best and you have seen Abraham at his worst, and then you have rushed to a conclusion! This is not the right way to read history; certainly it is not the right way to read the Bible. We are not to set act against act, but life against life. This, then, is the point at which I find rest when I am disturbed by the evident painful immortality of illustrious Bible characters, viz., human nature has never been perfect in all its qualities, energies, and services; the perfection of human nature can be wrought out only by long-continued and severe probation; in choosing instruments for the representation of His will and the execution of His purposes, God has always chosen men who were best fitted on the whole for such ministry, though in some particulars they have disastrously and pitifully failed. When I think I could have improved God's plan, the mistake is mine, because my vision is dim and I never can see more than a very limited section of any human character. 2. In the next place consider, knowing human nature as we do, how beneficial a thing it was to the great men themselves to be shown now and again that they were imperfect, and that they were only great and strong as they were good—as they were true to God. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The exact truth*:—Two young masons were building a brick wall—the front wall of a high house. One of them, in placing a brick, discovered that it was a little thicker on one side than the other. “It will make your wall untrue, Ben,” the other said. “Pooh!” answered Ben; “what difference will such a trifle as that make? you're too particular.” “My mother,” replied he, “taught me that ‘truth is truth,’ and ever so little an untruth is a lie, and a lie is no trifle.” “Oh,” said Ben, “that's all very well; but I'm not lying, and have no intention of lying.” “Very true; but you make your wall tell a lie, and I have read that a lie in one's work is like a lie in his character—it will show itself sooner or later, and bring harm, if not ruin.” “I'll risk it in this case,” answered Ben, and he worked away, laying more brick, carrying the wall up higher, till the close of the day, when they gave up work and went home. The next morning they went to resume their work, when, behold, the lie had wrought out the result of all lies. The wall, getting a little slant from the untrue brick, had got more and more

untrue as it got higher, and at last, in the night, had toppled over. Just so with ever so little an untruth in your character; it grows more and more untrue if you permit it to remain, till it brings sorrow and ruin. Tell, act, and live the truth. *God orders our journeys*:—A stage coach was passing through the interior of Massachusetts, on the way to Boston. It was a warm summer day, and the coach was filled with passengers, all impatient to arrive at the city at an early hour in the evening. The excessive heat rendered it necessary for the driver to spare his horses more than usual. Most of the passengers were fretting and complaining that he did not urge his horses along faster. But one gentleman sat in the corner of the stage calm and quiet. The irritation, which was destroying the happiness of all the others, seemed not to disturb his feelings in the least. At last the coach broke down as they were ascending a long steep hill, and the passengers were compelled to alight, and travel some distance on foot under the rays of the burning sun. This new interruption caused a general burst of vexatious feelings. All the party, with the exception of the gentleman alluded to, toiled up the hill, irritated and complaining. He walked along, good-humoured and happy, and endeavouring by occasional pleasantry of remark to restore good humour to the party. It was known that this gentleman, who was extensively engaged in mercantile concerns, had business which rendered it necessary that he should be in the city at an early hour. The delay was consequently to him a serious inconvenience. Yet, while all the rest of the party were ill-humoured and vexed, he alone was untroubled. At last one asked how it was that he retained his composure under such vexatious circumstances? The gentleman replied that he could have no control over the circumstances in which he was then placed; that he had commended himself and his business to the protection of the Lord, and that if it were the Lord's will that he should not enter Boston at as early an hour as he desired, it was his duty patiently and pleasantly to submit. With these feelings he was patient and submissive, and cheerful. The day, which to the rest of the party was rendered disagreeable by vexation and complaint, was by him passed in gratitude and enjoyment. And when, late in the evening, he arrived in the city with a serene mind, he was prepared to engage in his duties.

Ver. 11. *And Abraham said, Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place.*—*On harsh and selfish judgments*:—The true fear of God was at that moment in Abimelech's heart, and not in Abraham's; it was Abimelech who was playing the Christian part, that of the child of the light and of the day; Abraham was for the moment the child of fear, darkness, night. I. CONSIDER THE ORIGIN OF THE HABIT OF HARSH JUDGMENT. Two main sources. 1. The first a heathen Roman can illustrate for us (Acts xxii. 27, 28). The thing has cost us much; we feel it is hard to believe that it can be widely shared. Abraham had made a terrible sacrifice to assure his calling. As for those easy, jovial, prosperous heathen, surely the fear of God was not there. 2. A second source of this harshness of judgment is the predominance in all of us of the natural aristocratic principle over the Christian principle of communion. Men naturally believe in election. But, with rare exceptions, they naturally believe themselves to be the elect. It is hard indeed to believe that a private possession gains instead of loses by being shared by all mankind. II. THE HISTORIES OF SCRIPTURE ARE A PERPETUAL WARNING AGAINST NARROW AND SELFISH JUDGMENTS OF MEN. It is as if the Spirit had resolved that the virtues of those outside the pale should be kept clearly before the eyes of men. God is no respecter of persons, and He keeps hold in ways, of which we little dream, of the most unlikely human hearts. III. THE TRUE CHRISTIAN POLICY IN JUDGING MANKIND. 1. Let your personal fellowship be based on the clear explicit manifestation of that which is in tune with your higher life and Christ's. 2. As for those who are without, believe that God is nearer to them than you wot of, and has more to do with them than you dream. (*J. B. Brown, B.A.*) *Morality outside the Church*:—I. MORALITY OUTSIDE THE CHURCH MAY ATTAIN TO GREAT EXCELLENCE. 1. Belief in a moral standard of right and wrong. 2. Belief in the moral relations of human society. 3. A sense of injured moral feeling in the presence of wrong. 4. A readiness to make restitution for faults committed against others. II. MORALITY OUTSIDE THE CHURCH MAY HAVE LESSONS OF REPROOF FOR THOSE WHO ARE WITHIN IT. 1. For their mean subterfuges. 2. Their distrust of Providence. 3. Their religious prejudices. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Prejudice*:—1. It is often strong in those who enjoy high religious privileges. Abraham thought himself so highly favoured of God that he was unwilling to admit that any goodness could be found

among those who were less favoured. 2. The evils of it are great. (1) It limits the power of the grace of God. He is not confined to one mode of making Himself known. (2) It is a sin against charity. (3) It issues in committing wrong against others.

Vers. 17, 18. So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech.—*An efficacious interesting prayer:*—Abraham's prayer for the doomed cities was not granted, but his prayer for Abimelech was answered in full. "God healed Abimelech and his wife and his maid-servants." But in the present instance we can see some reasons why it was likely that this prayer should be answered. I. BECAUSE FAITH WAS MAINTAINED NOTWITHSTANDING PAST FAILURES. Persevering faith, which is superior to all discouragements, must be rewarded. II. BECAUSE THE OBJECTS OF IT WERE DISPOSED TO RECEIVE THE BLESSING. The hindrances to the gracious effects of prayer lie in man's rebellious heart. There must be a Godward direction imparted to souls which are to be blest. God meets those who are looking towards Him. Abimelech and his household had this receptivity. III. BECAUSE GOD DELIGHTS TO PUT HONOUR UPON HIS SERVANTS. God had entered into covenant with Abraham. He was God's prophet and faithful friend. God will set His visible marks of approval upon His own appointed means of blessing. Learn the importance of the prophet to mankind. 1. He makes known the will of God. He is a messenger who has received instructions from the Supreme Ruler of all mankind. 2. He is the human channel of spiritual blessings. He teaches men the way of righteousness, how they may find the chief good and reach true blessedness. (T. H. Leale.)

CHAPTER XXI.

VERS. 1-5. Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.—*The birth of Isaac:*—I. AS IT ILLUSTRATES THE POWER OF GOD. 1. God's power as distinctly seen. 2. God's power as it affects personal interest. 3. God's power manifested as benevolent. II. AS IT ILLUSTRATES THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD. 1. The promises of God sooner or later pass into exact fulfilment. 2. Their fulfilment justifies our confidence in God. 3. Their fulfilment is the stay of the believer's soul. III. AS IT ILLUSTRATES THE FAITH OF MAN. Abraham believed in God against all human hope, and Sarah "by faith received strength to conceive seed" (Heb. xi. 11). 1. It was a faith which was severely tried. (1) By long waiting. Abraham had waited for twenty-five years. (2) By natural difficulties. He and his wife had advanced to a stage of life when there could be no human prospect of offspring. 2. It was a practical faith. All the time he was waiting, Abraham was obedient to the word of the Lord. IV. AS IT LOOKS ONWARD TO THE BIRTH OF THE WORLD'S REDEEMER. 1. Both births were announced long before. 2. Both occur at the time fixed by God. 3. Both persons were named before their birth. 4. Both births were supernatural. 5. Both births were the occasion of great joy. 6. Both births are associated with the life beyond. (T. H. Leale.) *Isaac a type of Christ:*—I. IN THE APPROPRIATENESS OF HIS NAME. "Laughter," "rejoicing." II. IN THE PECULIAR CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIS BIRTH. III. IN BEING INTENTIONALLY OFFERED AS A SACRIFICE. Observe—1. The description of the sacrifice which was given. "Thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest." How naturally our thoughts are led by this language to Jesus, the only-begotten Son of God, the Son of His delight, His dearly beloved Son. 2. He was to be presented as a sacrifice (Gen. xxii. 1, 2, &c). Here again we are directly led to Jesus. He came to be a sacrifice. 3. He was to be devoted and sacrificed by his Father. To Abraham God said, "Take now thy son," &c. Jesus was God's gift to the world. 4. He was to be offered on mount Moriah. To this spot, with his father, he travelled for three days, &c. Near the same spot—on Calvary, Jesus was sacrificed for the sin of the world. 5. Isaac bare the wood, which was designed to burn the offering. Christ also bare the cross on which He was to be crucified. 6. Isaac freely submitted to be bound and tied upon the altar. Jesus voluntarily went forth to death, and freely surrendered his spirit into the hands of his Father. But here the typical resemblance terminates. For Isaac a substitute is provided. APPLICATION. 1. Let the subject lead us to contemplate the true

desert of sin—which is death. 2. Consider the necessity of an atoning sacrifice. 3. Consider the infinite merit and preciousness of that sacrifice which God has provided—His own Son. 4. The necessity of a believing, personal interest in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. 5. The awful consequence of neglecting the propitiation the love of God has provided—eternal death. (*J. Burns, D.D.*) *Light in the clouds; or, comfort for the discouraged*:—I. Back there in the beginning, God's call to Abraham had been accompanied by a promise. "From thy kindred, and from thy Father's house unto a land that I will show thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing, and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." So accompanied with the call came the promise. He was to sacrifice—but sacrifice was only a rougher path to a smooth and shining end. Out of its thorns was to blossom a better destiny than Abraham otherwise could possibly have gained. It was not all cross for Abraham; it was crown, too, and the cross was but the ladder climbing up which he should reach and wear the crown. What was true for Abraham is just as true for you and me. There comes to us no call of God, how rough and heavy soever its yoke may seem, that is not cushioned too with promise, that does not point onward and upward from itself to some vast and burdened blessing which otherwise we could not gain! You must yield a bad habit. Yes, but in order that you may enter into a great self-mastering. II. And the energy to do the duty, the strength to bear the burden, is to be found where? This is where it is to be found—in faith in the promise. Well, Abraham yields to the call and puts faith in the promise, and goes on and enters Canaan. They have staid in the land for several long years, and still their tent is voiceless of a child. They have been much blessed in other ways. Abraham is a person held, too, in very good repute. His name and position are most honourable. Every way and on every side the best things seem to come to Abraham—except the one special thing which he desires most of all, and which is absolutely essential to lift him into the high destiny God has promised him. He is still childless. I think, too, Abraham must have been just now in a despondent reaction after a great strain. The anxiety about Lot, and that military expedition, had taxed him terribly. I think all this, because the Word of God, which just now comes to him, seems to be a word answering to just such a mood as this. And then the Lord illustrates the glory of this promise to him. "Look up," God said to Abraham; "canst thou tell the stars to number them? So shall thy seed be." It is a great thing when a husband and a wife are united in the same faith. It is a great thing when they stand in equal faith, and so together pass forward into the uncertain years. Usually where a man and wife are believing people the wife has the greater faith. It is she who gets the firmest hold upon the Divine promises. It is she who rests on them the more utterly. It is she who, by many a faithful word and by the serene example of her trust, gives heart to the husband's failing courage, gives swiftness to his more laggard step. It was not so with Abraham and Sarah. Abraham was more a man of faith than Sarah was a woman of faith. And Abraham instead of being led on in the right way by his wife was led off in the wrong way by her. I have no time to wait to tell you of all the gain and shame which came to Abraham and to Sarah from this false step. How, even though Ishmael came to the tent, discord came with him; how jealous Sarah grew, and then how cruel. From the time of that second manifestation of the promise and the ratification of it full fourteen years have sped away. Ishmael has been born, but Ishmael is not the promised seed. Still Abraham's tent is empty of the true heir. I think Abraham had fallen into a lower sort of life since he had gone off in the wrong way. I suppose he tried to be content with Ishmael. That is the way a great many Christians live. They do not think that God means all He says. Possibly He may mean half; but never all, to them anyway. They must get on as best they can with a little joy and a little peace, and be very thankful for that little, and never hope that they can have much more. And then God comes to break in upon him with another and better word of promise still. He comes to him announcing for Himself a new name—God Almighty, Omnipotent, the God with whom nothing is impossible. "Abraham," He says, "I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect," that is, sincere in faith—upright. And then the promise is again renewed in terms more unmistakable. Abraham is to have a son and Sarah is to be his mother. All God's thoughts for us are always greater than our thoughts for Him. (*W. Hoyt.*) *Prayer sure to be answered*:—When the season has been cold and backward, when rains fell and prices rose, and farmers desponded, and the poor despaired, I have heard old people, whose hopes resting on God's promise did not rise and fall

with the barometer nor shifting winds, say we shall have harvest after all; and this you can safely say of the labours and fruits of prayer. (*T. Guthrie.*)

Vers. 6, 7. Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh.—*The rejoicing of Isaac's birth*:—I. IT WAS THE REWARD OF FAITH AND PATIENCE. II. IT WAS HAILED WITH A SONG OF GRATITUDE. 1. There was an element of amazement and wonder. 2. There was an element touchingly human. 3. There was a confident expectation of universal sympathy. "All that hear will laugh with me." 4. There was an acknowledgment of the Divine source of the joy. "God hath made me to laugh." (*T. H. Leale.*)

Ver. 8-13. Cast out this bondwoman and her son.—*The allegory of Isaac and Ishmael*:—I. CONTRASTED AS TO THEIR ORIGIN. II. CONTRASTED AS TO THEIR POSITION IN THE HOUSEHOLD. 1. As to the liberty enjoyed. 2. As to the security of their positions. (*Ibid.*) *Isaac and Ishmael separated*:—It only needs a glance beneath the surface to see that the future course of these two great branches of the Abrahamic blood was destined to be so divergent, that their currents could no longer mingle with advantage to either. 1. So far as Ishmael was concerned, the archer and huntsman whose home was to be the desert, with his bow for his best inheritance, it was well that he should be early trained to the hardships of a nomadic chieftain. For his own comfort, he could not be too soon compelled to forego all idle dreams of one day succeeding to his father's estate. Too soon he could not be withdrawn from the presence of a brother whose priority would only inflame his envy. It was the kindest thing for the youth to send him away from his father's tents. Let it be remembered that he was not sent away from his father's God. The mercies of God are not limited to the area of His covenant. 2. For Isaac's sake, on the other hand, it was scarcely less advisable to "cast out" the bondmaid's son. His yielding disposition was ill fitted to withstand the influence or endure the hostility of his older and more impetuous brother. Besides, the people of the covenant needed to be from the outset a separated people, kept clear of Gentile alliances. Ishmael's mother was a pagan slave; out of her Egyptian home he married a pagan wife. From all such close contact with heathendom it was requisite to guard the selected family through which a purer faith was to be transmitted. 3. Perhaps we may add a further consideration. No single home can long hold with safety the child of nature and the child of grace. This early family history was meant to be full of significance for the Church of God. And it had to be made clear that in God's spiritual family circle, or within their eternal home, no place can be found for such as are His only after the flesh, bearing on their body, indeed, the seal of His covenant, yet not born again of His Holy Spirit. (*J. O. Dykes, D.D.*) *Isaac and Ishmael*:—I. THE BIRTH OF ISAAC. Observe on this event—1. That God has a fixed time for fulfilling his word (see v. 2.) 2. When the time comes he is always found faithful. 3. The birth of Isaac connects itself with a blessing imparted to his parents. Each renewed his or her youth. II. THE CONTEST BETWEEN THE BROTHERS. 1. That which is carnal always hates and despises that which is spiritual. 2. The world seems to be much stronger than the children of promise. 3. But, in the end, Isaac prevails over Ishmael. III. THE EPISODE. Hagar means "fugitive." First, she fled from Egypt, of which country she was a native; then, from her mistress (see ch. xvi); and now from her master and husband. Ishmael means "God heareth." God heard Abraham's prayer for him (ch. xvii. 18); and now he hears Hagar's cry. (*The Congregational Pulpit.*) *Abraham and the promised seed*:—1. In particular we see first that the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant, in their full and ultimate significance, are precisely identical with those of the Gospel. The Church began in Abraham's household—as Paul has emphatically put it, the Gospel was preached before unto him, and so if the initiatory rite of that covenant, which was not a mere national thing, but included in it spiritual blessings for all the nations of the earth, could be administered to infants we need have no scruple about the baptism of infants. In Abraham's case, an adult circumcision, as the Apostle affirms, was a seal of the righteousness of his faith. That is to say, faith was necessary to his circumcision, and yet he was commanded to circumcise Isaac upon the eighth day when it was impossible that Isaac could have faith. Why, then, though faith be required of an adult for his baptism, may we not baptize the infant of a believer, just as Abraham circumcised Isaac, being eight days old? 2. Again, the view which I have brought out concerning the promised seed, sets vividly before us the ultimate number of the saved. Abraham was to be the father of

many nations, and to have a seed as the dust of the earth, or as the stars of heaven innumerable—and that, as we have seen, refers not to the Jewish nations, but to the seed of believers. 3. Finally, we have brought out into distinct relief by this view of the promised seed, the character of the saved. Abraham “is the father of all them that believe,” but this faith is inseparably connected with a spiritual birth—a birth resulting not from the operation of natural causes, but from the agency of the Holy Ghost. Now see how plainly that is foreshadowed in the birth of Isaac as contrasted with that of Ishmael. Ishmael’s birth was of the flesh, but that of Isaac was in fulfilment of promise. It was really supernatural, it was a divine gift; and one great reason for the long delay was just that this might be made apparent. Isaac thus stands for those who are “born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” Let me conclude by giving in plainest language what I judge to be for us now the spiritual truths suggested by this old history. 1. In the first place, the Deliverer for whom Abraham looked, whose actual coming in the future was made sure to him by the birth of Isaac, and whose day he saw afar off and was glad, has appeared among men. By a yet more striking miracle than that which issued in the birth of Isaac, “The Word who was God was made flesh and dwelt among us.” 2. Secondly, we learn from this old history, that in connection with the exercise of this faith, we must be supernaturally born, in order to enjoy the full blessings of salvation. 3. Finally, there is no inheritance without spiritual sonship. Ishmael who was born of the flesh, was cast out. Isaac who was born of the promise was the heir—the promised land belongs to the promised seed. “If children, then heirs.” (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Separation of the seed born after the flesh from the seed that is by promise:—*Beyond all question, the thing here done is felt, at first sight, on all hands to be harsh; and the manner of doing it perhaps even harsher still. Now, it is not necessary to acquit Sarah of all personal vindictiveness, or to consider her as acting from the best and highest motives, merely because God commanded Abraham to hearken unto her voice. This may be only another instance of evil overruled for good. I. Thus, in the first place, LET THE ACTUAL OFFENCE OF ISHMAEL, now no longer a child, but a lad of at least some fourteen years of age, be fairly understood and estimated. The apostle Paul represents it in a strong light—“He that was born after the flesh, persecuted him that was born after the Spirit”—and he points to it as the type and model of the cruel envy with which the “children of promise” are in every age pursued (Gal. iv. 28, 29.) It may have been little more than an act of self-defence on the part of Sarah, when she seized the first opportunity of overt injury or insult, to put an end to a competition of rights that threatened consequences so disastrous. II. Again, secondly, it is to be remembered THAT THE COMPETITION IN QUESTION ADMITTED OF NO COMPROMISE; and that, whatever might be her motives, Sarah did, in point of fact, stand with God in the controversy. III. Nor, in the third place, is it to be overlooked that the severity of the measure resorted to is apt to be greatly EXAGGERATED IF IT IS LOOKED AT IN THE LIGHT OF THE SOCIAL USAGES AND SOCIAL ARRANGEMENTS OF MODERN DOMESTIC LIFE. It was no unusual step for the head of a household in these primitive times, to make an early separation between the heir, who was to be retained at home in the chief settlement of the tribe, and other members of the family, who must be sent to push their way elsewhere. Nor are the wanderers sent away to a far country. They are to tarry for farther orders on the very borders of the place where Abraham himself is dwelling. The wilderness of Beer-sheba is almost at his very door; and long ere the bread and water they take with them are consumed, it may be expected that Abraham will be in circumstances to communicate with them more fully as to what they are to do. By some mistake or mischance, however, it unfortunately happened otherwise. Unforeseen delay occurred; and the wanderers were reduced to straits. Were a conjecture here warranted, it might be surmised as not improbable that the impatience of disappointed ambition may have tended to precipitate, as well as to aggravate, the crisis. IV. Once more, in the fourth place, a presumptive proof, at least, of THE PATRIARCH’S CONTINUED INTEREST IN ISHMAEL, and continued care for his accommodation, is to be found in the account given of his interview with Abimelech, king of Gerar (vers. 25, 26). If it was a well that had belonged to Ishmael—especially if it was the well which God caused Hagar in her distress to see, and around which, probably, her son formed his earliest settlement, Abimelech’s ignorance and Abraham’s anxiety are simply and naturally explained. (*R. S. Candlish, D.D.*) *The destinies of Ishmael:—*“Cast out this bondwoman and her son” (ver. 10). These were harsh words; it was hard for one so young to have all

blighted; it was grievous in Abraham's sight to witness the bitter fate of his eldest born. And yet was it not the most blessed destiny that could happen to the boy? The hot blood of the Egyptian mother which coursed through his veins could not have been kept in check in the domestic circle among vassals and dependants; he was sent to measure himself with men, to cut out his own way in the world, to learn independence, resolution, energy; and it is for this reason that to this very day his descendants are so sharply stamped with all the individuality of their founder. In them are exhibited the characteristics of Abraham and Hagar, the marvellous devoutness of the one with the fierce passions of the other, and together with these the iron will, the dignified calmness of self dependence wrought out by circumstances in the character of Ishmael. And how often is it that in this way the darkest day is the beginning of the brightest life. Reverses, difficulties, trials, are often amongst God's best blessings. From the loss of property is brought out very often the latent energies of character, a power to suffer and to act which in the querulous being without a wish ungratified you would have scarcely said had existed at all. The man compelled to labour gains energy, strength of character, the development of all that is within him. Can you call that loss? The richest resources are not from without, but from within. (*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*)

Ver. 14. **And she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.**—*The story of Hagar and Ishmael*.—I. **THE OUTCAST.** As Abraham is the father of all the faithful, so the Arab Ishmael is the father of all our outcasts. He was an impudent boy, who mocked his betters, and became "a wild ass of a man," whose hand was against every man. Do not despise the poor outcast children of our cities. Respect them for their sorrows; take them into your pity; let them find a home in your heart. For are we not all outcasts, the children of Adam the outcast? And are we not the followers of Him who makes the outcasts of earth the inmates of heaven? II. **THE GOD OF THE OUTCAST.** The highest kindness is to be personally interested in us, and to meet our wants. And God showed such kindness to Ishmael (ver. 17). God pities most those who most need pity; and so should you. III. **THE ANGEL OF THE OUTCAST.** It is part of angel's work to cheer and save the outcast. A church near Dijon contains a monument with a group of the Bible prophets and kings, each holding a scroll of mourning from his writings. But above is a circle of angels who look far sadder than the prophets whose words they read. They see more in the sorrows than the men below them see. The angels see the whole of the sins and sorrows of the young, and so rejoice more than we can do over the work of God among them. The orphans of society are cast upon the fatherhood of God, and He wishes them to be the children of our adoption. IV. **THE ALLEGORY OF THE OUTCAST.** Look at that lad in the desert perishing of thirst, and a fountain at his side. Are you not a spiritual Ishmael to-day, a wanderer upon life's highway, perishing of thirst at the side of the fountains of living water? Earth is a sandy desert, which holds nothing that can slake your soul's thirst. But Jesus Christ has opened the fountain of life, and now it is at your very side. (*J. Wells.*) *The sorrows of the outcasts*.—I. **THE EVILS THEY SUFFERED MUST BE CHARGED UPON THEMSELVES.** II. **THEY WERE ALSO FULFILLING GOD'S PURPOSES CONCERNING HUMAN SALVATION.** III. **YET THEY WERE NOT SHUT OUT FROM THE FAVOURS AND HELP OF PROVIDENCE.** 1. His Providence interfered when they were at their worst extremity. 2. His Providence was administered with touches of human tenderness. 3. His Providence made use of natural means. (*T. H. Lcale.*) *Hagar*.—A suggestive narrative, illustrating various Scriptures. 1. "The way of transgressors is hard." 2. God is "not far from every one of us." 3. "God is no respecter of persons." 4. It echoes the words, "Them that honour Me I will honour." I. **MAN'S EXTREMITY IS GOD'S OPPORTUNITY.** The darkest hour preceeds the dawn. We are never beyond Divine help. II. **BANE AND BLESSING ARE OFTEN NEAR EACH OTHER.** The antidotes of various poisons grow close beside them. Mercies are contiguous to miseries. III. **DIVINE HELP IS ALWAYS KIND AND APPROPRIATE.** God not only provided water, but, as one suggests, in such a way as to meet every want of the two sufferers. 1. He gave Hagar something to do for her boy. 2. He reminded Hagar of His aid to others. A well showed that dwellers had been in the desert before her. Biography is a "well" telling of heaven's blessing upon those who have preceded us. 3. He made a glorious promise to Hagar. (*T. R. Stevenson.*) *Hagar and Ishmael in distress*.—I. **THAT HUMAN LIFE IS HIGHLY ESTIMATED IN HEAVEN.** 1. It is not valued according to the locality in which it is placed. 2. It is not judged according to social standing. 3. It is not judged according to the human standard of useful-

ness. II. THAT SUPERNATURAL POWER IS MANIFESTED, SUSTAINING AND SUPPORTING LIFE. 1. At times this power seems to come unexpectedly. 2. It is manifested when all earthly resources fail. 3. This supernatural power is generally exerted in conjunction with human efforts. Hagar had to go to the well; the water did not come to her. (*Homilist.*) *Hagar in the wilderness*.—1. I learn from this Oriental scene, in the first place, what a sad thing it is when people do not know their place, and get too proud for their business. Hagar was an assistant in that household, but she wanted to rule there. She ridiculed and jeered until her son, Ishmael, got the same tricks. My friends, one-half of the trouble in the world to-day comes from the fact that people do not know their place; or, finding their place, will not stay in it. 2. Again: I find in this Oriental scene a lesson of sympathy with woman when she goes forth trudging in the desert. What a great change it was for this Hagar. There was the tent, and all the surroundings of Abraham's house, beautiful and luxurious no doubt. Now she is going out into the hot sands of the desert. O, what a change it was. And in our day, we often see the wheel of fortune turn. Here is a beautiful home. You cannot think of anything that can be added to it. Books to read. Pictures to look at. Dark night drops. Pillow hot. Pulses flutter. Eyes close. Widowhood. Hagar in the wilderness! May God have mercy upon woman in her toils, her struggles, her hardships, her desolation, and may the great heart of Divine sympathy enclose her for ever. 3. Again: I find in this Oriental scene, the fact that every mother leads forth tremendous destinies. You say: "That isn't an unusual scene, a mother leading her child by the hand." Who is that she is leading? Ishmael, you say. Who is Ishmael? A great nation is to be founded; a nation so strong that it is to stand for thousands of years against all the armies of the world. Egypt and Assyria thunder against it; but in vain. Gauls brings up his army; and his army is smitten. Alexander decides upon a campaign, brings up his hosts and dies. For a long while that nation monopolizes the learning of the world. It is the nation of the Arabs. Who founded it? Ishmael, the lad that Hagar led into the wilderness. She had no idea she was leading forth such destinies. Neither does any mother. A good many years ago, A Christian mother sat teaching lessons of religion to her child; and he drank in those lessons. She never knew that Lamphier would come forth and establish the Fulton-street prayer-meeting, and by one meeting revolutionize the devotions of the whole earth, and thrill the eternities with his Christian influence. Lamphier said it was his mother who brought him to Jesus Christ. She never had an idea that she was leading forth such destinies. I tell you there are wilder deserts than Beer-sheba in many of the fashionable circles of this day. Dissipated parents leading dissipated children. Avaricious parents leading avaricious children. 4. I learn one more lesson from this Oriental scene, and that is, that every wilderness has a well in it. Hagar and Ishmael gave up to die. Hagar's heart sank within her as she heard her child crying: "Water! water! water!" "Ah," she says, "my darling, there is no water. This is a desert." And then God's angel said from the cloud: "What aileth thee, Hagar?" And she looked up and saw him pointing to a well of water, where she filled the bottle for the lad. Blessed be God that there is in every wilderness a well, if you only know how to find it—fountains for all these thirsty souls this morning. "On that last day, on that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried: If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink." All these other fountains you find are mere mirages of the desert. (*Dr. Talmage.*) *Ishmael, the bondwoman's son*.—I. DRIVEN FROM HOME. 1. Ishmael's fault. 2. Sarah's anger. 3. God's decree. His will is supreme over all human arrangements. II. DISTRESSED IN THE WILDERNESS. Where is her pride now, her petulance, jealousy, anger? III. DELIVERED BY GOD. 1. God heard the voice of the lad. 2. God opened her eyes. 3. God was with the lad. Lessons: 1. God rules. 2. God pities. 3. God saves. (*W. S. Smith, B.D.*) *Hagar*.—I. THE EXPULSION. 1. Of whom? Hagar, the bondwoman, and Ishmael, Abraham's son. Type of those who are cast out spiritually. Bondslaves of sin, whom the truth has not made free (*Gal. iv. 31; Job viii. 36*). 2. By whom? Abraham; at Sarah's request, and by the Lord's direction. With a human pity for Hagar, he yet obeyed God. The event eminently instructive to us. Servants of the law shall not, as such, divide with the free children the promises and blessings of the gospel; they are for the heirs of Christ, the Son who has made us free. 3. Wherefore? Because of the mocking of the son of the free woman. God will avenge his own elect. Mockers are cast out. Isaac mocked for his child-like attachment to his mother; and the

seed of Abraham this day mocked for their attachment to Christ. 4. How? Kindly, pitifully. Food for the journey was given. The bond have their good things in this life. Even they are blessed so far. 5. Whither? Egypt, the house of bondage, their destination. The bond journey through a wilderness to a prison.

II. THE JOURNEY. Through the wilderness of Beer-sheba. Drear, desolate, lonely. The home where they might have been happy, behind; before them—Egypt. Ishmael, fainting and weary, likely to die. The mother's solicitude. Cannot bear to see him die. The death of the free, beautiful, attractive. Religious analogy. The world cannot bear to see its loved ones die. Tenderness of mothers.

III. THE INTERPOSITION. 1. God heard the lad. He "hears our sighs and counts our tears." His compassions fail not. 2. The voice of the angel. Comforting, guiding. Exhorted to hope or duty. 3. The promise. The lad should not die. The only word that could comfort that mother's heart. 4. The well of water. Gracious provision for the bondwoman and her son. 5. The bondwoman and her son did not go down into Egypt. They remained in the wilderness; became the founders of a great nation. God would not have any perish. Learn: 1. The sin and folly of despising Christ and his people. 2. The mercy of God to even such thoughtless sinners. 3. The strength of maternal affection, and duties of youth. 4. He maketh streams to flow in the desert. The river of life is not far from us; "Whosoever will, let him come unto Me and drink." V. We need Divine grace to open our eyes that we may see this stream. (*J. C. Gray.*) *Ishmael*:—The first feeling we have in reading the story of Hagar and Ishmael is that they were both most cruelly used. The next feeling is that surely we do not know the whole case. It must be only the outside that we see. Behind all this there must be something we do not fully understand. When the first flush of anger dies away I begin to wonder whether there may not be something behind which, when known, will explain everything, and add to this confused and riotous life of ours a solemnity and a grandeur supernatural! Through this incident, as through a door ajar, we may see a good deal of human life on what may be called its tragical side. 1. As a mere matter of fact there are events in human life which cannot but affect us with a sense of disorder in the government and administration of things, if, indeed, there be either government or administration. One is taken, another left. One moves upwards to wealth and honour, another is neither prosperous by day nor restful by night. You may take one of two views of this state of facts. (a) Life is a scramble; the strong man wins; the weak man dies; luck is the only god, chance is the only law, death the only end. The disorder of human life mocks the order of material nature. Or thus: (b) There must be a power mightier than man's, controlling and shaping things. Looking at human history in great breadths we see that even confusion itself is not lawless; it is a discord in the solemn music; it is an eccentricity in the astronomic movement; but it is caught up by the great laws, and wrought into the general harmony; above all, beyond all, there is a benign and holy power. Now from my point of view it requires less faith to believe this than to believe the other. 2. As a further matter of fact in human life, there are cases marked by utter despair, for which it seems utterly impossible that any deliverance can ever arise. Hagar's is a case in point. Her water was spent. The hot sun was beating on her head. Ishmael was faint with weakness. No human friend answered the appealing voice. Some of us may have been in the same circumstances as to their effect upon the soul. When you were left a widow with six children—no fortune, the water gone, the children crying for bread, the officer at the door, you wished to die; you were subdued by a great fear. But I ask you, in God's house, if there were not made to you sudden revelations, or given to you unexpected promises that brought light to the weary and hopeless heart? How did friends appear, how were doors opened, how did the boys get a little schooling and get their first chance in life? Are you the person now to turn round and say that it all came by chance, or will you not rather exclaim, "This is the Lord's doing; I was brought low and He helped me"? And what men God trains in the wilderness! It would seem as if great destinies often had rough beginnings! 3. You will bear me witness, as a further matter of fact, that life is full of surprises and improbabilities, and that the proverb, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity," is supported by innumerable instances. "God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water." She expected to die, and lo! she never was so sure of life. These surprises not only save life from monotony; they keep us, if rightly valued, lowly, expectant, dependent. They operate in two contrary ways—lifting up man, and casting him down. 4. As a matter of fact, the men who seem to be the most pro-

sperous have trials of a heavy and most disciplinary kind. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The expulsive power of love to Christ*:—Love to Christ will not suffer the near neighbourhood of anything in its bosom that is derogatory to Christ; either it will reduce or abandon it, be it pleasure, profit, or whatever else. Abraham, who loved Hagar and Ishmael in their due place, when the one began to jostle with her mistress, and the other to jeer and mock at Isaac, he puts them both out of doors; love to Christ will not suffer thee to side with anything against Christ, but take His part with Him against any that oppose Him. (*H. G. Salter.*)

Ver. 16. *Let me not see the death of the child.*—*Physical and spiritual life contrasted*:—I. THE CIRCUMSTANCE OF CHILDREN DYING BEFORE THEIR PARENTS. A common event. This fact shows—1. That the Ruler of the world does not treat man here according to his character. 2. That the youngest, as well as the oldest, should live in constant preparation for the change. 3. That parents should not centre their affection upon their children. II. THE PARENTAL DISTRESS WHICH SUCH AN EVENT PRODUCES. Like the tearing of a branch from a plant quivering all over with sensibility. Spiritual discipline. III. THE ATTENTIVENESS OF GOD TO DISTRESSED PARENTS (ver. 17). God is at all times present with us. This should—1. Comfort us in our sorrows. 2. Restrain us from all sin. 3. Stimulate us to a true life. IV. THE APPLICABILITY OF THIS PARENTAL DEPRECATION TO THE SPIRITUAL DEATH OF CHILDREN. (*Homilist.*) *Parental solicitude*:—I. WHAT ARE THE PROPER OBJECTS OF PARENTAL SOLICITUDE? 1. Salvation is supreme. It is not the only object of a parent's anxiety, but the chief. The favour of God is above all favour. A holy heart is the greatest wealth your child can ever possess. 2. Many other objects harmonize by being made subordinate to that. Hagar wanted water for her child; an object, the value of which in this cooler climate we may seldom have had occasion rightly to prize. It was entirely proper for this mother, at that time, earnestly to long for a spring of water. So there are a thousand wants pertaining to man's complex being which it is legitimate to indulge. Concerning them all, it is only important now to notice that two rules pertain to them. (1) The first is, that what is legitimate, proper, useful, and healthful, should be distinguished from all that is the opposite. Neither fashion, vanity, pride, nor any evil inclination in the parent should be allowed to select the objects which are to be sought for the child. (2) The other rule I alluded to is, make all other legitimate objects subordinate to salvation. II. GOD HAS MANIFESTED A SUPREME REGARD FOR THAT FORM OF PARENTAL SOLICITUDE. 1. The history of children as presented by the Scriptures. 2. God has arranged His covenant of grace with reference to the salvation of children. It appears under the Old Testament in two distinct forms. The one was the application of the seal of the covenant to children. The other was a specific requirement that they should be thoroughly brought under the influence of God's law and government. Then, in the New Testament, it is to us perfectly clear that the same great principle is continued, because our Lord treated children as if they had the same relation to His kingdom under the New Testament as under the Old. Conclusion: 1. This subject possesses a great and manifold interest for the Church of God. 2. Parents, this subject is emphatically yours. 3. And what an interest have the young in this subject. (*E. N. Rich, D.D.*) *Parental responsibility*:—But though we all sympathize with Hagar in the disconsolate outburst of her soul, "Let me not see the death of the child," though we all acknowledge the intense interest which we feel in our child's welfare, yet many of us are, after all, doing that to and for our child which is not merely sitting by, and seeing him die, but which is helping on his death, and making ready his grave. The proposition that I lay down is this. That a large number of parents in Christian lands are pursuing with their children a course of conduct that must inevitably work out their spiritual death. Alas! the proof is too startling and overpowering to be either gainsayed or set aside. 1. The infinite superiority of the soul to the body, and of eternity to time, being acknowledged, I proceed to remark, that one way in which parents, who cry out in view of physical dissolution, "Let me not see the death of the child," are yet accomplishing their child's spiritual death, is, by showing the child, that they regard the body more than the soul. 2. I proceed to remark, secondly, that we are procuring the spiritual death of our child by showing that child that we regard the things of time more than the things of eternity. This superior regard for temporal over eternal things is evidenced by the fact that we lay our plans so much for time, and few or none, perhaps, for eternity. 3. A third way in which parents accomplish the spiritual death of their children is by

showing them that they regard the favour and opinions of men more than the favour and law of God. What a Moloch is human opinion! How many thousands of children are cast into its burning arms, and sacrificed to the favour or frowns of a deceitful world, while the deafening din of fashion's giddy throng drowns the shrieks of agony which burst from their spirits as they die without hope, without pardon, without Christ! 4. Lastly, we aid and abet the spiritual death of the child by our irreligious example, both in doing that which is positively wrong, and in neglecting to do what is as positively required. (*Bishop Stevens.*) *Compassion for souls:—*I. COMPASSION FOR SOULS—THE REASONS WHICH JUSTIFY IT, NAY, COMPEL IT. It scarce needs that I do more than rehearse in bare outline the reasons why we should tenderly compassionate the perishing sons of men. 1. For first, observe, the dreadful nature of the calamity which will overwhelm them. Calamities occurring to our fellow men naturally awaken in us a feeling of commiseration; but what calamity under heaven can be equal to the ruin of a soul? Brethren, if our bowels do not yearn for men who are daily hastening towards destruction, are we men at all? 2. I could abundantly justify compassion for perishing men, even on the ground of natural feelings. A mother who did not, like Hagar, weep for her dying child—call her not "mother," call her "monster." A man who passes through the scenes of misery which even this city presents in its more squalid quarters, and yet is never disturbed by them, I venture to say he is unworthy of the name of man. 3. In this instance what nature suggests grace enforces. The more we become what we shall be, the more will compassion rule our hearts. If you would be like Jesus, you must be tender and very pitiful. Ye would be as unlike Him as possible if ye could sit down in grim content, and, with a Stoic's philosophy, turn all the flesh within you into stone. 4. Brethren, the whole run and current, and tenour and spirit of the gospel influences us to compassion. Ye are debtors, for what were ye if compassion had not come to your rescue? Divine compassion, all undeserved and free, has redeemed you from your vain conversation. Surely those who receive mercy should show mercy; those who owe all they have to the pity of God, should not be pitiless to their brethren. 5. Let me beseech you to believe that it is needful as well as justifiable that you should feel compassion for the sons of men. You all desire to glorify Christ by becoming soul-winners—I hope you do—and be it remembered that, other things being equal, he is the fittest in God's hand to win souls who pities souls most. 6. But I stand not here any longer to justify what I would far rather commend and personally feel. II. We shall pass on to notice THE SIGHT WHICH TRUE COMPASSION DREADS. Like Hagar, the compassionate spirit says, "Let me not see the death of the child," or as some have read it, "How can I see the death of the child?" To contemplate a soul passing away without hope is too terrible a task! It will greatly add to your feeling of sorrow if you are forced to feel that the ruin of your child or of any other person may have been partly caused by your example. Is it not an awful thing that a soul should perish with the gospel so near? If Ishmael had died, and the water had been within bow-shot, and yet unseen till too late, it had been a dreadful reflection for the mother. III. In the third place, I would speak upon COMPASSION FOR THE SOULS OF MEN—THE TEMPTATION IT MUST RESIST. We must not fall into the temptation to imitate the example of Hagar too closely. She put the child under the shrubs and turned away her gaze from the all too mournful spectacle. She could not endure to look, but she sat where she could watch in despair. There is a temptation with each one of us to try to forget that souls are being lost. IV. I will now speak upon THE PATH WHICH TRUE COMPASSION WILL BE SURE TO FOLLOW; and what is that? 1. First of all, true pity does all it can. Before Hagar sat down and wept, she had done her utmost for her boy. 2. But what next does compassion do? Having done all it can, it sits down and weeps over its own feebleness. If you know how to weep before the Lord, He will yield to tears what He will not yield to anything besides. Oh, ye saints, compassionate sinners; sigh and cry for them; be able to say, as Whitfield could to his congregation, "Sirs, if ye are lost, it is not for want of my weeping for you, for I pour out my soul day and night in petitions unto God that ye may live." 3. And then what else doth Hagar teach us? She stood there ready to do anything that was needful after the Lord had interposed. The angel opened her eyes; until then she was powerless, and sat and wept, and prayed, but when he pointed to the well, did she linger for a minute? Did she delay to put it to her child's lips? Was she slack in the blessed task? Oh, no! with what alacrity did she spring to the well; with what speed did she fill the bottle; with what motherly joy did she hasten to her child, and give him

the saving draught! And so I want every member here to stand ready to mark the faintest indication of grace in any soul. V. But I must close, and the last point shall be THE ENCOURAGEMENT WHICH TRUE COMPASSION FOR SOULS WILL ALWAYS RECEIVE. First take the case in hand. The mother compassionate, God compassionate too. You pity, God pities. The motions of God's Spirit in the souls of His people are the foothills of God's eternal purposes about to be fulfilled. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Lessons*:—1. First observe, how affliction followeth affliction, and one grief in the neck of another, when once God beginneth to exercise us. She lost her place, she wandereth in the wilderness with her child, comfortless and desolate; the water of the bottle is spent, and no more to be had when the child crieth for drink, and is ready to die for it; and, lastly, she giveth her child up to death as she thought, getting her far off as unable to hear the cry of it. Let it school us, if the Lord so deal with us; we are not privileged, we have no immunity. If the Cross come to us as a thing judged fit for us of our God, we may not set Him a stint, and say thus much will I bear, and no more; but leave Him to His own good pleasure, expecting and enduring even one upon another, as thick as ever it shall please Him to send them. Taking hold of this promise by a lively faith, that He will never lay more upon us, than He will make us able to bear, but will give the issue with the temptation, that we may endure it. And praying to His Majesty upon that promise, that for His mercy sake He would so do. Oh, pitiful parting betwixt a mother and her child! Oh, sorrow upon sorrow, and the last the greatest by a thousand degrees! Whose stony heart bewaileth not, as we hear it, this ruthless case, of a poor mother and her child? 2. Secondly, observe we again the divers passions of love herein, either of parents to children or friend to friend; some cannot be drawn from them either day or night when they are like to die, and it is a great love and a good. But here it is otherwise, for the mother's heart cannot abide to see the child die, and this also because she loved it; so are many where they love entirely. Thus differ our divers natures even in one thing, and we have our divers reasons upon divers circumstances. Blessed is the party whose affections draweth nearest the Lord's allowance and an holy patience. 3. Lastly, consider how in this bitter agony and most heavy plight, yet she neither openeth her mouth against the Lord, nor against the means of her woe, Abraham and Sarah—no, not against Sarah—that was the first and chief cause indeed to stir up Abraham to put her away. No cursing, no banning, no raving nor railing is heard out of her; a very great commendation of her, and a very great want in our days in some that think themselves no common Christians, for that thing almost happeneth not to cross their minds, but the very air almost is infected with their bannings, be it never so small and of no account. Their soul is acquainted with bitterness altogether, and their tongues cannot but take like course. Surely, surely, neither Abraham nor Sarah, nor God, I fear me, should have escaped curses many and great; but for Sarah, she should have been cursed to the deep pit of hell ten thousand times, and further, if further were any further torment to be had for her. But learn, Oh, fiery and furious spirits! even by Hagar here, no other lesson, follow it, and use it with careful hearts if you mean not to brew for yourselves in hell what you wish to others. (*Bp. Babington.*) *Approach of death*:—A plough is coming from the far end of a long field, and a daisy stands nodding and full of dew-dimples. That furrow is sure to strike the daisy. It casts its shadow as gaily, and inhales its gentle breath as freely, and stands as simple and radiant and expectant as ever; and yet that crushing furrow, which is turning and turning others in its course, is drawing near, and in a moment it whirls the headless flower with sudden reversal under the sod! And as is the daisy with no power of thought, so are ten thousand thinking sentient flowers of life, blossoming in places of peril, and yet thinking that no furrow of disaster is running in toward them—that no iron plough of trouble is about to overturn them. Sometimes it dimly dawns upon us, when we see other men's mischiefs and wrongs, that we are in the same category with them, and that perhaps the storms which have overtaken them will overtake us also. But it is only for a moment, for we are artful to cover the ear and not listen to the voice that warns us of our danger. (*H. W. Beecher.*) *Not afraid to die*:—In the early part of the career of the Rev. John Wesley, influenced by a desire to do good, he undertook a voyage to Georgia. During a storm on the voyage he was very much alarmed by the fear of death, and being a severe judge of himself, he concluded that he was unfit to die. He observed the lively faith of the Germans, who, in the midst of danger, kept their minds in a state of tranquility and ease, to which he and the English on board were strangers.

While they were singing at the commencement of their service, the sea broke over them, split the mainsail in pieces, covered the ship, and poured in between the decks as if the great deep had swallowed them up. The English screamed terribly: the Germans calmly sung on. Mr. Wesley asked one of them afterwards if he were not afraid. He answered: "I thank God, no." "But were not your women and children afraid?" He replied, mildly, "No; our women and children are not afraid to die." (*Moral and Religious Anecdotes.*)

Ver. 17. **And God heard the voice of the lad.**—*Prayer*:—A minister once said to a boy, "Can you pray? How did you pray?" He said, "Sir, I begged." He could not have used a better word; praying is begging of God. Prayer is very much like a bow. The arrow is a promise; the string is faith. You use your faith, and with it send a promise up to the skies. There are a great many things to think of in prayer. Let me tell you of one or two. 1. You should always address God by one of His names or titles, in a very reverent way. You have to thank God for His mercies; you have to confess to God your sins; you have to trust God to bless you; you have to ask for other people; then, to end all, "For Jesus Christ's sake." Tell God anything you like, only take care you ask it all in the name of Jesus, because we have no promise to prayer that God will hear us unless we add the name of Jesus to it. 2. Every boy and girl ought to have a form of prayer, though they need not always use it. A psalm is sometimes very good. But the more you practise, the more you will have to say out of your heart. 3. Wandering thoughts often trouble us in prayer. They are like the birds which flew down on Abraham's altar and spoiled the sacrifice. We must drive away these little birds; we must ask God to keep off the wandering thoughts. 4. When you are praying always remember that there is One who is offering up that prayer for you to God. That prayer does not go to God just as you send it up; but before it gets to the throne of God it gets much sweeter. Jesus puts His sweet incense into our prayer. So God will be pleased with us for His sake. 5. Pray always. You cannot always kneel down and pray, but little prayers in your hearts can always be going up. These little darts or ejaculations can be sent up anywhere, at any time. (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*) *God is with us everywhere*:—I. THIS PASSAGE TEACHES A LESSON TO PARENTS. It teaches that God is with us at our work; that the wilderness of life is full of Him; that in the waste of this world He is close beside us; that our children are His children; that He sees them under the shrub of the desert; that He has a property in them, a work for them, a work in them; that they are heirs, not of the desert in which they seem to be perishing, but of the many mansions of their heavenly Father's house. Believe that your children have been united to Christ; and that if you teach them to claim this union for themselves, its strength and its healing shall come out for them day by day as you seek to bring them up for Him. II. THIS PASSAGE CONTAINS INSTRUCTION FOR THE YOUNG THEMSELVES. 1. God saw the lad as he lay beneath the desert shrub. And He sees you, wherever you are, at home or abroad—His eye is ever on you. Learn this lesson first—God's eye is ever on the lad, and sees him wherever he is. 2. God was the true protector of the lad, and He is your true and only Friend. He sees in you the adopted children of Jesus Christ. Even from your helpless infancy has He thus looked on you, and had purposes of love towards you. 3. God had a purpose for the lad and a work in him. He meant him to become a great nation in these waste places. His casting out, dark as it seemed, was preparing the way for this; and so it is with you. Everything around you is ordered by God for an end. That end is truly your best spiritual happiness. 4. God heard the voice of the lad; and He will hear you in every time of your trouble. Ishmael was heard because he was the son of Abraham; you will be heard because you are the son of God through Christ. (*Bishop Samuel Wilberforce.*) *God's constant care*:—Homeless, helpless: is there any sight more pitiable than this—a child in the wilderness? Think of the hundreds about us, pinched with hunger, perishing in sore need; the young life passing away neglected, to appear before the throne of God, there by its presence to plead against us, or else rising up in this wilderness to avenge our disregard—"a wild man whose hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him." I. We dwell on these words especially as teaching THE FATHER'S CARE FOR THE CHILDREN. Do not think of this event as occurring under a dispensation so different from ours that we can find in it no distinct teaching for to-day—very beautiful, but of little worth save for its beauty. These words mean a thousandfold more to us than they could do to Hagar. The Father had not then revealed Himself in the only-begotten Son.

The Son of God went away into the wilderness; He shivered in the cold night-blast; He felt the pitiless beating of the storm. And now in all the world there is not one poor child shut out from His sympathy, for He Himself has lived a child of poverty and woe. II. NOT TO ANGELS NOW IS THIS WORK OF RESCUE GIVEN. It is our high honour and prerogative to be the ministers of the Father's love. Angels may bring the tidings, perhaps, but only that we may obey. Angels shall reveal the means, but only that we may carry the blessing. Hagar must fill the bottle and give the lad to drink; she must lift him up and hold him by the hand. (*M. G. Pearce.*)

What aileth thee, Hagar? — What aileth thee? — As there was a well of water close to Hagar, though unknown to her at the time, so the Lord has made provision for every human life. In the worst straits there is a well for us, and God places a beautiful flower in every thorny path.

1. First, let me come to you who consider yourself to be a Christian believer. (1) Believer, what aileth thee? You are not so happy as you were when first you gave your heart to God. In China, if a lady were to ask how it is she cannot enjoy a brisk walk, you would reply, "It is because you cramped your feet in tight shoes from childhood and have hindered their growth." Now, believer, faith may be compared to the feet on which a Christian stands; and if you have bound up your faith in the tight shoes of doubt, how can you expect to run and not be weary, or to walk and not faint? Have you not allowed your soul to be thrust in the prison of unbelief? Unshackle your mind from the fetters of that grim tyrant, Unbelief; and as your faith grows, so shall you enjoy the peace you have lost.

(2) I go to another and say, Believer, what aileth thee? You reply, "Paul sang praises in the dungeon at midnight; but the least cross worries and frets me. How is it?" Well, I will tell you. My friend, you say you have done no harm; but the reason why little vexations worry you, is that you have not done much good. Let us be tender-hearted, cheerful-looking, and ready-helping Christians; and, like a pleasant flower, let us exhibit beauty of character and exhale perfume of blessings. A young man, up there in the corner, may say, "I want to do great things!" Ah, young Christian, first of all begin to scatter little seeds of kindness. Be more lovable and helpful at home than you have been. On a cold day we long for the sun, because it cheers us; likewise make yourself such a blessing that every member of your home shall long for you to come, because your presence cheers their path and soothes their soul.

(3) Now, I go to another, and ask, What aileth thee? You reply, "I have not so much pleasure in prayer as I used to have." Well, the reason is, that you have neglected prayer.

(4) Let me pass on to another believer, who, I see, bears the look of anxious care in his face. Friend, what aileth thee? You reply, "I have to pass through much trouble, and I fret, and am in despair." Now, why should you allow worrying care to destroy your peace? Let me tell you a tale to comfort you. Some time ago, a father and his little daughter were travelling in the train to London. After rushing rapidly on for many miles, the train came to a sudden stop. The little child was anxious, and said, "Father, let us jump out!" The father looked out through the window, and seeing the signal ahead indicated that the line was not clear, he replied, "No, my dear; we are quite safe." The child exclaimed, "But, father, what are we stopping here for? I am so afraid! I wish I could get out." The father tried to explain, but the child could understand nothing except that the train stood still, and that she wanted to go on. Now, like that little child, you are perplexed as to certain stoppages of the wheels of the circumstances of your life; but you cannot understand it until later on. After a long time, the train, of which I have told you, went on and slowly passed an overturned engine, which had been thrown off the rails. The father said, "See, my dear, if we had gone on as you wished, we should have run into that train, and have been smashed up." Christian friend, when we reach our mansion in paradise, we shall see that the unpleasant stoppage, which we thought was against us, and that great crash, which prevented us from becoming rich, were directed by a gentle hand, a wise mind, and a loving heart.

2. I intend, now, to go to another class amongst you. I find here a person who makes an outward profession of religion, but who is not a sincere Christian. What aileth thee, professor? You reply, "Well, though I profess to be religious, I am not religious in all things."

3. What aileth thee, backslider? You reply, "The Lord has withdrawn from me." Ah, you judge the Lord as if He were human. I come to another backslider, and ask, "What aileth thee?" You reply, "I cannot return to God; for He must be disgusted with my character." Let me tell you of a man who had a foul disease. He was taken to the hospital in Piccadilly, but his breath

was offensive and his body so full of pollution that few could bear to be near him. He was placed in a spare bed; but though he had a disease of such a disgusting nature, the doctor smiled kindly upon him, and did all in his power to heal him. As the gentle surgeon did not turn from that wretched man, so the Lord will receive you, and heal your backsliding. (*W. Birch.*) *What aileth thee, Hagar?*—I. Now first, “WHAT AILETH THEE, HAGAR?” And to that question we give three answers. The first answer is this—she thought her son was given over unto death. Poor Hagar had a grief that swallowed up all other griefs. She had a sorrow that made all other sorrows appear utterly insignificant. What cared she if she had lost an Abraham’s home? She was losing her boy, that was something infinitely worse. What did it matter to her if all her hopes for the future were blighted and blasted? What a picture we have here of the anxious inquirer—the experience of the sinner when first awakened to the consciousness of his soul’s danger. The grief of the anxious inquirer is a grief that swallows up all other griefs. How little does it matter to him whether he has trouble in business or not. The trouble of his soul has made him oblivious to all other trouble. The one all-absorbing thought of the anxious soul, the thought that drives all others out of the mind, is—not “my son,” but “my soul is dying.” But observe, that Ishmael was her only son, and this added to her trial. If she had had another boy, it would have been bad enough, but poor Ishmael—if he was gone, her all was gone. No other hope. Lose him, and she had lost everything. Here again I see the sinner’s sorrow, for he also argues, I have but one soul, and if that is lost, it is a loss indeed. I think there was a third drop of bitterness in her cup, and that was her previously bright expectations. I do not know what exact future Hagar pictured for her boy, but doubtless it was a happy one. He was Abraham’s son; he would be Abraham’s heir. Likely enough, that often before Isaac was born, she used to pat the head of Ishmael, and say, “Ah, my boy, you are born to a fortune; you will never have to slave for your bread like some poor wretches. Thank God you are not like others.” And so the sinner, when convinced of sin, feels the painfulness of his condition all the more because of his previously bright expectations. Ah, he used once to think his soul was so well to do, it could never be in want. Often would he say, “Oh, soul, thank God thou art not as other souls. Thou art a good, moral, well-meaning soul, and thou needst never have a doubt about resting in the bosom of father Abraham above.” But, oh, when the light of God streamed into his soul, then he saw how utterly deluded he had been. 2. The second thing that ailed Hagar was, that she was powerless to aid him. Not only was the case bad, but she could not make it better. All human resources had now failed. The bottle is as dry as the desert itself, and she has flung it aside in despairing rage. The dry sand rattles in it unmoistened, and the skin is cracking in the heat. Here again I see the sinner’s case exactly photographed; all his hopes frustrated, and all his wonderfully clever expedients proving utterly futile. There was a time when he managed to satisfy or stupify his soul with the expedients of formal worship—outward reformation and life alteration. But there comes a time when he gets to the end of all his old resources, and a blessed time it is, although he does not think so. 3. The third thing that ailed Hagar was that she was stupefied with despair. Frantic effort had given place to despairing quiet; and that was a more fatal sign. “If the boy is to die, let him die, and I cannot help it.” So she takes the poor, emaciated lad and casts him down in the sand, saying, “Let him have the little benefit that the shadow of a shrub can give, and I will go and sit with my back towards him, for I cannot see him die.” She is so stupefied with her sorrow—so utterly benumbed by it, that she could not even pray. Is this thy case? Has frantic effort with thee given place to the quietude of despair? Art thou now found saying, “There is no hope for me, I am the man with the unclean spirit in me. Better I never can be. Saved I never shall be. It may be said of many a sinner who thinks he is dumb with despair, “God has heard the crying of thy soul.” Your lips could not pray, but, unconsciously to yourself, your heart did. 4. Now, we observe here, that sad as was the case of Hagar, yet there were many favourable signs about her, using her as an illustration of the sinner; and the first favourable thing I notice is that all indifference was gone. If there ever had been any it was clean gone to the winds now. Indifference! Why Hagar was ready to die for the salvation of her boy. Art thou like Hagar? Is thine indifference broken through? It is a grand moment when a man finds out he has a soul. And the next hopeful thing I observe in Hagar was—she was completely humbled. What a difference between that broken-hearted woman sitting

under the shrub, and the jaunty maid of Sarah. Who would recognize in her the one that used to be so pert and quick with her answers, and who gaily laughed at her mistress? Sinner, is that the case with you? There was a time when you had plenty of excuses to offer about yourself. And then we notice that a third favourable sign was—she had come to the end of her own resources. When Hagar came to the end of the bottle, she was very near finding the well; and he who comes to the end of his own expedients is very near finding out God's grand plan of salvation. II. HAGAR AILED A GREAT DEAL MORE THAN SHE NEED HAVE DONE. She need not have been so miserable after all. And the first reason why she need not have ailed so much is this: Her son was not appointed to death, he was appointed to life. God had said to Abraham, "I will make of him a great nation." When a broken-hearted sinner says, "My poor soul is appointed unto death," we say to ourselves, "He is mistaken; God has not appointed his soul unto death, but unto life." She ailed more than she need have done, for the very thing that she wanted was already prepared. "What aileth thee, Hagar?" She answers, "Want of water." Why, Hagar, there it is. And oh, blessed truth, dear anxious soul, everything you want is already prepared. Do you want an atonement? The atonement was made eighteen hundred and seventy-two years ago. Do you feel you need cleansing? There is the blood already shed. Do you need forgiveness? There are with our God plenteous pardons. And observe next, the water for which her son was dying was within—what distance? Why, within a bow-shot of her—nearer than that, for I am inclined to think that the well was just between Ishmael and Hagar, and that was the reason she did not see it. Oh, friend, Christ is nearer to thee than the well was to Hagar. III. I conclude by showing you HOW HAGAR LOST ALL HER AILMENTS. 1. She lost them I think, first, through prayer. "I have heard the cry of the lad." These are the sighings of a soul that God can understand, and He saith to thee, poor, despairing sinner, to-night, though you say you cannot pray, "I have heard the praying of thy soul." 2. And then notice. He opened her eyes to see what was already provided. He did not strengthen Hagar to do anything fresh, He only opened her eyes to see what was already done. And that is just how God deals with souls now. He does not ask the sinner to do anything further, but simply says, "Look this way." At the command the sinner's eyes are turned into the right direction, and the soul says what in all probability Hagar said, "Why, there it is!—there is what I want—there is the well—there is the water." Yes, there it is; and oh, why did not the sinner see it before? 3. And then, lastly, God used her pitcher. The very thing that had been no use came in very handy now. While she trusted to the pitcher it was a worthless thing, but the moment she made it subservient to the well it became valuable. It was useful as a means. Do not trust in the sermon, or you will be like Hagar, trusting to her bottle. Do not rest on the service; you will be as bitterly disappointed as she was when that bottle, all dried and cracked and sandy, lay at her feet. But, oh—may God open thine eyes to see the well, and may He make the words of to-night the pitcher to carry the water to thy dying soul! God grant it for Christ's sake!—Amen. (*A. G. Brown.*) *All right by and by*:—A woman, with sad face and doleful voice, was once complaining bitterly of her hard lot in life, and of the trials and misfortunes which she was called to pass through, when the sweet voice of a child, of only five years, broke in with: "It will all come right by-and-by, mother." Those words, coming as they did from childish lips, made an impression on my mind which will never be erased. Many times since, amid the conflicts of life, I have seemed to hear a childish voice saying, "It will all come right by-and-by." Oh that we might always have the love and confidence of a little child. Then we should ever trust in our heavenly Father's tender care, feeling that He will bring us safely through all the troubles of this life, and that all things shall work together for our good and the glory of God. (*S. W. W.*)

Ver. 19. *God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water.*—*The hidden well discovered*:—In this hidden well, which Ishmael's prayer uncovered, lies many a true lesson, if only we have the right sort of pitcher to dip and draw. 1. How CAME THE WELL TO BE THERE, JUST WHERE AND WHEN IT WAS WANTED? The Arab shepherds who dug it never meant it for wandering travellers, but for their own flocks. God guided the steps of Hagar to it. Life is full of hidden wells—stored-up blessings, ready at the right moment to supply the answer to prayer. God foresees our prayers as well as our necessities. II. OUR ENCOURAGEMENT TO PRAY IS NOT OUR OWN GOODNESS, BUT GOD'S. We plead not the name of Abraham, or of any earthly parent or friend,

but the name of Jesus, God's own dear Son. III. Learn from this story not to THINK LITTLE THINGS OF NO IMPORTANCE, and not to be afraid to pray to God about little things as well as great. There are two reasons which prove that God does not disdain to attend little things: (1) He has made many more little things than great, and has made the greatest things to depend on the least; (2) God is so great, that the difference between what we call great and little is to Him as nothing; and He is so wise, that nothing—not a thought or atom—is small enough to escape His eye. IV. Prayer itself is a hidden well; a secret source of strength, and joy, and wisdom, not only in times of trouble, but always. (*E. R. Conder, D.D.*) *Christian culture*:—I. HUMANITY NEEDS LIGHT. 1. Physical. 2. Intellectual. 3. Spiritual. II. GOD GIVES THE LIGHT. 1. Creator. 2. Providence. 3. Conscience. 4. Revelation. 5. Redemption. III. LIGHT IS BENEFICENT. (*The Homiletic Review*.) *Hagar in the wilderness*:—I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH BROUGHT HER INTO THIS SITUATION. II. THE EFFECT PRODUCED ON HER BY THE DESOLATE SITUATION INTO WHICH SHE IS BROUGHT. 1. It was despair in opposition to God's plain promises. "Let me not see the death of the child," she says. Why, the Lord Himself had spoken to her from heaven years ago, and told her that that very child should live to be a man and a powerful and great one. And this promise He had renewed but a short time before to Abraham, who would naturally mention the renewal of it to her. But in this hour of seeming danger, Jehovah's words are nothing to her; she either does not think of or she disbelieves them. "My child must die," she says, and cast him down to die. How like ourselves in some of our trials! 2. The despair of Hagar was despair in opposition to her own experience. This was not the first time she had been in a desert (see Gen. xvi). And there, we might have expected, the Lord would have left her to reap the fruit of her rashness; but not so. He is observant of her there. In admiration of the Lord's goodness, she calls the place where she had experienced it by a name implying, "Thou God seest me." But this is now clean forgotten. Ourselves again, brethren. "I know whom I have believed. The experience I myself have had in days past of my Saviour's love and faithfulness encourages me, nay, compels me, to trust Him now." The Lord brings us into a desert and appears for us there. "I can never forget this," we say. "The remembrance of this mercy will be a stay to me all my life long." But we get into the desert again, and what do we say then? All the many proofs we have had of the Lord's power and faithfulness, are as much out of our thoughts as though we had never had one of them. 3. Hagar's despair was despair in opposition to fact also. It was despair in the very midst of abundance. III. Let us look now at THE INTERPOSITION OF GOD IN BEHALF OF THIS DESPAIRING WOMAN, the mercy He showed her. It consisted, you observe, in this one simple thing, He "opened her eyes." He did no more for her, for no more was needed. Wondering, happy woman! we say; but not more wondering or more happy than many a despairing sinner has been, when the Lord has opened his eyes and discovered to him His great salvation, His abounding mercy, the fountain of living waters He has provided for him in Jesus Christ. (*C. Bradley, M.A.*) *Providence timely*:—We find a multitude of Providences so timed to a minute, that, had they fallen out ever so little sooner or later, they had signified but little in comparison of what they now do. Certainly, it cannot be casualty, but counsel, that so exactly nicks the opportunity. Contingencies keep no rules. How remarkable to this purpose was the tidings brought to Saul, that the Philistines had invaded the land just as he was ready to grasp the prey (1 Sam. xxiii, 27). The angel calls to Abraham, and shows him another sacrifice, just when his hand was giving the fatal stroke to Isaac (Gen. xxii, 10, 11). A well of water is discovered to Hagar just when she had left the child as not able to see its death (Gen. xxi, 16-19). Rabshakeh meets with blasting providence, hears a rumour that frustrated his design, just when ready to give the shock against Jerusalem (Isaiah xxxvii, 7, 8). So when Haman's plot against the Jews was ripe, and all things ready for execution, "On that night could not the king sleep" (Esther vi, 1). When the horns are ready to gore Judah, immediately carpenters are prepared to fray them away (Zech. i, 18-21). How remarkable was the relief of Rochelle by a shoal of fish that came into the harbour when they were ready to perish with hunger, such as they never observed either before or after that time. Mr. Dodd could not go to bed one night, but feels a strong impulse to visit (though unreasonable) a neighbouring gentleman, and just as he came he meets him at his door, with a halter in his pocket, just going to hang himself. Dr. Tate and his wife, in the Irish rebellion, flying through the woods with a sucking child, which was just ready to expire, the mother, going to rest it upon a rock, puts her hand upon a bottle of warm milk, by which

it was preserved. A good woman, from whose mouth I received it, being driven to a great extremity, all supplies failing, was exceedingly plunged into unbelieving doubts and fears, not seeing whence supplies would come; when lo! in the nick of time, turning some things in a chest, she unexpectedly lights upon a piece of gold, which supplied her present wants till God opened another door of supply. If these things fall out casually, how is it that they observe the very juncture of time so exactly? This is become proverbial in Scripture. "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen" (Gen. xxii, 14). (*J. Flavel.*) *Strange providences*:—"Suppose you were in a smith's shop, and there should see several sorts of tools, some crooked, some bowed, others hooked, would you," asks Spencer, "condemn all these things for nought because they do not look handsome? The smith makes use of them all for the doing of his work. Thus it is with the providences of God: they seem to us to be very crooked and strange, yet they all carry on God's work." *Eyes opened*:—I. Taking HAGAR'S CASE first, I shall address myself to certain unconverted ones who are in a hopeful condition. 1. Taking Hagar's case as the model to work upon, we may see in her and in many like her a preparedness for mercy. In many respects she was in a fit state to become an object of mercy's help. She had a strong sense of need. The water was spent in the bottle, she herself was ready to faint, and her child lay at death's door; and this sense of need was attended by vehement desires. It is quite certain that, in Hagar's case, the will was right enough with reference to the water. It would have been preposterous indeed to say to Hagar, "If there be water, are you willing to drink?" "Willing?" she would say; "look at my parched lips, hear my dolorous cries, look at my poor panting, dying child!" And so with you; if I were to propose to you the question, "Are you willing to be saved?" you might look at me in the face and say, "Willing! oh, sir, I have long passed beyond that stage I am panting, groaning, thirsting, fainting, dying to find Christ." All this is hopeful, but I must again remind you that to will to be rich does not make a man rich, and that to will to be saved cannot in itself save you. 2. In the second place, mercy was prepared for Hagar, and is prepared for those in a like state. The water was near to Hagar; and so is Christ near to you, my dear friend, this morning. The mercy of God is not a thing to be sought for up yonder among the stars, nor to be discovered in the depths; it is nigh thee, it is even in thy mouth and in thy heart. 3. We pass on, then, in the third place, to notice that although Hagar was prepared and mercy was prepared, yet there was an impediment in the way, for she could not see the water. There is also an impediment in your way. Hagar had a pair of bright beaming eyes, I will be bound to say, and yet she could not see the water; and men may have first-rate understandings, but not understand that simple thing—faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Simple trust in Jesus has this difficulty in it, that it is not difficult, and therefore the human mind refuses to believe that God can intend to save us by so simple a plan. What blindness is this! So foolish and so fatal. The main reason I think, however, why some do not attain early to peace is because they are looking for more than they will get, and thus their eyes are dazzled with fancies. Again, I am afraid some persons, with the water at their feet, do not drink it because of the bad directions that are given by ministers. 4. I feel certain that there are some here upon whom the Lord intends to work this morning; so we will speak, in the fourth place, upon the divine removal of the impediment. Hagar's blindness was removed by God. No one else could have removed it. God must open a man's eyes to understand practically what belief in Jesus Christ is. But while this was divinely removed, it was removed instrumentally. An angel spake out of heaven to Hagar. It matters little whether it be an angel or a man, it is the Word of God which removes this difficulty. II. Oh that the Spirit of God would give me power from on high while I try to talk to the saints from the second case, viz., that of the apostles in Luke xxiv, 31. This is no Hagar, but "Cleopas and another disciple." They ought to have known Jesus for these reasons. 1. They were acquainted with Him, they had been with Him for years in public and in private, they had heard His voice so often that they ought to have recollected its tones. 2. They ought to have known Him, because He was close to them; He was walking with them along the same road, He was not up on a mountain at a distance. 3. They ought to have seen Him, because they had the Scriptures to reflect His image, and yet how possible it is for us to open that precious Book and turn over page after page of it and not see Christ. 4. What is more, these disciples ought to have seen Jesus, for they had the Scriptures opened to them. 5. There was another reason why the disciples ought to have seen Him, namely, that they had received

testimonies from others about Him. Now what is the reason for this? Why do we not see Him? I think it must be ascribed in our case to the same as in theirs, namely, our unbelief. They evidently did not expect to see Him, and therefore they did not discover Him. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *A welcome discovery*:—I. It often happens that when we are in trouble and distress, THE SUPPLY OF OUR NEED, AND THE CONSOLATION FOR OUR SORROW ARE VERY NEAR AT HAND. There is a well close to us at our feet, if we could but see it. 1. How true this often is in providence with Christian people. We have known them to be in sore alarm at some approaching ill, or in the most fearless distress on account of some troublous circumstances which already surround them. They have said, "We don't know what we shall do to-morrow." They have inquired, "Who shall roll us away the stone?" They wot not that God has already provided for to-morrow, and has rolled the stone away. If they knew all, they would understand that their trial is purely imaginary. They are making it by their unbelief. It has no other existence than that which their distrust of God gives to it. 2. Though this is true of providence, I prefer rather to deal with the matter of spiritual blessings. It often happens that souls are disturbed in spiritual matters about things that ought not to disturb them. For instance, a large proportion of spiritual distresses are occasioned by a forgetfulness or an ignorance of the doctrines of the Bible. Sometimes, holy Scripture has its well near to the troubled heart, not so much in the form of doctrine, as in the form of promise. There was never a trouble yet in human experience among God's people, but what there was a promise to meet it. At other times the well appears in the form neither of a doctrine nor of a promise, but in the shape of an experience of some one else. Perhaps nothing more effectually comforts, under the blessing of God, than the discovery that some undoubtedly good man has passed through the same state of heart in which we are found. And, beloved, sometimes it pleases the Holy Spirit to open a well of living waters for us in the person, and work, and life, and sympathy, and love, of our Well-beloved, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus suffers with thee, O thou child of God,—suffers in thee. Thou art a member of His body, and therefore He endures in thee. Thou art making up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ for His body's sake, which is the Church. Besides, once more, our sorrows often arise from our not observing the Holy Spirit. II. I think I hear some one say, "I have no doubt, sir, that God has provided a supply for necessities, but may I partake of that supply? may I participate in the provisions of Divine love?" I will answer thee by saying, in the second place, that THIS SUPPLY IS FOR YOU. III. Now to our last point. IT IS AVAILABLE WITHOUT ANY EXTRAORDINARY EXERTION. Hagar went and filled her bottle with water, and she gave her child to drink. No hydraulic inventions were required; no exceedingly difficult pumping, no mechanical contrivances to obtain the water when the spring was perceived. She did a very simple thing: she held her bottle in the water till it was full, poured out into the child's mouth, and the dilemma which had perilled life was over. Now, the way by which we get a hold of Christ is faith. (*Ibid.*) *Eyes opened*:—I. Our first head shall be that IF OUR EYES WERE FURTHER OPENED THE RESULT TO ANY ONE OF US WOULD BE VERY REMARKABLE. We are at present limited in our range of sight. This is true of our natural or physical vision, of our mental vision, and of our spiritual vision; and in each case when the range of sight is enlarged very remarkable discoveries are made. God has been pleased to open the natural eyes of mankind by the invention of optical instruments. What a discovery it was when first of all certain pieces of glass were arranged in connection with each other, and men began to peer into the stars! Equally marvellous was the effect upon human knowledge when the microscope was invented. We could never have imagined what wonders of skill and taste would be revealed by the magnifying-glass, and what marvels of beauty would be found compassed within a space too small to measure. Our physical eyes thus opened by either glass reveal strange marvels, and we may infer from this fact that the opening of our mental and spiritual eyes will discover to us equal wonders in other domains, and thus increase our reverence and love towards God. 1. Suppose, that our eyes could be opened as to all our past lives. Our childhood—how different that period would now appear with God's light upon it. Our vision will be strengthened one day, so that we shall see the end from the beginning, and then we shall understand that the Lord maketh all things work together for good to them that love Him. 2. And now suppose, again, our eyes should be opened upon the future. Ay, would you not like to spy into destiny? Ah, if your eyes could

be opened as to all that is to happen, what would you do? If you were wise, and knew your future, you would commit it unto God; commit it to Him though you do not know it. 3. If our eyes were opened, again, on another point, as to the existence of angels, we should see marvels. If the Lord opened the eyes of His greatly beloved servants to see how many of these mighty intelligences are silently guarding them, they would cease to complain of loneliness while in the midst of such a thronging ministry of willing friends. 4. And what, once more, if your eyes could be opened to look into heaven? II. IN SOME THINGS OUR EYES MUST BE OPENED. Those I have spoken about are desirable in a measure, but these are absolutely necessary. For instance, as to the divine salvation, our eyes must be opened. III. IN OUR PRESENT CASE IT IS VERY DESIRABLE THAT OUR EYES SHOULD BE OPENED. To many it is imperatively needful at this moment, for if not now recovered from their blindness they will die in their sins. 1. First, we would have opened eyes that we may see Jesus to be very near us. Do not think of Him just now as if He were far away in heaven. He is there in his glorious personality, but His spiritual presence is here also. 2. We desire that you may have your eyes opened to see what you are in Christ. You complain that you are black in yourselves; but you are most fair in Him. 3. Lastly, may the Lord open your eyes to see what you will be in Him. Certain of us are nearer heaven than we think. Let our hearts dance for joy at the bare thought of such speedy felicity. Let us go on our way blessing and magnifying Him who has opened our eyes to see the glory which He has prepared for them that love Him, which shall be ours ere long. (*Ibid.*) *Wells in unexpected places*.—It is wonderful how God provides for the needs of His creatures in strange places and in unlikely ways. All living things must have water or die; and so water is often found stored up in remarkable and unexpected places. In the heart of Africa, where all is drought and barrenness, it is said that there is sometimes found in the soil a little stem of a plant, and by digging down to the bottom of it, a bulb is discovered which contains a quantity of pure, sweet water. Melons, which are full of water, grow best on light, dry, sandy soil; and sometimes, where water cannot easily be found, certain trees afford a most nourishing and refreshing beverage. There is a vast amount of water in the air, even when no clouds are seen. In a summer day how quickly the outside of a pitcher of cold water will be covered with moisture, which is drawn from the air. So while some plants draw up water from the earth by their roots, others, called air plants, hang upon trees, and, without touching the ground, draw nourishment and moisture from the air. A writer tells of a surveying party who were resting at noon in Florida, when one of the chainmen exclaimed: "I would give fifty cents a swallow for all the water I could drink." He expressed the sentiment of the others; all were very thirsty, and there was not a spring or a stream of water anywhere in the vicinity. While the men were thus talking, the surveyor saw a crow put his bill into a cluster of broad, long leaves, growing on the side of a tall cypress. The leaves were those of a peculiar air-plant. They were green, and bulged out at the bottom, forming an inverted bell. The smaller end was held to the tree by roots grappling the bark. Feeding on the air and water that it catches and holds, the air-plant becomes a sort of cistern. The surveyor sprang to his feet with a laugh. "Boys," he said, "that old crow is wiser than every one of us." "How so?" they asked. "Why, he knows that there are a hundred thousand water-tanks in this forest." "Where?" they demanded, in amazement. The surveyor cut an air-plant in two, and drained nearly a pint of pure cold water from it. The men did not suffer for water after that, for every tree in the forest had at least one air-plant, and almost every air plant contained a drink of water. So God satisfies the longings of thirsty men. Even amid the desert's glowing sands, the smitten rock poured forth the life-giving flood. And God also provides living water for thirsty souls; and those who feel in their hearts longings such as earth can never satisfy, may hear amid the restlessness of unsatisfied desire, the voice of Him who stood in the Temple and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink!"

Ver. 22. *God is with thee in all that thou doest.*—*Christian prosperity*.—I. ALL CHRISTIAN PROSPERITY IS CONSCIOUSLY IDENTIFIED WITH GOD. II. ALL CHRISTIAN PROSPERITY IS ALSO CONSCIOUSLY IDENTIFIED WITH CHRISTIAN CHARACTER. III. ALL CHRISTIAN PROSPERITY IS IDENTIFIED WITH CHRISTIAN ENTERPRISE. Between God blessing a man's labour and God doing a man's labour for him there is a wide difference. God won't pasture the sheep, but God will multiply the flock. God

won't dig the ground, but He'll water it with rain and dew. IV. IN ALL CHRISTIAN PROSPERITY THERE IS A CONSCIOUS INFLUENCE AND POWER. (A. W. Potts.) *The son of the bondwoman*:—God's care even for Ishmael—for one who would appear to be outside all covenant blessings—is a most encouraging fact! 1. God delivered him in extremity. He heard his cry and distress. He knew his needs; for God always knows our needs and how to supply them. There is a well for bondmen as well as for the free. God's living well is to be reached in any position of life. "The word is nigh thee, in thine heart," etc. (Rom. x. 8). 2. God was with the son of the bondwoman as he developed. He was with him as he grew up, and gave him favour in the sight of others. God is ever seeking by His Holy Spirit to mould the characters of the worst for good. 3. God had intentions of grace towards the slave-mother's boy. He gave a promise to him as well as to Isaac. 4. God showed how He was with Ishmael by quickening his faculties. "He became an archer." He had to learn to defend himself, and secure for himself by God's help a position. The fiery defenders of faith and controversial champions of the truth have their sphere as well as the pious, plodding, pastors of Christ's flock. We have all to learn to appreciate diversity of talents, and to remember that skill in any work is the outcome of independence, resolution and energy. 4. God's care was seen in the selection of the place of abode for the son of the bond-woman. He gave to him the desert for his domain, a place in which he might roam and pitch his tent at his own suggestion. The wilderness was the most suitable place for this man of wild nature. Some grow up under the sweet shadow of the home, and ever find there a resting-place. They occupy themselves in some work at hand, pleasant and profitable; but others wander off, perhaps go to sea, emigrate, engage in sheep-farming, cattle-tending in some wide and lonely ranch, or go to gold-digging and diamond-hunting. God works through all these phases of life to discipline the heart. He follows each one, and cares for all. 5. God also was with Ishmael, securing for him acceptance among others. He was to "dwell in the presence of his brethren" (xvi. 12). Though cast out by Abraham he was not cast off by God, or cut off from all interchange with others. 6. God was with Ishmael to the end of his life. He had a shorter life than Isaac. Ishmael died at a hundred and thirty years old, Isaac at a hundred and eighty. Evidently the active, restless, wandering, hazardous life was more wearing and consuming than the calm and meditative life of pastoral Isaac. But that his death was recorded shows that it was noticed by God. (F. Hastings.)

Ver. 23-32. **Swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me.—Abraham the friend of man:**—I. ABRAHAM YIELDS READILY TO THE REQUEST FOR HIS FRIENDSHIP. Abimelech's motives in seeking the friendship of Abraham were probably mixed, and included—1. Expediency. 2. The worship of success. 3. The admiration of goodness. II. ABRAHAM UNDERTAKES THE DUTIES OF FRIENDSHIP. He freely accepts Abimelech's conditions. True and righteous dealing. 2. Gratitude for favours shown. 3. Faithfulness to the faults of a friend. III. ABRAHAM RECOGNIZED THE SACREDNESS OF FRIENDSHIP (ver. 24). (T. H. Leale.) *Abraham and Abimelech*:—Observe—(1) The motive that induces this friendly request; "he saw that God was with him." Probably the news of the extraordinary birth of Isaac had reached the court of Abimelech, and became a topic of conversation. "This," said he, "is a great man, and a great family, and will become a great nation; the blessing of heaven attends him. It is our wisdom, therefore, to take the earliest opportunity to be on good terms with him!" Had Abimelech's successors always acted on this principle towards Israel, it had been better for them; for whether they knew it or not, God, in blessing Abraham, had promised to "bless them that blessed him, and to curse them that cursed him." (2) The solemnity with which he wished the friendship to be confirmed: "swear unto me by God." . . . It is a dictate of prudence very common among magistrates to require men to swear by a name which the party holds sacred. In this view Abimelech certainly acted a wise part; for whoever made light of God's name, the party here concerned would not. Abraham's cheerful and ready compliance. I hope he did not need to be sworn not to deal falsely; but as posterity was concerned the more solemn the engagement the better. The friend of God has no desire but to be the friend of man. (A. Fuller.)

Vers. 33, 34. **Abraham planted a grove in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the Lord.—Abraham the godly man:**—I. HE MAKES PROVISION FOR

DIVINE WORSHIP. 1. It was intelligent. 2. It was grateful. 3. It was hopeful. II. HE IS CONTENT TO BE A STRANGER AND PILGRIM ON THE EARTH (VER. 34). (T. H. Leale.) *Lessons*.—1. Times of peace God makes to His servants times of plantation. Such leave He giveth His people. 2. What was done by Abraham with God's approbation might be turned to sin by man's superstition. So the groves. 3. The saints' peace with the world sets them more seriously to serve God. 4. The name of Jehovah, even the eternal God, is the saints' satisfaction in all plantations (ver. 33). 5. God allows His saints sometimes a longer space of respite after troubles than at others. The longest space of quietness below is but a sojourning time of God's people. They are not at home. Heaven is the place of his rest, and so is to every true believer (ver. 34). (G. Hughes, B.D.) *Grove sanctuaries*.—It is very curious to notice how the first sanctuaries seem to have been woods, forests, and groves. And it is equally remarkable to notice how, after they were used for true and spiritual worship, they came to be employed exclusively for idolatry—so much so, that in the rest of this blessed Book you will hear God often commanding them utterly to pull down the groves, because those groves had been made places where idols were worshipped. The brass serpent was made by God's command, its healing virtue was given by God Himself, and the people were divinely told to look at it. But after it had served its purpose, the same people tried to make a god of it. In this instance men took that which was true and good originally, and made such a bad use of it that God commanded it to be ground to powder as "a thing of vanity and as nothing." These grove sanctuaries came to be desecrated, and therefore He commanded them all to be pulled down. One can see in these groves the first idea of a cathedral. Let any one stand in a lofty avenue of oaks, with their branches intertwining and interlacing, and he will see the nave of a Gothic cathedral. The tracery on the roof, the groined arches, the columns, and the pillars with their picturesque capitals, all is but man trying to embody in the stone what nature has so magnificently developed in her forests, and to perpetuate a grove of stone as a memorial still of the first sanctuaries in which men worshipped.

"Against the clouds, far up the skies,
The walls of the cathedral rise,
Like a mysterious grove of stone."

Hence, also, the Druids, and the Druid temples, all were instances of the early purpose to which groves and forests were applied, that is, for worship; and when one thinks of the silence and the solemnity of primeval forests, one can see how naturally man would have recourse to them to worship; but when we see how sadly they were abused, one feels how easily the best things may be perverted, and God's own divine institutions turned into objects of sin and folly. But, blessed be God, neither in this mountain nor in that, neither in grove nor cathedral only, is worship acceptable to God. He is worshipped truly, and the worship is accepted, wherever He is approached in spirit and in truth. (J. Cumming, D.D.)

CHAPTER XXII.

VERS. 1-18. God did tempt Abraham.—*The trial of Abraham*.—I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF ABRAHAM WHEN THIS TRIAL CAME. His hope was set on Isaac as the medium through which God's promise could be fulfilled, and he had been encouraged by observing him rising year after year to the age and stature of manhood. II. GOD'S CONNECTION WITH THE TRIAL. He subjected Abraham to a testing trial in order to prove his faith. 1. There was no attempt in the action of God, bearing upon Abraham, in the least to diminish the patriarch's affection for his son. 2. In the command binding Abraham to offer up his son there was an assertion of Jehovah's right to be regarded as the supreme object of His creatures' love. III. ABRAHAM UNDER AND AFTER THE TRIAL. 1. His fear of God was tested by this trial. 2. His faith in God was tested by the trial. But the result was blessed to him in these four ways: (1) He obtained an attestation from heaven of his fear and of his faith. (2) He obtained a new revelation of Messiah as the atoning

Surety. (3) He brought back with him alive his only son, whom he loved. (4) He held "Jehovah-jireh" in the grasp of his faith, and had Him pledged to care for him always. Application: 1. Learn that true faith is sure to be tested faith. 2. Learn that all love must be subordinated to love for God. 3. Learn that the only way to be truly strong is to have faith in God. 4. Learn that God will never fail under the leanings of faith. 5. Learn from this text that no one need expect an attestation of his fear and faith except when these are revived and exercised. (*J. Kennedy, D.D.*)

Abraham's trial:—It is by trial that the character of a Christian is formed. Each part of his character, like every part of his armour, is put to the proof; and it is the proof that tests, after all, the strength both of resistance and defence and attack. I. The voice of God to Abraham was NOT HEARD IN AUDIBLE WORDS; it was a voice in the soul constantly directing him to duty and self-sacrifice. The voice told him, as he thought—I do not for a moment say as God meant—that his duty was to sacrifice his son. The memories of olden days may have clung and hovered about him. He remembered the human sacrifices he had seen in his childhood; the notion of making the gods merciful by some action of man may still have lingered in his bosom. We have here the first instance of that false and perverse interpretation which made the letter instead of the spirit to rule the human heart. II. As Abraham increases in faith HE GROWS IN KNOWLEDGE, until at last more and more he can hear "Lay not thy hand upon thy son." "God will provide Himself a sacrifice" bursts from his lips before the full light bursts upon his soul. In this conflict Abraham's will was to do all that God revealed for him to do. In every age and in every station faith is expressed in simple dutifulness, and this faith of Abraham is, indeed, of the mind of Christ. We may be perplexed, but we need not be in despair. When we arrive on Mount Moriah, then the meaning of the duty God requires of us will be made clear. And as we approach the unseen, and our souls are more schooled and disciplined to God, we shall find that to offer ourselves and lose ourselves is to find ourselves in God more perfect. (*Canon Rowsell.*)

Abraham's sacrifice:—The birth of Isaac brought Abraham nearer to God; though he had believed in Him so long, it was as if he now believed in Him for the first time—so much is he carried out of himself, such a vision has he of One who orders ages past and to come, and yet is interested for the feeblest of those whom He has made. Out of such feelings comes the craving for the power to make some sacrifice, to find a sacrifice which shall not be nominal but real. I. The Book of Genesis says, "God did tempt Abraham." The seed did not drop by accident into the patriarch's mind; it was not self-sown; it was not put into him by the suggestion of some of his fellows. It was his Divine Teacher who led him on to his terrible conclusion, "The sacrifice that I must offer is that very gift that has caused me all my joy." II. Abraham must know what God's meaning is: he is certain that in some way it will be proved that He has not designed His creature to do a wicked and monstrous thing, and yet that there is a purpose in the revelation that has been made to him; that a submission and sacrifice, such as he has never made yet, are called for now. He takes his son; he goes three days' journey to Mount Moriah; he prepares the altar and the wood and the knife; his son is with him, but he has already offered up himself. And now he is taught that this is the offering that God was seeking for; that when the real victim has been slain, the ram caught in the thicket is all that is needed for the symbolical expression of that inward oblation. III. When this secret has been learnt, every blessing became an actual vital blessing; every gift was changed into a spiritual treasure. Abraham had found that sacrifice lies at the very root of our being; that our lives depend upon it; that all power to be right and to do right begins with the offering up of ourselves, because it is thus that the righteous Lord makes us like Himself. (*F. D. Maurice, M.A.*)

Abraham's temptation:—A temptation had come upon Abraham; he thought that it was the right thing to do, and that he was called to do it; so after brooding over it intently for several days, he was irresistibly drawn to take the knife for the purpose of slaying his son. I. Since the child of promise had been born to him, his natural tendency had been to repose on Isaac rather than on God. After a while he would awake to the troubled consciousness that it was not with him as in other days; that he had sunk from the serene summit on which he once stood. Brooding thus from day to day he came to feel as if a voice were calling him to prove himself by voluntarily renouncing the son that had been given him. He was driven wild, fevered into madness, through the fervour of his desire to maintain trust in the great Father, even as now men sometimes are by the lurid burning of distrust. II. But did not God tempt him? you say. Is it not so re-

corded? Yes, undoubtedly; in the patriarch's mind it was God tempting him. The narrative is a narrative of what took place in his mind; the whole is a subjective scene, portrayed objectively. The old Canaanite practice of offering human sacrifices suggested to Abraham the cultivation and manifestation of trust by immolating his son. III. Although God did not suggest the crime, yet He was in the trial—the trial of maintaining and fostering trust without allowing it to lead him by perversion into crime. IV. We see God penetrating and disengaging the grace in Abraham which lay behind the wrongness. He divided between the true motive of the heart and the false conclusion of the weak brain. He notes and treasures every bit of good that blushes amidst our badness. (*S. A. Tipple.*) *The crucial test*:—I. THERE COME TIMES IN HUMAN LIFE WHEN MEN MUST UNDERGO A CRUCIAL TEST. A man can have but one trial in his lifetime; one great sorrow, beside which all other griefs dwindle into insignificance. II. THE CRUCIAL TEST CAN ONLY TAKE PLACE IN REFERENCE TO THAT WHICH WE LOVE AND VALUE MOST. Do we so hold that which is dearest to us upon earth, that we could surrender it at the Divine bidding? III. Abraham's answer, "My son, God will provide Himself a lamb," is THE SUM OF ALL MEDIATORIAL HISTORY; it is the main discovery of love. After all, what has the world done but to find an altar? It found the Cross; it never could have found the Saviour. IV. The narrative shows WHAT GOD INTENDS BY HIS DISCIPLINE OF MAN. He did not require Isaac's life; He only required the entire subordination of Abraham's will. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Lessons from the trial of Abraham*:—1. We learn from this passage the lesson that God taught Abraham that all souls and all things are His, and that our greatest and dearest possessions are beneath His control and within His grasp. 2. We learn also a lesson of obedience. Abraham was called upon to make the greatest possible sacrifice, a sacrifice that seemed to clash with the instinct of reason, affection, and religion alike, and yet without a murmur he obeyed the command of God. We learn, too, that for wise reasons God sometimes permits the trial of His people's faith—not to weaken, but to strengthen it, for He knows that if it be genuine, trial will have the same effect which the storm produces on the kingly oak, only rooting it more firmly in the soil. 4. We learn that God's provisions are ever equal to His people's wants. Man's extremity is God's opportunity. He giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not. (*J. W. Atkinson.*) *Abraham offering Isaac*:—All the elements of piety were in this act. The voice of the Lord heard and obeyed is essential to religion. The unshaken conviction that all He requires is best, though one lose thereby all but Himself, is the substance of religion. Abraham heard and did and trusted. Thus he became our worthy example. I. HIS TRIAL. What could it mean? Abraham had the traditions and prejudices of his time. No man can be much above them. With all the manifestations of Jehovah to him, there yet lingered in his mind the common ideas of God and of His requirements which the common people had. He was in conflict between the two. The sense of sin and guilt was universal; the hope of propitiation as well. Human sacrifice was common. It represented the most stern exaction by the offended deity and the greatest gift which the transgressor could make. Popular custom helped the conceit in the patriarch. While heathen were so ready to show their faith in the false god, much more must he exhibit as great for the true. Could he withhold the choicest thing while imagining the Almighty asked for it, then his was a partial, not a single and complete, fealty. Isaac must not rival Jehovah in his affection. More and more plain the issue became, till his intense impressions seemed the solemn accents of his Maker, bidding him take the precious life. So far, at least, must he be willing to blot out every means by which his darling desire might be gained. Was not this an early illustration of the crucial test: "He that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me"? II. HIS OBEDIENCE. "Doubtless," one says, "while Abraham lifted up the knife to slay his son, the sun was turned to darkness to him, the stars left their places, and earth and heaven vanished from his sight. To the eye of sense, all was gone that life had built up, and the promise had come actually to an end for evermore; but to the friend of God all was still as certain as ever—all absolutely sure and fixed. The end, the promise, nay even the son of the promise—even he, in the fire of the burnt-offering—was not gone, because that was near and close at hand which could restore: the great Power which could reverse everything. The heir was safe in the strong hope of him who accounted that God was able to raise him up even from the dead." The offering, so far as the offerer was concerned, had been made. His obedience to the word he thought to hear was perfect. God's will and his were one. III. HIS ACCEPTANCE. From that lofty summit in the land

of Moriah there went up to heaven the sweet savour of acceptable sacrifice before any fire was kindled on the altar. So in the grossest darkness it may be still, where they who know not of the true God bring as perfect a gift. But piety and humaneness alike impel all who have heard the protest from the lips of Jehovah to speed with it to them whose sacrificial knives are about to be bathed in the blood of their firstborn. Thus again Christ arrests the devout and teaches them His righteousness. IV. HIS DELIVERANCE. The place was "Jehovah-jireh" indeed, for the Lord had provided Himself the lamb for the burnt-offering. The sacrifice in its outward form should not fail. Here was the Divine sanction of the method of substitution. Here was foreshadowed the ritual of Tabernacle and Temple, and, most dimly, "the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Isaac need not die, but the animal must. We need not perish, but the Christ must give His flesh and blood for the life of the world. The victim was God's choice in the first instance: He was in the last. In the smoke and flames of this first sacrifice ascended not only the tribute of a penitent and adoring soul, but also the unutterable gratitude for a life given back as from the dead. (*De Witt S. Clark.*)

Abraham's trial, obedience, and reward.—I. ABRAHAM'S TRIAL. 1. Purpose of this trial. Not to discover something unknown; but to test the strength of a recognized faith. To illustrate the gift of Christ; whose day Abraham saw afar off. 2. The nature of this trial. (1) The sacrifice of a son. An only son. A well-beloved son. (2) By the father's own hands. (3) A son of promise. Through whom was expected the fulfilment of the covenant. In whom this great believer's hopes centred. What is the trial of our faith as compared with this? How little does our faith in God call us to surrender. Yet the "trial of our faith is more precious than of gold which perisheth." II. ABRAHAM'S OBEDIENCE. 1. He did not wait for the repetition of the command, nor demand additional evidence concerning it. Did not imagine he might have mistaken its nature. Did not question the love or wisdom of God. Did not wait till he perfectly understood its purpose. 2. It was prompt. To hear was to obey. Rose early. Prepared at once. 3. It was ruled by precedence. Told no one his purpose. What might Sarah and Isaac have done or said to hinder the execution of the plan? Conceals it from his young men. The wood was cleft at home and taken with him. There might be none on the spot. That might be a hindrance. 4. It was marked by great self-control. Does not by manner express a mental burden. The affecting conversation with Isaac by the way. 5. It was distinguished by an heroic confidence in God. The Lord will provide. He fully believed he should return to the young men with Isaac. Expected he would be raised from the dead (Rom. iv. 16-22).

III. ABRAHAM'S REWARD. Having built an altar, he bound his son. Non-resistance of Isaac ("Jesus, the Son of God, became obedient unto death." "No man taketh My life from Me." &c. Isaac, at twenty-five years of age, might have resisted, but did not). Learn—1. Receive with submission the trial of our faith. 2. Cheerfully and promptly obey God. 3. The Lord has provided. Jesus died willingly. (*J. C. Gray.*)

Temptation a trial.—When a person took the first Napoleon a shot-proof coat of mail, the emperor fired many shots at it, whilst the inventor had it on. Finding it answered, the emperor gave the maker a reward. Storms of trial, sacrifices to be made, obedience required, or loving services demanded, will test us. Constantine thus tested the Christians in his household, when he required them to give up their religion under a heavy penalty. Those, however, who were faithful he took into his particular favour and service. *Trials reveal God to us.*—It is the mission of trouble to make earth worth most and heaven worth more. I suppose sometimes you have gone to see a panorama, and the room has been darkened where you were sitting—this light put out, and that light put out, until the room was entirely darkened where you sat. Then the panorama passed before you, and you saw the towns and villages, the cities and the palaces. And just so God in this world comes to us and puts out this light of joy, this light of worldly prosperity, and this light of satisfaction; and when He has made it all dark around us, then He makes to pass before our souls the palaces of heaven and the glories that never die. (*Dr. Talmage.*)

Abraham's faith tried and triumphant.—The significance of the transaction is rooted in the fact that Abraham was not a mere private individual, but in a very special sense a representative man. God's communications to him were made, not for his own sake alone, but also for that of those who should come after him. There was a revelation through Abraham as well as to him; and in this transaction God was seeking not only to develop Abraham's faith to its

highest exercise, but at the same time to instruct him and all his spiritual children in their duty to their covenant Lord. It was literal fact, but it was also acted parable. I would say that the whole story was meant to reveal the universal law to this effect, that what is born of God must be consecrated to God; that the children of promise are at the same time the children of consecration, and so there is no more difficulty in the command to sacrifice Isaac than there is in the injunction to cast out Ishmael. Both alike arose out of the representative character of Abraham and his seed, and through both alike a revelation has been made for all time. The one says to unbelievers, "Ye must be born again"; the other says to believers, "I beseech you by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable, unto God, which is your reasonable service." The whole transaction, therefore, literal fact as it was, was at the same time the acted hieroglyphic of a spiritual revelation foreshadowing the self-sacrifice of the Christian to his Lord. But now leaving the merely expository for the time, let us take with us one or two practical lessons suggested by the whole subject. 1. And in the first place we may learn that the people of God should expect trial on the earth. Here is one of the greatest saints subjected to the severest of tests, and that not as an isolated experience but as the last of a series which began when he was called to leave his country and his kindred in the land of the Chaldees. So when we are required to pass through ordeals that seem to us inexplicable let us not imagine that some strange thing has happened to us. And Tholuck is right when he says: "I find in all Christians who have passed through much tribulation, a certain quality of ripeness which I am of opinion can be acquired in no other school. Just as a certain degree of solar heat is necessary to bring the finest sorts of fruit to perfection, so is fiery trial indispensable for ripening the inner man." Nor is this all: trial may come upon the believer for the sake of others rather than for his own. The chemist darkens the room when he would show some of his finest experiments; and when God designs to let others see what His grace can enable His people to endure, He darkens their history by trial. So God, by our trials, may be seeking to show through us what His grace can do; may be making manifest the reality of His presence with His people in the fire, in such a way as to bring others in penitence to His feet. Thus we too may vicariously endure, and so enter into what Paul has called "the fellowship" of the Saviour's sufferings. What a sting does that take out of many of our trials! 2. But we may learn in the second place, that if we would stand trial thoroughly we must meet it in faith. Tribulation by itself will not improve our characters. The patriarch did not know the way God was taking with him; but he knew God. He had received such proof of His tenderness, His faithfulness, and His wisdom in the past that he could trust Him now; and so putting his hand in the Divine grasp, he was once more upheld by God's strength. Andrew Fuller has well said that a man has only as much faith as he can command in the day of trial. 3. Finally, we may learn that faith triumphant is always rewarded. At the end of this dreadful ordeal the Lord renewed the covenant with Abraham; and in the belief of many writers, it was on this occasion that he was permitted to see Christ's day and to rejoice in the assurance thereby given him that his hope should never be belied. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

Abraham's trial:—I. ITS LEGALITY. Would God command to kill who saith, Thou shalt not kill? (1) The supreme Lawgiver, who made that law, can out of His uncontrollable sovereignty, dispense with His own law. (2) God did not command Abraham to do this, as it was an act of rebellion against His own moral law (which was not now promulgated, as after by Moses) nor against the law of nature, which is writ in every man's heart, and so in Abraham's (Rom. ii. 14, 15), but as it was an act of obedience to the great Lawgiver; and therefore it was necessary that Abraham should well know it was God, and not the devil, who tempted him to this act, which in itself seemed so unnatural for a father to kill his own son, and wherein God seemed so contrary to Himself, and to His own positive precepts and promises; this Abraham knew well, (a) from special illumination; (b) from familiar experience of God's speaking to him, whose voice he knew as well as the voice of his wife Sarah's. (c) This voice came not to him in a dream (which would have been more uncertain, and less distinguishable from the devil's deceit), but while Abraham was awake; for it is not said that he stayed till he was awakened out of sleep, but immediately he rose up and addressed himself to his business, which intimates he understood his author from the plainest manner of speaking to him, without any ambiguity in so arduous an affair. II. What were the DIFFICULTIES of Abraham's duty under this command of God? 1. God saith not to him, Take thy

servants, but thy son. Oh then what a cutting, killing command was this to Abraham, Take (not thy servant, but) thy son! 2. Thy only son. Had he had many sons, the trial had been more bearable. Here was another aggravation; for a tree to have but one branch and to have that lopped off; for a body to have but one member, and to have that dismembered. 3. Yet higher, Whom thou lovest (Gen. xxii. 2). Isaac was a gracious and dutiful son, obedient both to his earthly and to his heavenly Father, and therefore Abraham did love him the more; had he been some graceless son, his grief had been the less. 4. Higher than that, Isaac was the son of God's promise—In him shall thy seed be called. So he was the son of all his father's hope of posterity, yet his expectation hereof, and of the accomplishment of God's promise (given to relieve him, when his mouth was out of taste with all His other mercies), as victory (Gen. xiv.), protection and provision (Gen. xv. 1); he could take no joy in his former conquest or present promise, because childless (Gen. v. 2)—must by this means be cut off in the offering up of Isaac. 5. But the greatest conflict of all was, that the Messiah was promised to come of Isaac, and so the salvation of the world did seem to perish with Isaac's perishing. Notwithstanding all these difficulties, Abraham acts his part of obedience—1. With all alacrity and readiness to obey, he rose up early (Gen. xxii. 3), making no dilatory work about it. Thus David did, saying, I made haste, and delayed not (Psa. cxix. 60). 2. The constancy and continuance of this his ready obedience it is a wonder how his heart was kept in such an obedient frame for three days together, all the time of his travelling from Beersheba to Mount Moriah. 3. Abraham's prudence in leaving his servants and the ass at the foot of the hill (ver. 5). 4. Abraham's confidence herein. (1) Speaking prophetically, we will both of us come again to God (Gen. xxii. 5), and (2) God will provide Himself a lamb (ver. 8). Abraham believed to receive his son again from the dead (Heb. xi. 19). Yet this cannot be the genuine sense. As Abraham did, so every child of Abraham ought to evidence their fear and love to God (Gen. xxii. 12). (*C. Ness.*)

Trial of Abraham:—This is the most extraordinary command which we find in Scripture. In order to set it in the most intelligible and instructive light, I shall make the following inquiries. I. LET US INQUIRE, WHETHER GOD HAD A RIGHT TO GIVE THIS COMMAND TO ABRAHAM. 1. In the first place, God did not command Abraham to murder Isaac, or to take away his life from malice prepense. He required him only to offer him a burnt sacrifice; and though this implied the taking away of life, yet it did not imply anything of the nature of murder. 2. In the next place, it must be allowed that God Himself had an original and independent right to take away that life from Isaac, which He had of His mere sovereignty given him. It is a Divine and self-evident truth, that He has a right to do what He will with His own creatures. And this right God not only claims, but constantly exercises, in respect to the lives of men. He taketh away, and who can hinder Him? And He takes away when, and where, and by whom He pleases. 3. Farthermore, God has a right to require men to do that at one time which He has forbidden them to do at another. Though He had forbidden men to offer human sacrifices in general, yet He had a right to require Abraham, in particular, to offer up Isaac as a burnt sacrifice. And after He had required him to sacrifice Isaac, He had a right to forbid him to do it, as He actually did. II. WHETHER ABRAHAM COULD KNOW THAT THIS COMMAND CAME FROM GOD. Now it must be granted by all, that if Abraham did sacrifice Isaac, or offer him upon the altar, he really thought God did require him to do it; and, if he did really think so, it must have been owing either to his own heated imagination, or to the delusion of some evil spirit, or else to some real evidence of God's requiring him to sacrifice his son. But it is evident that it could not be owing to his own heated imagination; because there was nothing in nature to lead him to form such an imagination. The command was contrary to everything that God had before required of him; it was contrary to what God had revealed in respect to human sacrifices; and it was contrary to all the natural instincts, inclinations, and feelings of the human heart. Nor is there any better reason to think that he was under the delusion of some evil spirit. We can by no means suppose that God would suffer such an excellent man as Abraham to be deluded in such an extraordinary case, by the great deceiver; nor that Satan would be disposed to tempt Abraham to do what he really thought would be for the glory of God. Nor can we suppose, if Satan viewed it as a criminal action, that he would have restrained him from committing the crime. But if Abraham was not led to think that God required him to sacrifice his son, by a wild imagination, nor by this delusion of an evil spirit, then we are constrained to

conclude that he had clear and conclusive evidence of the command's coming from God. III. WHY GOD COMMANDED ABRAHAM TO SACRIFICE HIS SON. 1. It is evident that Abraham's offering Isaac upon the altar was a lively type or representation of God's offering Christ as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. 2. God meant, by the command in the text, to try or prove whether Abraham loved Him sincerely and supremely. IV. WHETHER THIS COMMAND TO ABRAHAM ANSWERED THE END WHICH GOD PROPOSED IN GIVING IT. And we find that Abraham did actually and punctually obey both the letter and spirit of the command; by which he gave an infallible evidence that he loved God sincerely and supremely. 1. He obeyed, in contrariety to all the natural feelings and affections of the human heart. 2. The cheerfulness and promptitude with which he obeyed the Divine command increase the evidence of the sincerity and supremacy of his love to God. 3. His obedience to the command to sacrifice his son was obedience to the mere will of God; which renders it, in the highest possible degree, evidential of his real and supreme love to Him. Improvement.—1. It appears from Abraham's ready obedience to the command in the text, that those who are willing to obey God, can very easily understand the real meaning of his commands. 2. Did Abraham exhibit the highest evidence of his sincere and supreme love to God, by obedience to His command? Then we learn that this is the only way for all good men to exhibit the highest evidence of their sincere and supreme love to God. 3. It appears from the obedience of Abraham to the Divine command, that all true obedience to God flows from pure disinterested love to Him. 4. It appears from God's design in giving the command in the text, and from the effects of it, that Christians have no reason to think it strange concerning the fiery trials which they are called to endure. God has a good design in all their trials. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *Abraham's trial*.—1. This trial is wholly unexpected. For several years the patriarch has been the recipient of great and uninterrupted prosperity. Instead of going through the bleak and barren desert he has been walking in the garden, which is smiling with the flowers of richness, fertility, and hope. How speedily may the heart be bereft of all joy and filled with poignant sorrow! 2. This trial is wholly unprecedented. Abraham is not a foreigner to suffering. He had been separated from his country and friends at the age of seventy-five. He had been driven by famine from the land of promise into a distant country. The companion of his youth and the affectionate partner of all his fortunes had been forced from him again and again. You may say, "I am the man that hath seen and felt affliction;" yet sterner calamities may be coming upon you than any you have ever experienced. 3. This trial is an assault upon the object which the patriarch loves and values most. He loves and values his son Ishmael. He loves and values his wife Sarah. He loves and values his own life. Isaac, however, is the son of promise, the root from which the final blossom is to be the Messiah, and on this account he must love and value him most of all. To slay him with his own hand, this is the climax of trial to Abraham—it cannot ascend higher. A man can only have one such trial in his lifetime. But if no such surrender has been demanded from us; then our trials have been only secondary. They have scattered a few blossoms, and swept away a little fruit, but they have not touched the root; the tree remains as healthy and vigorous as ever. Let us not heave one rebellious sigh, lest, instead of the wind, the whirlwind should come to us in all its terrific fury. (*A. McAulane, D.D.*) *Trial of Abraham's faith*.—We notice—I. The AUTHOR of the trial (ver. 1). What has God to do with my trials? is the first question which wisdom always asks. When that is settled, we know where we are and what to do. II. The NATURE of the trial (ver. 2). It was no ordinary requirement. Any father's heart would sink within him at such a command. The history of the future of which hope had dreamed was a fable. The book of life was to be closed when nothing but the title-page had been written. III. The PROGRESS of the trial (vers. 3-10). It was not one downright blow of trouble, but protracted trial. Days came and went, and found it unconcluded. Good men never graduate from trouble. Christian life itself, in one view, is trial—an escaping from old conditions, a breaking of fetters, a climbing to higher levels—all accomplished with pain and cost. Life is a race for life. Life is a battle for life. And so likewise its incidental troubles have a self-perpetuating power. Long after the gale has gone down the ocean keeps its restlessness, and under the serenest sky the after-surge of the storm moans upon the beach. It is so in human life. The shock of sorrow comes and passes, but the soul is not at rest. The old grief comes back in thought and dreams, and life can never again be what it was. IV. The ENDING of the trial (vers. 11-14). The long agony was over, and the issue was all the

sweeter for the bitterness which had preceded it. Accepting this story of Abraham's trial as a type of human life, we find certain practical truths emphasized. 1. Men make mistakes in their judgment of experience. What they think the best, may be the worst possible for them; what they think the worst, may be the best. Humanly judging, the command to sacrifice Isaac was the end of Abraham's hopes; in fact, it was the beginning of his prosperity. It is so always. God plans behind and works through a cloud, but always for the best. 2. Clearly, also, in the practical conduct of life, faith is superior to reason. We can trust, and are wise in trusting for some things which can never be argued. 3. In our dealings with God, obedience is safety. Men are not to stop to calculate chances, nor wait until they think they see their way clear. Whatever God appoints is to be undertaken at once and without question. Men ruin themselves sometimes with what they call their prudence. There is no prudence in anything that limits exact obedience to the Divine requirements. (*E. S. Atwood.*) *The trial of Abraham's faith*.—I. IT WAS A TRIAL FOR WHICH ABRAHAM HAD BEEN CAREFULLY PREPARED. 1. By his spiritual history. 2. By a life of trial. II. IT WAS A TRIAL OF REMARKABLE SEVERITY. 1. The violence done to his natural feelings. 2. The violence done to his feelings as a religious man. III. THIS TRIAL WAS ENDURED IN THE SPIRIT OF AN EXTRAORDINARY FAITH. His obedience was—1. Unquestioning. 2. Complete. 3. Marked by humility. 4. Inspired by trust in a personal God. IV. GOD REWARDED HIS FAITHFUL ENDURANCE OF THE TRIAL. 1. By taking the will for the deed. 2. By renewing His promises. 3. By turning the occasion of the trial into a revelation of the day of Christ. (1) He sees represented the sacrifice of the only-begotten and well-beloved Son of God. (2) There is suggested to him the idea of substitution. (3) The resurrection of Christ and His return to glory are also represented. Learn: 1. That the most distinguished of God's servants are often subjected to the greatest trials. 2. That trials test the strength and spirituality of our faith. 3. That trials well endured set spiritual truths in a clearer and more affecting light. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Abraham offering Isaac*.—The crowning test of Abraham's life, in which all preceding trials culminated. The greatness of the test appears in the exceptional character of the demand. It appeared as a direct contradiction of God's promise. Abraham's obedience was—1. Prompt. The command came in the night. Early next morning, Abraham "rose up . . . and took . . . Isaac," &c. 2. Persistent. He had the sustaining force which enabled him to maintain his purpose unwaveringly during the period of suspense between the command and the full obedience to it. 3. Perfect. He accepted the command as meaning the unreserved and unconditional offering up of Isaac, with the faith that God would say "enough" when the obedience came up to the measure of the demand. When that would be, it was for God, not Abraham, to decide. It was for him to obey; and he did obey. When he lifted up the knife, the sacrifice was complete. Isaac had already been sacrificed upon the altar of a father's heart. All the agony of giving up had been endured. Only the tragedy, and not the real sacrifice was prevented. (*D. Davies.*) *Abraham's trial*.—I. THE DIFFICULTY AND ITS EXPLANATION. God seems to have required of Abraham what was wrong. He seems to have sanctioned human sacrifice. My reply is—1. God did not require it. You must take the history as a whole, the conclusion as well as the commencement. The sacrifice of Isaac was commanded at first, and forbidden at the end. Had it ended in Abraham's accomplishing the sacrifice, I know not what could have been said; it would have left on the page of Scripture a dark and painful blot. My reply to God's seeming to require human sacrifice is the conclusion of the chapter. God says, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad." This is the final decree. Thus human sacrifices were distinctly forbidden. He really required the surrender of the father's will. He seemed to demand the sacrifice of life. 2. But further still. God did not demand what was wrong. It did not seem wrong to Abraham. It is not enough defence to say God did not command wrong. Had God seemed to command wrong, the difficulty would be as great. Abraham's faith would then have consisted in doing wrong for the sake of God. Now it did not. Abraham lived in a country where human sacrifices are common; he lived in a day when a father's power over a son's life was absolute. He was familiar with the idea; and just as familiarity with slavery makes it seem less horrible, so familiarity with this as an established and conscientious mode of worshipping God removed from Abraham much of the horror we should feel. II. THE NATURE OF THE TRIAL. 1. We remark, first, this trial was made under aggravated circumstances. The words in which God's command was couched were those of accumulated keenness. To subdue the father in the heart, that a Roman has done, and calmly signed his son's death-

warrant; but to subdue it, not with Roman hardness, but with deep trust in God and faith in His providence, saying, It is not hate but love that requires this—this was the nobleness, this the fierce difficulty of Abraham's sacrifice; this it was which raised him above the Roman hero. 2. We remark, secondly, Abraham was to do this; his son was to die by his own hand, not by a delegate. He was to preclude escape. We do our sacrifices in a cowardly way; we leave loopholes for escape. We do not with our own hand, at His call, cut asunder the dearest ties. We do not immediately take the path of duty, but wait till we are forced into it; always delaying in the hope that some accident may occur which will make it impossible. Then conscience says, with a terrible voice: "You must do it and with your own hand. The knife must be sharp and the blow true. Your own heart must be the sacrifice, and your own hand the priest. It must not be a sacrifice made for you by circumstances." III. HOW THE TRIAL WAS MET. 1. Without ostentation. 2. Abraham was in earnest. If you make a sacrifice, expecting that God will return you your Isaac, that is a sham sacrifice, not a real one. Therefore, if you make sacrifices, let them be real. You will have an infinite gain: yes; but it must be done with an earnest heart, expecting nothing in return. There are times, too, when what you give to God will never be repaid in kind. Isaac is not always restored; but it will be repaid by love, truth, and kindness. God will take you at your word. He says, "Do good and lend, hoping for nothing in return." Lessons: 1. The Christian sacrifice is the surrender of will. 2. For a true sacrifice, there must be real love. 3. We must not seek for sacrifices. You need make no wild, romantic efforts to find occasions. Plenty will occur by God's appointment, and better than if devised by you. Every hour and moment our will may yield as Abraham's did, quietly, manfully, unseen by all but God. These are the sacrifices which God approves. This is what Abraham meant when he said "My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt-offering." (F. W. Robertson, M.A.) *The greatest trial of all:*—Satan tempts us that he may bring out the evil that is in our hearts; God tries or tests us that He may bring out all the good. The common incidents of daily life, as well as the rare and exceptional crises, are so contrived as to give us incessant opportunities of exercising, and so strengthening, the graces of Christian living. I. GOD SENDS US NO TRIAL, WHETHER GREAT OR SMALL, WITHOUT FIRST PREPARING US. II. GOD OFTEN PREPARED US FOR COMING TRIAL, BY GIVING US SOME NEW AND BLISSFUL REVELATION OF HIMSELF. III. THE TRIAL CAME VERY SUDDENLY. IV. THE TRIAL TOUCHED ABRAHAM IN HIS TENDEREST POINT. V. IT WAS ALSO A GREAT TEST OF HIS FAITH. VI. IT WAS A TEST OF HIS OBEDIENCE. VII. THIS TEST DID NOT OUTRAGE ANY OF THE NATURAL INSTINCTS OF HIS SOUL. (F. B. Meyer, B.A.) *Faith tested and crowned:*—A life of faith and self-denial has usually its sharpest trials at or near its beginning. The stormy day has generally a calm close. But Abraham's sorest discipline came all sudden, like a bolt from blue sky. Near the end, and after many years of peaceful, uneventful life, he had to take a yet higher degree in the school of faith. Sharp trial means increased possession of God. So his last terrible experience turned to his crowning mercy. I. THE VERY FIRST WORDS OF THIS SOLEMN NARRATIVE RAISE MANY QUESTIONS. We have God appointing the awful trial. The Revised Version properly replaces "tempt" by "prove." The former word conveys the idea of appealing to the worst part of a man, with the wish that he may yield and do the wrong. The latter means an appeal to the better part of a man, with the desire that he should stand. God's proving does not mean that He stands by, watching how His child will behave. He helps us to sustain the trial to which He subjects us. Life is all probation; and because it is so, it is all the field for the Divine aid. The motive of His proving men is that they may be strengthened. He puts us into His gymnasium to improve our physique. If we stand the trial, our faith is increased; if we fail, we learn self-distrust and closer clinging to Him. No objection can be raised to the representation of this passage as to God's proving Abraham which does not equally apply to the whole structure of life as a place of probation that it may be a place of blessing. But the manner of the trial here presents a difficulty. How could God command a father to kill his son? Is that in accordance with his character? Well, two considerations deserve attention. First, the final issue; namely, Isaac's deliverance was an integral part of the Divine purpose, from the beginning of the trial; so that the question really is, Was it accordant with the Divine character to require readiness to sacrifice even a son at His command? Second, that in Abraham's time, a father's right over his child's life was unquestioned, and that therefore this command, though it lacerated Abraham's heart, did not wound his conscience as it would do were it heard to-day. II. THE GREAT

BODY OF THE STORY SETS BEFORE US ABRAHAM STANDING THE TERRIBLE TEST. What unsurpassable beauty is in the simple story! It is remarkable, even among the Scriptural narratives, for the entire absence of anything but the visible facts. There is not a syllable about the feelings of father or of son. The silence is more pathetic than many words. We look as into a magic crystal, and see the very event before our eyes, and our own imaginations tell us more of the world of struggle and sorrow raging under that calm outside than the highest art could do. The pathos of reticence was never more perfectly illustrated. Observe, too, the minute, prolonged details of the slow progress to the dread instant of sacrifice. Each step is told in precisely the same manner, and the series of short clauses, coupled together by an artless "and," are like the single stroke of a passing bell, or the slow drops of blood heard falling from a fatal wound. The elements of the trial were too: First, Abraham's soul was torn asunder by the conflict of fatherly love and obedience. The friend of God must hold all other love as less than His, and must be ready to yield up the dearest at His bidding. Cruel as the necessity seems to flesh and blood, and especially poignant as his pain was, in essence Abraham's trial only required of him what all true religion requires of us. Some of us have been called by God's providence to give up the light of our eyes, the joy of our homes, to Him. Some of us have had to make the choice between earthly and heavenly love. All of us have to throne God in our hearts, and to let not the dearest usurp His place. The conflict in Abraham's soul had a still more painful aspect in that it seemed to rend his very religion into two. Faith in the promise on which he had been living all his life drew one way; faith in the latter command, another. God seemed to be against God, faith against faith, promise against command. We, too, have sometimes to take courses which seem to annihilate the hope and aims of a life. The lesson for us is to go straight on the path of clear duty wherever it leads. If it seems to bring us up to inaccessible cliffs, we may be sure that when we get there we shall find some ledge, though it may be no broader than a chamois could tread, which will suffice for a path. If it seem to bring us to a deep and bridgeless stream, we shall find a ford when we get to the water's edge. III. SO WE HAVE THE CLIMAX OF THE STORY—FAITH REWARDED. 1. The first great lesson which the interposition of the Divine voice teaches us, that obedience is complete when the inward surrender is complete. The will is the man, the true action is the submission of the will. The outward deed is only the coarse medium through which it is made visible for men. God looks on purpose as performance. 2. Again, faith is rewarded by God's acceptance and approval. "I know that thou fearest God." Not meaning that he learned the heart by the conduct, but that on occasion of the conduct He breathes into the obedient heart that calm consciousness of its service as recognized and accepted by Him, which is the highest reward that his friend can know. 3. Again, faith is rewarded by a deeper insight into God's word. That ram, caught in the thicket, thorn-crowned and substituted for the human victim, taught Abraham and his sons that God appointed and provided a lamb for an offering. It was a lesson won by faith. Nor need we hesitate to see some dim forecast of the great substitute God provided, who bears the sins of the world. 4. Again, faith is rewarded by receiving back the surrendered blessing, made more precious because it has been laid on the altar. 5. Lastly, Abraham was rewarded by being made a faint adumbration, for all time, of the yet more wondrous and awful love of the Divine Father, who, for our sakes, has surrendered His only-begotten Son, whom He loved. (A. MacLaren, D.D.) *The temptation of Abraham*:—1. Trials increase with time. 2. There is a gradation in service, and the trial is in proportion to the rank. 3. God's servants are tested most severely at their strongest point. 4. In proportion to the uses to be made of a thing, so is it tested. 5. In the Bible history individual virtues are tried in turn. I. GOD TESTED ABRAHAM'S POWER OF SIMPLE OBEDIENCE. II. GOD TESTS THE POWER OF PERFECT SURRENDER. III. IN ALL GOD'S DEALINGS WITH MEN THERE IS A REVELATION, AND THE GREAT TRUTH UNFOLDED AT THE CROSS IS HERE IN GERM AND SEED. (Anon.) *Abraham's great trial*:—1. No narrative in Scripture more solemn and affecting, more graphic in its delineation, than this. 2. Profound instruction here as to the power and reward of faith. I. THE TIME AT WHICH THE TRIAL CAME. "After these things"—after all his rich and ripe experience, after all that he had done and suffered, after all that he had gained and lost, in his repeated trials, after all Divine promises and Divine manifestations. There is no guarantee that our worst trials are over, till we have sighed out our spirits upon the bosom of our great Father. II. THE NATURE OF THE TRIAL ITSELF. What could be a greater contradiction than this, that the child in whose seed mankind was to be blessed, was now to

be slain? Only let us yield implicit obedience to Divine commands, and contradictions will explain themselves; the mysteries of providence, of life and death, shall all be unfolded; for "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him." III. THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH THE TRIAL OCCURRED. It was the final and grand development of the patriarch's faith; that was the end sought and attained. Not the sacrifice of Isaac, but of Abraham himself. When this was complete, it was enough (*Homilist.*) *Abraham's victory*:—I. THE TRIAL. 1. An unexpected trial. 2. A trial between the present and the future. 3. A trial without any precedent. 4. A trial between man and God. II. THE VICTORY. 1. A victory after a long struggle. 2. A complete victory over self. 3. A victory revealing the trust God had placed in him. 4. A victory which obtained fresh tokens of the Divine love. Lessons: 1. That a religion without sacrifice is worthless to us. 2. The shadow directs our attention to the reality—the Saviour's Cross. (*Ibid.*) *Perfect faith*:—I. THE TESTING OF FAITH. II. GOD'S MANIFEST APPROVAL OF PERFECT FAITH. 1. God manifests His approval by abstracting the pain consequent on obedience to the command. 2. God manifests His approval by providing a sacrifice which shall be at once vicarious and a thank-offering. 3. God repeats His promise of blessing, and confirms it by a solemn covenant. (*F. Hastings.*) *Abraham's sacrifice*:—I. HE SACRIFICED HIS OWN REASON. No argument. Simply faith. II. HE SACRIFICED HIS OWN AMBITIOUS DESIRES. His only son was to be slain. III. HE SACRIFICED NATURAL AFFECTION. To murder an only child in cold blood required a strong nerve and a wondrous fixedness of purpose. IV. HE SACRIFICED HIS OWN GOOD REPORT. Was willing to be branded as a murderer, for the sake of winning the approval of God. (*Homilist.*) *Faith's trial; or, Abraham's example practically applied*:—I. THE FATHER OF THE FAITHFUL. Example is an invariable element in every man's education. More or less he is sure to be shaped by it. II. ABRAHAM'S EXAMPLE ATTAINABLE. Abraham is a favourite subject for the artist's pencil. But in most of the paintings we behold a figure erect and commanding, his countenance ploughed with stern lines of determination, an eye which makes resistance quail and tremble, and features which display a natural decision of character capable of pursuing its object at any cost. You would think love an easy sacrifice for such a being; you would say at the very first glance, "I could tell beforehand that man would give up his all to accomplish his purpose; I can understand his offer of Isaac." I recollect seeing a painting the very opposite of all this. Before me stood the Patriarch, a decrepid and weak old man; he had lost his stature, for years had bent him down; there was a shrinking back from the deed, a rebellion in every joint; his face harrowed with grief, wearing an expression of intense agony, and evidently appalled by the act it was contemplating; his arm half lifted up, and apparently questioning whether he should do the deed or not. My first impression was, "It is wrong, utterly wrong." And yet there was something on that canvas which kept me gazing, and at last altered my opinion entirely. There was a certain speech about the uplifted eye which you could not mistake; there was a peculiar and inexplicable expression overshadowing the agony of feature; there was a heavenly something about the countenance which told you that, after all, the deed would be done, and that the struggles you saw were but the weakness of man contending in unequal and unavailing effort with the might of the Spirit. The man would evidently draw back, but the God would as evidently triumph. Human power was all directed to avoid the sacrifice; but heavenly power—God working in that refractory heart to will and to do of His good pleasure—would certainly consummate the offering. That painting was a faithful likeness. I recognized Abraham. The Patriarch was not by nature a firm man; much less was he a stern man of cold heart. There are facts of his previous life which prove him to have been originally of a somewhat shrinking and cowardly disposition. We look in vain for moral firmness in the case of Sarah's sojourn in Egypt. He resorted to a falsehood as a safeguard against his fears lest strangers should slay him to obtain his wife; and notwithstanding he saw the evil and mischief resulting from this deception, he again practised it on Abimelech with the same purpose. His domestic life altogether indicates a pliant and yielding disposition. The short narration of Sarah's imperious and overbearing conduct in Ishmael's case (*Gen. xiii. 8-10*) is very significant. The division of land with Lot goes to prove the same point; there is no stern demand of strict justice; he does not insist upon his due; he does not even award the nephew his portion of territory; but he gives up his right of adjudication, which he possessed by seniority and patriarchal title, and meekly does he allow his younger relative to select his own land and pasturage. Even in his prayer for Sodom, there evidently is seen the pitying and earnest, yet

fearful and undecided suppliant : he does not sternly leave the city to its doom ; he does not put forth one general supplication for mercy ; but the ground of his petition is moved and shifted in a way, which, to say the least, is not the act of a firm unyielding nature. Yet if these proofs do not establish the contrary of constitutional boldness, there is at least no proof of its existence ; there is nothing to indicate that the parent's sacrifice had any sort of origin or support in natural disposition. We know that one who was weak in bodily presence, and in speech contemptible, was chosen out of the rest as the very chiefest of the apostles ; and the probability is that one of the most infirm and naturally unlikely of all the Patriarchs was made strong out of weakness, and distinguished above many physical and mental Samsons, as a Father in grace. We are apt to consider such examples far above, out of our reach. We reckon them as giants from the womb, instead of giants by grace. We attribute to them natural powers which we have not. In fact we treat them as superhuman beings of a different race, and moving in a different sphere. But though the power provided is amply sufficient to enable us to emulate the faith of Abraham, yet you object, that you will not have the same scope for the exercise of that power ; your circumstances are different ; you are never likely to be commanded to take a son of special promise and slay him as a sacrifice to God. True, the deed is great, and probably, as a single act, it stands and will stand alone and unequalled ; but there is often, as it were, a congeries of trials, which may even surpass, in its sum total, the amount of suffering which Abraham endured. A long succession of lesser sacrifices, following one on the heels of another, and keeping you in a state of constant depression for years, may call for more than the strength of faith required for Isaac's sacrifice. Sustained labour—sorrow scattered over a large surface—is far more difficult to bear than any crushing but momentary load. A strong man may easily walk twenty-four miles a day for a fortnight together ; but break up this distance, and distribute it over the entire day and night ; compel him to walk half a mile in each half hour. The distance is the same, but the effect is altogether different. The harassed traveller cannot bear this unceasing drain on his strength ; he has no unbroken rest, no time for nature to recruit before her energies are again taxed ; and often has such an attempt ended in almost fatal exhaustion. There is an analogy between body and soul ; a number of little trials are more than equal to a great one ; like the half mile to each half hour, they keep the moral bow continually strained and bent, and thus tend to destroy its elasticity. You may kill a man with drops of water as well as by immersing him in a flood. III. THE NATURE OF FAITH'S TRIAL. God tries men ; Satan tempts them. God sits as a refiner of silver, to purify it ; Satan as a base coiner, to alloy it. Both often use fire ; but the fire of heaven burns out the dross, whilst the fire of hell amalgamates more and more base metal with the lump. The two operations are diametrically opposed, though the means are often the same. God sits as a refiner of His people ; His object is to purify and not to punish ; and hence our surest escape from sorrow is not to struggle against the sorrow itself, but against the sin which demanded it. But since God alone gives trial efficacy, why cannot He give the efficacy without the trial ? of what use is trial ? how does God employ it ? Some speak of the believer's trial as though it were a means employed by God, for His own information, to find out the qualities of our heart and the strength of our faith. But the Lord knows such facts without trial. Our Creator is not a mere spiritual experimentalist, who needs a long course of practical tests before He can arrive at the truth. His science is not inductive, but intuitive. A mere volition on His part is more searching than the most careful analysis of the chemist, or all the combination, separation, and comparison of the philosopher. A look of God can resolve the intricate mesh-work of the human heart into single strands, and make every spiritual pulse as apparent as though it were the heaving of a volcano. The Lord "knoweth our frame"—every part as well as all—every weakness as well as every faculty ; and even the unconceived thought—the "thought afar off"—is understood by Him. It is not necessary, then, that we should be put to the proof, in order that God may estimate our amount of faith and love ; neither is it needful for our Maker to try our strength by actually piling burdens upon our shoulders, for He can tell to the very grain what we can bear, and what will crush us. The promise that He "will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able to bear," clearly implies a previous knowledge of the extent of our ability. Yes ! God can weigh in the delicate balances of His Omniscience every power, bodily, mentally, or spiritual ; a mere glance reveals to Him every weakness of our soul ; and therefore trial is not intended to usurp the province of Omniscience, or to teach that which the Lord

knows without teaching. Why, then, does God try His people? How does He employ trial? He aims, not at a knowledge of their condition, but at development of it. His object is to open out to your own eye the book of your heart, to display before you the letters which He Himself has already seen, and to pour such a light upon them that their true meaning and character may be understood by you. The frequent aim of sorrow is to "show My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." At other times trial is sent, not so much to point out actual sin, as to expose some internal weakness—some latent tendency to evil. There is a flaw in the metal, and since it has escaped your notice, God puts the lump in the proof-house, and that flaw is soon made visible—David's impure affections, and Peter's "fear of man," were thus brought to the light. Or, perhaps, there is some muscle of the soul shrunken for the want of use—some talent buried and wrapt in a napkin—and temptation is to us as a gymnasium, strengthening that which was weak by athletic exercise, and gradually developing that which was attenuated even to deformity, until the might of the Spirit has by trial so completely matured our strength that the babe in Christ stands forth in all the gnarled muscle and starting sinew of spiritual manhood. IV. THE REALITY OF TRIAL. Abraham's offer of Isaac was not "a solemn farce," as a scoffer has said; but it was a real sacrifice—real, as God who searches the heart counts reality. The father's entire plan bears the impress of a fixed conviction that Isaac must die, and die by his parent's hands. There are many who can behave most heroically with trial in the far and uncertain distance. So long as self-denials and sacrifices are indefinitely shadowed in the dim future, so long as they are problematical, who so ready as these pseudo-Abrahams to meet them! There have been sad instances of this spiritual dealing in promissory notes, given under the impression that no call for the money would ever be made, and that men may live, and satisfy both their neighbours and themselves, on the credit of this mere paper sacrifice. God does not require from us loud assertions of what we would do under circumstances which we never expect to occur; He does not desire us to tell the world how unflinchingly we would bear the tortures of persecution, and die in the flames for the sake of Christ; but He requires some practical and real proof of our obedience. Conditional faith is very easy; gifts ungiven do not cost much; zeal, without a field for work, is readily kindled; but the true proof that you possess the spirit of Abraham is this—are you ready in act or deed to give up this or that jewel as he gave up Isaac? Are you willing to surrender any possession, or endure any suffering, in the full belief that God will ask and receive it from you? V. FAITH TRIED BY DUBIOUS OR CONFLICTING COMMANDS. VI. FAITH TRIED BY A CONFLICTING PROMISE AND COMMAND. The command to slay Isaac seemed to be given in the very face of previous promise. On Isaac was the covenanted future of Abraham built. "But My covenant will I establish with Isaac." What a strange and mysterious contradiction! Here is the forefather of the Redeemer—the boy from whom Christ is hereafter to be born; and he is to die as a sacrificial lamb—a burnt-offering—a type of Christ. As though God with one fell blow would destroy the hope of Israel, and in the very act of destruction mock His servant with the sign He had established as a guarantee that the hope would be fulfilled. It was like using the earnest of our inheritance to sweep away and devastate our inheritance itself. It was like employing the seal of the covenant as an instrument wherewith to cancel the covenant itself. This alone was a fearful trial of faith. And can our circumstances ever resemble these? We believe they can, and often do. God may have placed you in a position of great spiritual peril. Your soul seems to be endangered. He has promised to save you, and yet has surrounded you with such a complication of snares and dangers, that salvation appears impossible. Cares "like a wild deluge" sweep over you; your business is all-engrossing; it demands your closest attention; it calls you early from your bed, and only allows you to retire when it has thoroughly drained the energies of mind and body; your family is increasing around you; you dare not slacken your labours; starvation or this drudgery lies before you. Now such a case appears to be utterly incompatible with the growth of piety; it seems a flat contradiction of the promise, "Peace I leave with you." Yet it is clear that God has put a necessity upon you to remain in this employment; He has so contrived circumstances that you cannot escape without violating duties on all hands. If you abandon your calling, then a much worse condition threatens. You dare not lay down and die; this were suicide, and if you have lives depending on you, it were murder too. If your employment were in itself wrong and immoral, then it would be different; in such a case God calls you out, and at all risks, even though you had a thousand Isaacs to leave, you must go.

But as it is, your occupation is right in itself, yet owing to your own weakness and infirmities, it has an influence, as all business has, to draw your soul from Christ, and plunge it in a sea of anxieties. Your companions also may be among those spiritual fools who say in their hearts there is no God, and laugh at your scruples. You cannot rid yourself of them; they may be employed by your master; or they may be a part of your necessary stock-in-trade; at all events, for some reason or other, escape from their society may be as impossible as giving up your calling altogether. Or perhaps your very family may be profane; the father who begat you may look coldly on you as a saint; your piety may wear you even from a mother's heart; for Christ's sake you must remain like a leper in your family—alone, and when not alone, still worse—a butt for mockery, or a thing to be loathed. And all these grievous spiritual stumbling-blocks, or some of them, or other which we have not named, may stand in your way to heaven, and there is no possible turning by which you may rightly avoid them. In fact, to stay or to go seems fraught with your soul's peril. How then can you be saved? Now such a position may appear hostile to your soul's welfare; it may seem like handing you over to the wiles and power of Satan; it may wear the aspect of imminent peril; but if only you go on your way as Abraham journeyed with the doomed Isaac to Moriah, trusting in God's love and faithfulness, you will eventually find that this road right through the enemy's camp was really your safest road after all; your mind and your habits may be so formed, that nothing but constant "fightings without" keep up the necessary fightings within; like many a soldier after the flesh, you may not be fit for peace service; the luxuries of repose may prove more fatal to you than the enemy's whole park of artillery; so that war is actually your safest occupation; resisting strong temptations may be the securest employment for you. Or perhaps God has some work for you to perform in the world's heart—some poor half-wrecked bark to draw out of the whirling sucking vortex—some soul to be converted from the error of his ways, and to shine at last as your joy and crown of rejoicing before the presence of Christ. At all events, you may be quite sure that though every possible spiritual danger were accumulated round you, yet is that position nought but a master-piece of strategy, planned by the Captain of your salvation for your safety. Only trust in the Lord's wisdom, and lean upon His strength, and the very spear of the foe shall be your defence, warding off some more dangerous and unseen weapon; the sharp bosses of the world's buckler shall be the steel on which you sharpen your own sword; the number of your enemies shall be but an index of your imparted graces; the fierceness of the fight shall only predicate the splendour of your triumph and the brightness of your everlasting crown. VII. FAITH SACRIFICING AFFECTION. The heart of the Patriarch was the primary point of assault in his trial of faith. The flocks of the Patriarch were not asked. It had been a great sacrifice to give up those large possessions of which we are told, some years previously to Isaac's offer, that "Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold." But though the command left them untouched, what would they be when the heir was gone? And Isaac was now Abraham's only son. Ishmael was gone—gone at God's command (Gen. xxi. 13). And how painfully must the dear boy's name have struck on the father's ear, when he was told to take "thine only Isaac"—"thy Laughter!" Oh! God touched more than one sensitive cord of Abraham's heart when He said, "Take Isaac." It told the father of that ungrateful mockery with which he heard the promise of a son pronounced; it told him how a forgiving God had pardoned the offence, and turned the laughter of mockery into the laughter of joy; it told him of the many years he had spent with this Isaac—this "Laughter"—to wipe away his tears and wreathe sorrow itself into smiles. And now he is to take this Isaac—and God, when He dooms the son to death, and the father to kill him, calls him "Thine only Laughter." And then to complete this array of the son's claims on his father's heart, the Lord terms him thy son, "whom thou lovest"—as though there were any occasion to tell Abraham that. The reason of all this is obvious; it was to make manifest the Divine purpose; it was to say in plain language, "Lovest thou Me more than these?" God is not contented if you only give Him what you can easily spare; He will not be satisfied with a mere secondary treasure; but often He demands your chief delight, and bids you surrender the most precious thing you have. There is to be no reserve—no treasure kept back—no bidding God to take anything except that. There are many ways in which your faith is thus tried, and your love is called to give up its treasures. True, you are not told to offer up an Isaac on the altar; but there are other things which are "Isaacs" to you, and which God requires you to surrender; the "great possessions" were the young ruler's

Isaac, pharisaism was that of Paul, and expected worldly greatness was that of all the apostles who followed Christ in the days of His flesh. Everything dear to us, whether within or without, may be our Isaac; and oftentimes we find that the most hidden of our idols is our dearest. What can be dearer to you than your own will—that inbred desire to walk where you list, do as you like, and live for yourself? it is your nature; it is like the instinctive love of life; it is that for which the carnal man craves. And God invariably says with respect to this Isaac; “Take him, dear though he be, and offer him up in a place that I will show thee”—that place is Calvary. But frequently this cherished will assumes some more special form; it appears as some particular disposition or tendency of nature; there is some pleasure in which your tastes lead you to indulge, some unholy employment which mere avarice induces you to continue, some bad companion whose image has crept into your heart. Or it may be that some object, good in itself, stands between you and your God—between your love and your duty. And this trial is often heightened by God’s selecting a particular mode of giving, as well as by His choosing a gift we prize. God not only demanded Isaac, but He also fixed upon the most trying process of surrender. “Give Me thy son, and offer him up,” Abraham knew what that meant. If Isaac had been sent, like Ishmael, into the wilderness, and there left to perish of thirst, still had it been a gift of the child to God. But a mere gift was not all which God demanded; the means of bestowment were as essential as the gift itself. Abraham must sacrifice Isaac like a mere sheep on the altar. How many pangs did that act require! Even the mere preparations demanded more than a martyr’s fortitude. Knife and fire! Just the two things from which affection most abhorrently recoils. So fearful in their operation! So violent in their work! So terrible for memory to dwell upon. It is related of an ancient painter that he once chose for his subject the sacrifice of Iphigenia by her father, and over Agamemnon’s face he painted a veil, thus rendering the features invisible. The artist’s friends remonstrated on this singular omission. “You have obscured,” said they, “the chief personage in your group; you have concealed the father.” “Ah,” said the painter, “I could not describe his features”; and so he thought the veil more significant than any impotent attempt to depict agony, which no canvas nor words can convey. We must adopt the same wise plan; silence is the best comment upon the anguish of Abraham; the heart alone can paint it. But, however painful the operation which God selects, we must adopt it; for to change the mode of sacrifice, or to murmur at it, is just as much a proof of deficient faith, as to withhold the object. Alas! This impatience of the Lord’s mode of trial is all but universal. We seem contented with submitting to the bare loss of some treasure, and appear to think this meagre submission entitles us to find fault with the way in which that loss befel us. The merchant does not pine under his ruin, but impatience overmasters him when he thinks of the fact that a son’s extravagance, or a friend’s treachery was the agency which God permitted; if only he had miscalculated his expenses, overrated his profits, or been defrauded by strangers, and thus being ruined, he could have submitted; at least he thinks he could. The parent loses his child; perhaps the stroke fell upon him with appalling suddenness, or the visitation was attended with severe pain, and long continued struggles with death; he fancied that he could have given up his boy in any other way without a murmur; if only time to say farewell had been granted, or if he had seen his darling sink into death as into a calm and painless sleep, he could have said, “Thy will be done”; but oh! that violent wrenching apart of soul and body, that pillow unwatched and unsoothed, that far distant grave unwatered by a tear, untold by an epitaph, or unadorned by a flower; these are the food on which a murmuring spirit feeds; these are the excuses to which want of submission clings. Or perhaps the sacrificed Isaac may be of quite a different kind; some privilege is taken away, some means of usefulness removed, and it is possible that all this may have been brought about by the authority of those dear to you; they care not for religion, they are taken up with business, they compel you, as far as possible, to relinquish what they call your weakness and absurdity, and since you will not go with them to the same excess of riot and worldliness, they throw every obstacle they can in the way of your progress; the taunt, the sneer, the profane jest, and the positive prohibition are all tried in turn; your heart is almost broken as it views such barriers reared by such hands. Oh! if the sword were to be the instrument which cut you and your privileges asunder; if a dungeon were to shut you out from your means of grace, instead of that parlour and that circle of loved hearts which like a chain surround you; if the edicts of some bloodthirsty ruler or some savage council were to utter your sentence

of banishment from your means of grace, and not those words spoken by lips which have kissed you, and by tongues which have soothed you even as a babe, then you could bear your sad lot. All this is wrong; our faith is seriously defective; we have not learnt to say, "Thy will be done," until we can give not only what the Lord wills, but as the Lord wills. VIII. FAITH OPPOSING AFFECTION. One half of the Patriarch's sacrifice is frequently forgotten—men see the father surrendering the son, but they overlook the husband giving up the wife; they do not remember that the same weapon which slew the child would inevitably divide asunder the parents. Abraham was called to pierce one heart and break another; and the same blow would certainly do both. How could Sarah survive Isaac's death stroke? The probability is that the command was purposely kept from her, lest she, who had imperiously sent Ishmael away against her husband's wish, should now step in like a robbed lioness, snatching Isaac from his father's hands, and thus preventing obedience. Besides, the account tells us that God's purpose was to try Abraham—not Sarah—and therefore to him alone was the afflicting command given, and from him alone was this sacrifice of faith required. With Sarah in this state of unconsciousness, what a terrible awakening was before her! And supposing Isaac were at length given back, would Sarah's love for Abraham recover from such a shock? Could she ever bear to be supported or fondled with that hand which had once been spotted with her Isaac's blood? But in any case what a trial of the heart was here! We speak truth when we say that a large share of the Patriarch's sacrifice consisted in opposing, as well as surrendering, his affections—in wounding Sarah as well as killing Isaac. God calls you frequently to thwart your heart, and to oppose things and persons you love. He does not always require you to give up the object; but He leaves it in your possession and bids you contend against it. It is not enough to resist love's influence against God, nor will it suffice that it should lie passive and submissive beneath the Saviour's power; but we must even strive to make it an active and influential agent in Christ's work of winning souls. Love must not be drummed out of the regiment as a vagabond sin, but it must be disciplined into a "good soldier of Jesus Christ"—a recruiting sergeant for the Lord's army. Love must turn preacher, and "persuade men." IX. FAITH DURING THE WORLD'S REPUTE. What will the servants of Abraham say? How will the Canaanite mock? Even if Isaac be restored, yet what will they say, should the bare purpose of that journey to Moriah ever transpire? And if the Patriarch should return alone; what then? What a difference between the Patriarch and many of us! He had reproaches awaiting him of such a character as to make the firmest man stagger—reproaches founded on principles which were true in the general way, and only false in his special case; and here are we hesitating at every step, however slight, wondering and fearing what this friend, or that neighbour, may say. "How strange it will seem" is our excuse for omitting many a duty, and perpetrating many a sin. I have but to quote to you half-a-dozen opinions against your obedience to God; I have but to show you that this or that act of discipleship will incur a laugh, or a sneer, or a curse, from your acquaintance, and you draw back; I have but to prove that open profession of Christ will be followed by your being cast out from some privileged "Synagogue of Satan," and you timidly hide your Saviour, you content yourself with a hole-and-corner piety, your discipleship is only an invisible dress, you come to Jesus by night, the fear of man is your snare. Abraham must have expected to draw down upon himself the reproaches even of those who loved God; Melchisedec the priest, and Sarah the wife, and Eliezer the servant, would probably all unite in upbraiding him. And the name, too, how hard to hear—"Murderer!" X. PROMPT FAITH. The difference between an excuse and a reason is, that the former is the offspring of desire, the latter is the result of judgment; one is forced into being by self-justification, the other is deliberately conceived by conviction; one is a mere invention, the other is a discovery. Now Abraham had no reason for delay; yet had he many possible excuses. Why not take some days or at least some hours to make his preparations for almost a week's journey; food must be obtained, tents must be packed, wood must be hewn, and arrangements must be made for so long an absence. Affection might have lingered over a thousand so-called necessities, and multiplied its preparations, in order to lengthen out the span of Isaac's life. The youth himself must be allowed time to get ready; and, above all, Sarah's mind must be prepared for his absence, or else what will she say to his sudden and mysterious journey? True, the servants may tell her, "He is gone to do sacrifice"; but will not her obvious answer be, "Why should he conceal such a deed from me? why should he so suddenly conceive such

a purpose? why disappear like a thief in the night?" Surely the husband may spare her this woe! surely he may lull her suspicions by giving her a few days' warning that he and Isaac are about to go and offer sacrifice in a place which God will show him, and thus reconcile her to the journey! The heart might easily have seized on any or all these excuses to prolong the son's life, and defer the dreadful slaughter. And to facilitate this immediate obedience, we find the Patriarch using the most simple preparations, and actually sharing in the labour of making them. With servants in abundance, he yet saddles the ass with his own hands; he then takes Isaac and two young men, and the four cleave the wood—i.e., the dry fuel which it was necessary to carry with them in order to kindle the damp wood they might find near the place of sacrifice. A tardy and hesitating commencement of Christian duty is so utterly opposed to the spirit of the gospel that the bare existence of reluctance is a just cause for doubting the genuineness of our faith. One of the most hopeless forms which ungodliness takes is the pseudo-obedience of unbelief, and fear, and hesitation. Oh! there is a force in prompt obedience which completely baffles the enemy of souls; he has no time to manufacture snares; he has no opportunity of throwing down stumbling-blocks before you; but there you are in possession, so to speak, of the heights, and too firm and strongly entrenched for him to disturb your position. Promptitude is the very strategem Satan employs so successfully against us; he anticipates our obedience with his rebellious suggestions; he is throwing up barricades before us while we are questioning whether we will go forward or not. Alacrity is thus the very weapon specially adapted to foil him. History tells us that promptness and rapidity of movement were the keys to Napoleon's most splendid victories; he no sooner conceived a plan of campaign than his whole army was in swift march to execute it; his adversary's outposts, driven in by what appeared to them a mysterious and omnipresent antagonist—his artillery, flashing and booming from heights which the foe thought it useless and absurd to occupy—these were the couriers who made the first announcement of his approach to the enemy. At times this prompt appearance in the field served of itself to force the opposing army into a hasty and full retreat; and if this effect did not follow, then did the conqueror's columns move with the same swiftness to the attack as they had shown on their march, and they fell upon the surprised and panic-struck foe as though they had been transformed into a literal "thunderbolt of war," hurled by a second Mars. And why may not we use the same tactics in spiritual warfare with the same success? XI. DELIBERATE FAITH. True diligence begins her work by earnest inquiry; she first looks, and then runs; she first prepares, and then sets out; neither is her course, when commenced, like an arrow from a bow—slower and slower, as she goes on, but it is like iron attracted towards a loadstone—faster and faster as she approaches it. She does not move like some showy ensign on a flagstaff—flapping and waving in all directions, yet always confined to one point—but like the sails of some gallant ship, she catches and keeps the wind, her canvas filled with the heavenly breeze, and pressing onwards towards port. She has an eagle's eye and an eagle's wing—looking and soaring to the sun—and not a swallow's uncertain flight, now skimming the water, now gliding along the ground, now circling in the air, and yet never flying towards a given point. The desire of true diligence is, not motion, but motion towards an object; she runs, looking to Jesus; she presses to the mark. First of all, deliberation is needed to ascertain the fact and the genuineness of the Divine command; for until that is known, true faith can do nothing. Abraham was sure of this fact at once, but, as we have seen, it is different with us, and often much doubt surrounds the question. Diligence, therefore, begins by seeking Divine illumination; for no time is gained which is gained at the expense of God's teaching—no time is wasted which is spent in supplication of the Spirit. Yet there must be no manufacture of doubts for the sake of waiting to have them removed; there must be no halting of unbelief after the Lord has uttered a reply quite clear and definite enough for a ready faith to hear. In fine, your questions must be like those of the child who has lost its way, and pants for home—not like those of the sluggard, who, when he is called, still lies rubbing his eyes, and asking a score of inquiries as to the time, and weather, and temperature, just to delay the act of rising, and, if possible, to discover an excuse for further sleep. And then, while this earnest and sincere inquiry of the Lord is going on, and we are learning what we knew not, a second purpose will be attained; we shall be strengthened as well as taught; the answer to our prayer for teaching will include might as well as instruction; the Lord will add power to knowledge; the Spirit will at the same time mark out our road, and prepare us for

it. True obedience does the Lord's will at the Lord's time; it is neither before nor after; it is neither rash nor slow. But what has all this to do with Abraham's example? he did not tarry, but set out almost immediately; two or three hours after the vision he was on his way. Yet, notwithstanding this early start, the deliberate character of the Patriarch's faith was most thoroughly tested by the three days' journey to Moriah. It had been comparatively easy for him to leave his couch under the immediate influence of the vision, rouse Isaac from his bed, take him to some neighbouring hill, and there sacrifice him before the morning had dawned. But God required him to be a burning and shining light, and not a mere flashing meteor; He resolved to expose the flame to rough winds, and to sustain combustion, in order to give us an example of that holy fire kindled by the Spirit, which no wind can blow out, and no time can burn out. At first the full extent of Isaac's loss might not present itself to Abraham's mind. He was probably carried beyond himself by the abundance of the revelation given unto him. The first excitement of the Lord's sudden appearance to him was cooled down; his obedience was clearly not the result of entrancement; he could stand, as it were, calmly in God's presence for three long days, holding Isaac in his extended and untired arms for the Lord to take him when He chose. And then this period of suspense served not only to try the real and enduring character of Abraham's faith, but it also gave time for that necessary and painful work of counting the cost. In fact, he had time to estimate what the Lord's will really was in all its extent and consequences, and thus to obey God with his eyes open. The Saviour is not contented that He should know the value of what He asks; we must know it too. Christ will have an intelligent surrender of all you have. You must reckon what you give to Him, not with a purse-proud spirit, but with the steady purpose of a man who makes over all his property to another, and numbers up pounds, and fields, and houses, to see that nothing is wanting. Thus prepared by earnest inquiry, imparted grace, patience, and a foresight of sorrows, our obedience will not be that hybrid monster of a day, begotten from the adulterous union of so-called religion with excitement or fear; but it will be the calm, holy, long-lived offspring of the Spirit—obedience which can rise with the lark, and like a bird of passage on its migration, continue on the wing till the distant clime is reached—obedience so unchangeable, that even were it three years instead of three days, or three centuries instead of three years, still would God's true servant bend his willing steps to the distant Moriah, and at last take the knife to consummate the act with as much holy strength of purpose as if he had rushed from the scene of the night vision to the place of sacrifice. XII. FAITH CLEARING THE WAY OF EXPECTED OBSTACLES. It is not enough to foresee a difficulty, or to blunder onwards, encountering hindrances as they come, but, so far as we can, we must previously remove out of our path everything which may impede or stop us. Many obstacles are insurmountable and fatal when discovered after they are reached, and yet are mere trifles if seen and provided against at a distance. How easy for a general to dislodge the mere handful of enemies which lie in yonder wood in ambush; yet let him march his whole force past the ambuscade, and only take measures against it when his army is attacked, then are his troops thrown into most serious confusion, and perhaps driven back panic-stricken. The traveller across the desert may easily guard against the drought of his journey beforehand; he has nothing to do but to fill his water-skin, and sling it across his shoulders; but if he delays preparation till the moment of thirst, what agonies—perhaps agonies even to death—does it entail! It is self-confidence, and not faith, which despises precaution, and expects no obstacle till it comes; it is presumption, and not filial confidence, which will not anticipate the obstacles God has revealed, or use the means to overcome them which He has given. A foresight of difficulty, and precaution against future obstacles, are as much the Spirit's work as is strength for the actual battle. What, if Abraham had not hewn the wood, or had left the fire or the knife at home, depending on the moment of sacrifice to provide him with these necessities! Would that have been genuine faith? Would you not have questioned his sincerity if the Bible had told us that he took Isaac to Moriah, and lo! the wet wood of the mountain would not kindle? Would you not have suspected an obedience which was arrested by the want of a knife or fire? If Abraham had returned with an unslain Isaac on such grounds as these, you would have refused to own him as an example of faith. Another remarkable instance of this same careful forethought is seen when, at some distance from Moriah, Abraham stopped the servants who attended his journey, and bade them "Abide here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder and worship." It is clear that

Abraham's purpose was to secure himself against the certain interference of these servants. Without having received a direct command from God to submit, there is not a single right-minded man on earth who would, or could, or ought to, have quietly permitted such a deed to be done. They would certainly have interfered. Well! if they did, was not Abraham's purpose of obedience perfect? Could he not have said, "I was quite willing, but they prevented me"? Now, the faith of excitement would have gone carelessly on, without any forethought or precaution against this obstacle. Oh! what a contrary spirit often prevails among so-called disciples of Christ, and professors of Abrahamic faith. Instead of the Patriarch's foresight and energy of purpose, they welcome difficulties as saviours from self-denial. They snatch at any obstruction, magnify it a thousand-fold, esteem it an impassable barrier, and call it an interposition of Providence. XIII. ACTIVE FAITH. The son must be given—and something more—the father must be the immediate giver. Behold a priest is even at hand! Why not send Melchisedec to me? he is Thy priest; the office is peculiarly his; let the work be his; let him slay my Isaac. No! Abraham, the Lord requires thy active faith, therefore "Take the knife." How desirable such a plan must have appeared for many reasons! Melchisedec would share in the act; the priestly sacrificer would at once be a guarantee for the character of Isaac's slaughter, and would in some measure silence the reproaches which such a deed would bring on the Patriarch. It would be evident to all that the deed was done from religious motives. But no! All this alleviation must Abraham forego; his faith must be active—not passive—he must take the knife. Faith must be active. She must not wait till houses, and lands, and friends are wrenched out of her possession, but when the Saviour's cause requires it, she must forsake them; she must become the agent in her worldly loss; she must, so far as earth is concerned, be both ruiner and ruined. Are we to wait till accident robs us of them, or till God takes them from us by some signal calamity? No! The deprivation is to be our own act; we are to cut off the hand; we are to pluck out the eye; we are to amputate the foot. She is not like an unwilling child who requires the mother to rise up out of her place and force the toy from his hand; but she resembles the sweet and ready child, who, at a word, catches up the forbidden plaything, and runs with outstretched arms to put it in the mother's lap. Thus, the believer must often be the executioner of his own joys—the slayer of his own Isaac. But there must be no mere self-torture, for torture's sake; none of those lashings, and horse-hair shirts, or hot iron floor, or beds of thorns, or starving, which are often prescribed as trials of faith. If you act on your own judgment and responsibility, you are a presumptuous tormentor; your sacrifice has no relationship to that of Abraham, for if he had done as you do, he would have taken Isaac without any Divine command to Moriah, he would have slain him upon the altar, he would have been a murderer. Faith, then, must not walk alone: she must not mark out her own course; her activity must be that of obedience, and not of independent and self-prescribed action. Her first inquiry must be, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" and immediately she must set about doing it. XIV. PASSIVE FAITH. There stands a weak and aged man, his form bent, and his hand trembling. And there, on the wood, lies a youth in all the bloom and power of bursting manhood, his age about twenty-five, his muscle developed, his form displaying all that wiry strength which ultimately endured the shocks of one hundred and eighty years. Why, Abraham would have shaken and staggered in such a grasp as Isaac's hand could give. A blow from the son's arm, and the father had rolled helplessly down the sides of Moriah. Doing often includes suffering; but suffering does not in itself always include doing; there is a suffering which is strictly passive; we have solely to endure. Yet when we speak of any part of Christian character or conduct as passive, it must be a very contrast to apathy. XV. FAITH REWARDED. The reward of faith is so named because it is given to faith, and not because it is given for faith. The relation therefore of faith to blessing is not the relation of a price to a purchase, but that which the excavation of a channel bears to the water which is afterwards to flow into it. And what of the reward itself? What was it in Abraham's case? One part of that reward was the restoration of Isaac. Yet what was this more than the father would have enjoyed if the son had never been taken to Moriah? Was not Isaac returned, the same Isaac as Isaac given? No! he was not; Isaac after being offered and restored, could not be the same to Abraham as if he had been unoffered and unrestored; he was a different son—a more precious son—a thousand-fold more precious. Could Isaac be the same boy to him? Supposing by some fearful accident I had almost destroyed the child of my love; for days I

watched him as life seemed rapidly ebbing; but suddenly a change appeared, and the physician told me he was out of danger; what would be my future feelings to that child? Why! under such circumstances even hatred has been known to warm into affection; and how much more will a father's ready heart be kindled into an intensity of fondness! Our Saviour Himself finds some of His most beautiful parables on the principle that a thing lost, but restored, is dearer far to the finder than a thing never lost at all. Isaac restored was literally a reward—a thing given to faith—a thing which Abraham never possessed before. And then what a hallowed and sacred association would ever after cling to that boy! he had actually been solemnly offered to God. Isaac was an ever-present image of God's favour—a living memorial of the Lord's faithfulness—he was grace incarnated—grace “manifest in the flesh.” A trial sanctified is always a trial rewarded; it always sweetens the true believer's blessings; and though he may have no more outward causes of happiness than before—yea, though he may have even fewer—yet has the soul's palate been so freshened and improved that his actual perception of joy is tenfold greater; the change is not in the food, but in the quickened appetite of the eater. But the consummation of faith's reward in Abraham's case was when, for the first time, he gazed on that incarnate Saviour born of his Isaac's seed. Great must have been his joy when he saw the Eternal Son in all the glory of His Godhead; but when he beheld his Lord becoming in very deed a child of Isaac and a Redeemer of the whole world, oh then he could understand in all their fulness and their depth those promises which were confirmed and enlarged on that mount where his faith was so tried—then could he estimate in all its unmerited richness the infinite value of faith's reward. And doubtlessly Abraham's constant and eager eye was fixed on that great consummation of faith. And if faith thus keeps her constant eye fixed on this bright, holy, and Christ-pervaded consummation of her reward, the result is certain—our efforts will all take the direction of our heart, our steps will follow our eye, our thoughts and actions will tend upwards, and we shall gradually be “changed into the same glory” we contemplate, “from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (*D. F. Jarman, M.A.*)

The claims of Divinity and humanity reconciled:—On Mount Moriah the religious life of Abraham reached its maturity, and his knowledge of the Divine nature attained its greatest spiritual depth. On Mount Moriah, the type of the future Mount Calvary, we may see the synthesis of the infinite truths, the light of which has streamed in its meridian fulness from the Cross of the God-man. Let us proceed to consider:—I. God's first commandment, ENFORCING THE CLAIMS OF DIVINITY. “They came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.” II. God's second commandment, ORDAINING THE CLAIMS OF HUMANITY. “And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And He said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him.” III. The scene of DIVINE REVELATION. “Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.” I. THE VOICE OF DIVINE TRUTH, we are clearly told, called upon Abraham to sacrifice the natural life of his only son. The destiny of man, as revealed to us throughout Holy Writ, is to share the attributes of God's eternal life. The words spoken through Moses in Gen. i. 26, “God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness”; and the words of 2 Pet. i. 4, “That by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature”; and the words of St. John the Divine, “Having His Father's name written in their foreheads,” all express the same great truth, that man was created to be a partaker of the attributes of God. It follows, therefore, that the attributes of the uncreated Divine life are the laws of the human life, and that every revelation or glory of God imposes an obligation and a duty on man. The sovereign attribute in the life of God is consequently the ruling principle in the true life of man. What, then, is that sovereign attribute? “God is love” (1 John iv. 8). Sacrifice on earth in human life is the analogue of love in the Divine life. Consequently the same supremacy which belongs to love among the attributes of God, also belongs to sacrifice among the duties of man. Hence throughout the history of religion, from the earliest passages of the book of Genesis to the visions of the eternal life in the heavenly mansions, unfolded to us in the revelation of St. John the Divine, sacrifice is the highest effort of the human soul, in the exercise of which man finds the approach to God, and the blessed rest of his own nature. Hence it follows, that

the difference between a high-principled and an unprincipled life is simply the difference between a life of love and a life of selfishness; a life of self-indulgence, in which no altar is erected on the low ground; and a life of self-sacrifice, in which man rises above the lower, baser instincts of his being in obedience to the Divine call. This one central law of the Divine kingdom was revealed to Abraham at the first, when he was summoned by the call of principle to leave his country, his kindred, and his father's house. The faith of Abraham, whereby he obeyed that voice, was simply the submission of his soul to the ruling principle of love expressed in self-sacrifice. The growth in his soul of the power of that Divine principle was the development of his faith. That development was progressive throughout his life, as it is still in the history of every individual soul. In his conduct towards Pharaoh, and towards Abimelech, we see the temporary lapse from the high ground of faith and self-sacrifice to the low level of earthly selfishness and expediency. As time went on, and the patriarch's vision of Divine truth became clearer and fuller, and the new letters were added to his name, significant of a higher destiny and a wider influence, he was inspired by God to express in the outward rite of circumcision that inward and spiritual principle which was the governing law of his life. Circumcision of the heart, in the spirit, and not of the letter, was the expression of the deep truth that man is to reflect the Divine love by self-sacrifice. Throughout his career the power of this principle had become stronger and stronger in the soul of Abraham. He had yielded his whole soul in obedience to "the first and great commandment: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.'" The mighty significance of this general principle had overpowered his entire being. The first and great commandment, although it is the sun of human righteousness, has other commandments revolving in the spiritual system, not in antagonism to it, but in harmony with it and deriving their light from it. In ascending Mount Moriah Abraham saw nothing in the universe but the one great principle: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God." Whatever sacrifices were necessary in order to give expression to that love, he was ready to make. The firmly-grasped knife and the outstretched arm represent the strong, resolute self-surrender of the soul that has, in obedience to the call of Divine truth, risen to the heights on which it shrinks not from the sharpest pangs of inward agony, that are necessary in order to offer to God the sacrifice which He asks. The great truth taught in this passage is the absolute sovereignty of the love of God over the human soul. The destiny of man is to bear in his being the image of God, in which he was created. That is the highest principle which must reign over all other forces in human life. In the command to sacrifice Isaac, the eternal Spirit is still teaching Abraham the same great principle in a different form of practice. As he had been taught at first to subordinate the love of country and clanship to the love of God, so he is now commanded to bring the love of family under the dominion of the same sovereign principle. The ascent of Mount Moriah, and the sacrifice of Isaac, are an eternal obligation laid upon man. We can inherit no land of spiritual promise without recognizing it. The nation, the family, the individual, is called upon to make this sacrifice. There is no high future promise to the nation that withholds from God the natural life of its Isaac, by regulating its national action in obedience to low temporal expediency, instead of hearkening to the voice of the unseen eternal life. The voice of earthly wisdom, on the level plain of mere natural reason, bids the nation value only the outward form of its future life. Its command is: "Give to the young life that secular knowledge which will enable it to answer the questions, 'What shall I eat? what shall I drink? wherewithal shall I be clothed?'" extend commerce, multiply possessions, and heap up the means of luxury, and then the national future will be great—Isaac will obtain that rich and good land of promise. But if you act on high principles—giving education in the spiritual truths that reveal the love of Christ; maintaining the ministry of the mysteries of God; going even to war for the rescue of the weak nations carried captive by the strong; losing the profits of commerce; and expending the fat of the national frame in the adventurous toils imposed by the behests of national honour and good faith—you will impoverish the earthly future that lies before your posterity." The policy of shrinking from war at the expense of principle is not noble or Christian. There are times in which God demands the greatest sacrifice which a nation can make, namely, the blood of its youth shed upon the field of battle in obedience to an idea. No nation, which resolutely determines to remain upon the low grounds of selfish ease and shameful peace, can inherit a great future, for it is guilty of withholding from the altar the lower life of Isaac, and thereby

forfeiting the higher destiny of his spiritual being. The nation which never rises into the high ground of principle to erect an altar of national sacrifices; which never prepares the wood for the burnt-offering, and is fired by no generous enthusiasm, but coldly and calculatingly barter its honour for the extension of its trade; which shrinks from considering itself bound by the obligations of solemnly plighted national faith; which lets the knife of sacrifice fall from its nerveless hand, rather than imperil the ease and luxury of its life—is a nation which is finding its life for the moment, in order to lose it for ever. In the life of the family, God still calls upon the heirs of the land of promise to sacrifice, as the condition of rising into possession of life's noblest blessing. The ancient voice, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of," is appealing to the conscience of the fathers of England to-day. The man of the world loves his Isaac, and desires to further his prospects, and to see him the heir of a rich future. Without Christ, deaf to the call of the spiritual voice, he lives the low-toned life of the world's level; his heart knows nothing of the wood of burnt-offerings, or of the fire of spiritual enthusiasm; he coldly calculates his gains, and multiplies his silver and gold; he recognizes no cords of Divine love, but casts away from him the constraining bands of spiritual motives, and relaxes all the higher obligations of the inner life; he performs no sacrifice of homage to the unseen majesty of the King of Life; offers no prayer, no praise, no alms, and never extends a single effort of his soul in painful self-denial. He has the reward of cold, selfish expediency, and low-toned, short-sighted worldly prudence. He becomes rich, and has saved the life of his Isaac to inherit the fat plains of his earthly prosperity. But there is really no land of promise on the plain which he has inherited. That life of low-toned, selfish, prayerless, cold-hearted money-getting, carries within itself a power that disinherits his descendants. The low tone, and the moral feebleness of his career, ensure to his family after him social decay and poverty of destiny. The man who will not ascend the Moriah of the Cross, by living a life of self-sacrifice and obedience to the Divine voice, cannot hope to secure a real Canaan for his race. On the other hand, there are families who, when they seem to be destroying the life and prospects of their Isaac, are in obedience to God's voice preparing for the certain entrance into Canaan. The noble-hearted, highly-educated young missionary in the Church's distant fields of labour; the young clergymen of brave energy and keen intellect, toiling in voluntary poverty and noble obscurity amid the haunts of vice and sin in our great cities; the student who, seeking to enlighten his fellow-men, gives himself to the ungainful pursuits of science or literature; the young soldier who devotes his life to the loyal duties of ill-requited service to his country—all these to the vulgar eye of worldly expediency seem to be offered, as Isaac, in obedience to an unpractical idea, and in wanton forfeiture of the Canaan of worldly prospects. To the individual soul, as to the nation and the family, the call to ascend the Moriah of sacrifice comes with authority. To the unspiritual man of the world the obedience of the soul to this strange command seems as great a mystery as the offering of Isaac. To him every hour spent in prayer, in meditation, in gathering the materials that fire the enthusiasm of Christian love, in tightening the cords of religious obligation, and wielding the instrument of searching self-denial, seems wasted, vainly spent in shedding the vital energy that should live to enter that Canaan of the world and the flesh, which is the only land of promise that he can realize. But the true spiritual seed of Abraham for ever acknowledges the love of God as the highest rule of life. II. God's second commandment ORDAINING THE CLAIMS OF HUMANITY. The love of God, as a universal principle, demands the sacrifice of man's all. Abraham felt this, and was willing to express the sincerity of his devotion by sacrificing the life of his son. But a corrective voice from heaven revealed to him a second qualifying commandment, not at variance with, but "like unto" and explanatory of the inner, deeper meaning of the first. The forms of sacrifice, which God imposes upon the soul, are not ends meritorious in themselves, but simply means of cultivating and expressing in the human being the energy of Divine love. As soon as the love has become perfect, the need of the sacrifice passes away. As soon as the principle of love has exacted the homage of perfect self-surrender from man, and acknowledged it in the words, "Now I know, seeing thou hast not withheld," then the obligation of sacrifice is abrogated in the words, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him." God required from Abraham an unreserved willingness to sacrifice his son, as an expression of obedience to the first law of life, "Thou

shalt love the Lord thy God." But God equally forbade the slaughter of Isaac, in obedience to the second commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Every form of life existing is an expression of Divine love. The sacrifice of physical life is, therefore, for ever inconsistent with the love of God, except when it is required for the creation or preservation of some higher form of life. The consecration of murder, as a means of expressing love to God, would have led to the mutual destruction of mankind, and the extinction of that life in the universe which it is the highest purpose of God to create and sustain. It is true that the expression of the infinite love of God upon the Cross of Calvary was given at the cost of a human life voluntarily laid down. The self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ seems to the superficial the destruction of a human life, and inconsistent with that love of life which flows from the love of God. But the work of Christ and the revelation of God did not end upon the Cross. The second commandment, enforcing the claims of humanity, likewise in the purpose of the Father required obedience. "Therefore doth My Father love Me," not simply, "because I lay down My life," but "because I lay down My life that I might take it again." In the power of the resurrection following upon the sacrifice of Calvary, and loosing the pains of death, we see the operation of that second law, the authority of which arrested the hand of Abraham, saying, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him." The fruitless sacrifice of life, which is not justified by a subsequent resurrection of life in a higher form, is based upon an imperfect interpretation of the great commandment, and contrary to the full truth of God. The risen life is the proof of the accepted sacrifice. "I am He that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore." A sacrifice which is a mere expenditure of life, leading on to no renewal, is contrary to God's will. Sacrifices that lead on to no raising of life into a higher form are forbidden by the second voice of God. That there should be in every land witnesses to the supreme claims of God's love, in the persons of those who forsake the secular toils of the world, and give themselves up entirely to the religious life, is essential, in order to enable the nation to rise to the heights of principle upon which God manifests Himself. In the entire devotion of such lives the nation ascends the Mount Moriah. Where such devotion is withheld, God's presence is not realized. But it is hardly necessary to point out that, although God demands the submission of human life to His rule in sacrifice, He does not require all men to give themselves up to that unceasing devotion of outward, physical, liturgical sacrifice, which would arrest the growth and healthy progress of society. To injure human society, and cramp the lawful energies of the state in the name of religion, as the Roman Church has often striven to do, is to slay the Isaac of progressive hopeful humanity, the heir of the Promised Land of the future. So also the state and society led into the high places of devotion, bound in willing submission by the cords of religious obligation, and recognizing the penetrating power of the principle of sacrifice, is for ever an offering acceptable to God, and passes on in the career of its history, fitted by its high self-devotion to inherit the land of the promises. But the state and society weakened, maimed, bleeding, dying, under the fruitless, senseless, purposeless bondage of superstitiously tightened restrictions, and the fatal stroke of fanatical self-torture, is a victim slain in defiance of the protestant voice, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad." In the same manner the lessons of this passage are applicable to the sacrifices of the individual soul. Prayer and fasting must not be withheld. In them the human being offers to God on his altar its mental and bodily energies in self-sacrifice. When the offering has not been withheld, the soul rises to a nobler walk, stronger existence, and a clearer vision of God. But there is a tendency in the human being to pervert self-sacrifice into self-slaughter. It is possible so to pray and fast as to make the body unhealthy, the mind feeble, and the will morbid and unstrung. They who carry religious exercises into that extreme, which is injurious to the growth and health of true human life, are losing the balance of truth, and are deaf to the Divine protest, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad." III. THE SCENE OF THE DIVINE REVELATION OF TRUTH. "Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh; as it is said to this day, In the Mount of the Lord it shall be seen." The Mount Moriah, the mount on which the Lord reveals Himself, is the type of the supernatural life of the Church of Christ. As it was upon the mount that Abraham received the teaching of the Divine voice which enabled him to recognize the harmony of the two commandments seemingly contradictory, so it is only the guidance of the Spirit of God in the Church that enables men to reconcile the two great principles opposed to each other in modern

life—law and liberty. The old freedom of the plain is not the same as the freedom of the Mount of God. The freedom of the natural man, who knows not the claims of the Divine law of love, is very different from the freedom of the crucified but risen life of man, who has received the spirit which makes him love God and obey Him, not in the servile fear of the bondsman, but in the glorious liberty of the child. The guidance of the Holy Spirit, which abides in the Church, can alone give us the enjoyment of this blessed freedom, that comes not from the defiance, but from the fulfilment of the law of life in Jesus Christ: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." This realization of blessedness, of power, of widely-extended beneficence to others; this foretaste of the glories of an endless life in the future, only comes to those who have striven to climb the steep, toilsome mount of Christian self-dedication, on which the air of pure life is breathed, and from which the true views of a soul elevated and enlightened are obtained. To nations no less than to individuals is this revelation necessary. The nation which banishes the name of God from the schools of its youth, and from its organism of government, in the hope of increasing human happiness and power, has no promise. That liberty which expresses the love of our neighbour has its root in the love of God. National religion is the guardian of the national liberty. Until the nation has learnt to obey the command of religion enjoining self-denial and self-sacrifice—saying, "Take thy growing life and offer him unto Me," it can never hear the true charter of liberty: "Lay not thine hand upon the lad." (*H. T. Edwards, M.A.*)

The ordeal.—I. THE TRIAL OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH AND OBEDIENCE, AND THE CONDUCT OF THE PATRIARCH UNDER IT. 1. The trial. Fearfully severe. 2. The conduct of the patriarch under the trial. He did not consult with flesh and blood, but listened to the voice of faith, which assured him of the perfect wisdom and unchangeable love of God (Heb. xi. 17-19). The issue of the trial. II. THE INCIDENTS RECORDED HERE ARE TYPICAL OF THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST. Application: 1. The subject teaches us to cultivate resignation to the Divine will. 2. The time of trial is the time for the exercise of faith in God. 3. Those who believe in Christ, and trust in His vicarious sacrifice, shall be saved; saved from all temporal evil, for nothing shall by any means hurt them; but above all, they shall be saved from spiritual and eternal death, and enjoy life eternal in heaven. (*The Evangelical Preacher.*)

The trial of Abraham.—I. THE PATRIARCH'S PAINFUL TRIAL. 1. The subject of requisition. 2. The prescribed manner of compliance. II. THE PATRIARCH'S EXEMPLARY CONDUCT. 1. The promptness of his obedience. 2. The prudence of his measures. 3. His inflexible perseverance. III. THE BLESSINGS OF WHICH IT WAS PRODUCTIVE. 1. Isaac was spared. 2. A testimony of Divine approbation was experienced. 3. A gracious repetition of promise was received. IV. THE INSTRUCTIVE TENDENCY OF THE WHOLE. 1. The will of God revealed to man is a sufficient reason for prompt obedience. 2. Our greatest earthly blessings may be productive of very painful exercises. 3. Severe trials are strictly consistent with the enjoyment of Divine favour. 4. A lively faith in God manifests itself by a regular course of cheerful obedience. (*Sketches of Sermons.*)

The trial of Abraham's faith.—I. THE PERSONAL TEST AND DISCIPLINE. II. THE GREAT MORAL AND RELIGIOUS LESSON HERE TAUGHT. God was loved better than Son—loved even though He slew. III. THE FACT BECOMES A TYPICAL PROMISE. God has provided. (*W. H. Davison.*)

Abraham's temptation.—I. HIS TRIAL. II. HIS OBEDIENCE. 1. Prompt. 2. Protracted. 3. Perfect. III. HIS REWARD. 1. A numerous seed, instead of one Son. 2. To be the progenitor of the Messiah, because willing to give up Isaac. 3. He also received the most express and gratifying assurance of Jehovah's approval and friendship. Application: 1. God tries the faith of all His people. The principle is, that we are not fit to possess any treasure unless we are ready to give up that treasure at God's command at any moment. You say you love God; but you also love your child, friend, property, life. Which do you love most? 2. Let our obedience be like Abraham's. As soon as you know God's will, submit to it. 3. God will reward the patience of faith. (*The Congregational Pulpit.*)

Trial of Abraham's faith.—I. THE SEVERITY OF THIS TRIAL. 1. It was a trial that put the severest possible strain upon him in the tenderest relations of his natural life. Isaac was his son, his only son. 2. It was a trial that put the severest possible strain upon him in the tenderest relations of his spiritual life. (1) In respect to the promise of God (Gen. xvii. 19). (2) In respect to the covenant of God. 3. The severity of this trial is unparalleled, save in the experience of Abraham's God (Rom. viii. 32; John iii. 16). II. ABRAHAM'S CONDUCT. 1. In obedience he was prompt, believing, perfect. 2. His obedience was inspired by faith. 3. His

obedience was perfect (vers. 9, 10). III. God's INTERPOSITION. 1. God did interpose. 2. God's interposition was timely. Lessons: 1. It is God's plan to test the faith of His children (1 Peter i. 7). 2. God's children should rejoice when their faith is tested. 3. The more cheerfully we bear the tests of faith, the more we honour God. 4. No one will be tried beyond what he is able to bear. (*D. C. Hughes, M.A.*) *Abraham's temptation and obedience*:—I. WHAT THIS TRIAL WAS. 1. It came from God Himself. 2. It comprehended the loss of a child, and of a peculiarly dear and precious child. He was his Isaac too; and how much does that word comprehend! the son of his old age; his beloved Sarah's child; one who had been promised him and whom he had looked for with eager expectation, not months but years, before he came; a child of miracle, born out of due time, to be regarded as an almost immediate gift from heaven! 3. And he is to lose him, not as we generally lose our children, by sickness, but by a violent death, and that death to be inflicted by his own hand—Abraham is to slay him. And, moreover, he is to be a burnt-offering. This includes more than the slaying of him—a dismembering of him when slain and the consuming of his mangled body in the flames. 4. And the time, too, when this trial fell on Abraham must have made it worse. "After these things"—i.e., just after losing Ishmael, he is called upon to give up Isaac. II. HIS CONDUCT UNDER IT. 1. Prompt obedience. 2. Determined, unflinching obedience. 3. His obedience was also calm. III. Let us now see what lay at the bottom of all this; WHAT THAT MIGHTY PRINCIPLE WAS WHICH ACTUATED ABRAHAM IN IT. And we are not left in doubt of this point. It was faith. "By faith," says St. Paul, "Abraham when he was tried, offered up Isaac." And by faith, as we apply the term here to Abraham, we mean, not a belief in this or that great gospel-truth only, but a belief in the Divine character and word generally, a faith embracing all the glorious perfections of Jehovah and all the glorious promises and declarations of his lips. This led Abraham to sacrifice his son. There are three things which commonly actuate mankind in their conduct—reason, feeling, and interest. All these we find in this case put aside. Abraham did not act from either of them, but from a principle which was in opposition to them all. (*C. Bradley, M.A.*) *The appointed sacrifice; or, Abraham's faith*:—I. THE TRIAL OF FAITH. Very heavy must have been Abraham's heart when he heard God's strange message. But he would not refuse to trust God. (Read Job xxiii. 8-12; comp. 1 Pet. i. 5-7.) II. THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH. Not a base profession. He obeyed promptly, and without murmuring. III. THE REWARD OF FAITH. 1. He won God's approval. 2. He received God's explanation of what had seemed so strange. 3. He gained God's solemn assurance to comfort and gladden him. IV. THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC AS TYPICAL OF THE DEATH OF CHRIST. 1. It was an appointed sacrifice. 2. It was a willing (self-) sacrifice. 3. It was a mystery of salvation. (*W. S. Smith, B.D.*) *Abraham tempted to offer up his son*:—I. THE TRIAL ITSELF. 1. The time of it. The same things may be more or less trying as they are connected with other things. If the treatment of Job's friends had not been preceded by the loss of his substance, the untimely death of his children, the cruel counsel of his wife, and the heavy hand of God, it had been much more tolerable; and if Abraham's faith and patience had not been exercised in the manner they were anterior to this temptation, it might have been somewhat different from what it was. It is also a much greater trial to be deprived of an object when our hopes have been raised, and in a manner accomplished respecting it, than to have it altogether withheld from us. It was "after these things that God did tempt Abraham"—that is, after five-and-twenty years waiting; after the promise had been frequently repeated; after hope had been raised to the highest pitch; yea, after it had been actually turned into enjoyment; and when the child had lived long enough to discover an amiable and godly disposition. 2. The shock which it was adapted to produce upon his natural affections is also worthy of notice. The command is worded in a manner as if it were designed to harrow up all his feelings as a father: "Take now thy son, thine only son (of promise), Isaac, whom thou lovest"—or, as some read it, "Take now that son . . . that only one of thine . . . whom thou lovest . . . that ISAAC!" And what! Deliver him to some other hand to sacrifice him! No; be thou thyself the priest; go "offer him up for a burnt-offering!" But the shock which it would be to natural affection is not represented as the principal part of the trial; but rather what it must have been to his faith. It was not so much his being his son, as his only son of promise; his Isaac, in whom all the great things spoken of his seed were to be fulfilled. II. THE CONDUCT OF ABRAHAM UNDER THIS SHARP TRIAL. We have here a surprising instance of

the efficacy of Divine grace, in rendering every power, passion, and thought of the mind subordinate to the will of God. There is a wide difference between this and the extinction of the passions. This were to be deprived of feeling; but the other is to have the mind assimilated to the mind of Christ, who, though He felt most sensibly, yet said, "If this cup may not pass from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done!" III. THE REWARD CONFERRED UPON HIM. A repetition of the promised blessing. IV. THE GENERAL DESIGN OF THE WHOLE. 1. Though it was not the intention of God to [permit Abraham actually to offer a human sacrifice, yet He might mean to assert His own right as Lord of all to require it, as well as to manifest the implicit obedience of faith in the conduct of His servant. Such an assertion of His right would manifest His goodness in refusing to exercise it. 2. But in this transaction there seems to be a still higher design; namely, to predict in a figure the great substitute which God in due time should see and provide. The very place of it, called "the mount of the Lord" (ver. 14.), seems to have been marked out as the scene of great events; and of that kind, too, in which a substitutional sacrifice was offered and accepted. 3. One reason of the high approbation which God expressed of Abraham's conduct might be its affording some faint likeness of what would shortly be His own. (*A. Fuller.*) *Temptation a test*:—Temptation is that which puts to the test. Trials sent by God do this. A test is never employed for the purpose of injury. A weight is attached to a rope, not to break but to prove it. Pressure is applied to a boiler, not to burst it but to certify its power of resistance. The testing process here confers no strength. But when a sailor has to navigate his ship under a heavy gale and [in a difficult channel; or when a general has to fight against a superior force and on disadvantageous ground, skill and courage are not only tested but improved. The test has brought experience, and by practice is every faculty perfected. So, faith grows stronger by exercise, and patience by the enduring of sorrow. Thus alone it was that "God did tempt Abraham." (*Newman Hall, LL.B.*) *Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest.*—*Sacrificial obedience*:—I. THE SACRIFICE DEMANDED BY GOD. 1. That which was prized the most. 2. That which tested faith the most. 3. That which God gave Himself. II. THE WAY IN WHICH THIS SACRIFICE WAS RENDERED BY ABRAHAM. 1. It was rendered promptly. "And Abraham rose up early in the morning." 2. It was rendered prayerfully. "Abide ye here, and I and the lad will go yonder and worship." Prayer prepares for sacrifice. 3. It was rendered heroically (vers. 8, 9). 4. It was rendered observantly. "The place which God had told him of." "Laid the wood in order." III. THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE ACCEPTED BY GOD. 1. It was substitutionary. 2. It was sufficient. (*The Congregational Pulpit.*) *The offering of Isaac*:—I. THAT WE ARE OFTEN EXPOSED TO GREAT TRIALS WITHOUT ANY REASON BEING ASSIGNED FOR THEIR INFLICTION. II. THAT EVEN IN OUR SEVEREST TRIALS, IN THE VERY CRISIS AND AGONY OF OUR CHASTISEMENT, WE HAVE HOPE IN THE DELIVERING MERCY OF GOD (vers. 5, 8). It is often so in human life; the inward contradicts the outward. Faith substitutes a greater fact for a small one. "You will get better," we say to the patient, when perhaps we mean that he will be healed with immortality; and when we meet him in heaven, he will tell us that we were right when we said he would live. III. THAT WE ARE OFTEN MADE TO FEEL THE UTMOST BITTERNESS OF A TRIAL IN ITS FORETELLING AND ANTICIPATION. Sudden calamities are nothing compared with the lingering death which some men have to die. IV. THAT FILIAL OBEDIENCE ON OUR PART HAS EVER BEEN FOLLOWED BY SPECIAL TOKENS OF GOD'S APPROVAL (ver. 16). More than mere Hebrew redundancy of language in the promise. It reads like a river full to overflow. "Because thou hast done this thing," &c. I call upon you to witness whether you yourselves have not, in appropriate degrees, realized this same overflowing, and all-comforting blessing of God, in return for your filial obedience. V. OTHER POINTS OF COINCIDENCE as between the old experience and the new will occur on reading the text, such as—1. The unconscious aggravations of our suffering made by inquiries such as Isaac's (ver. 7). 2. The wonderfulness of the escapes which are often made for us by Divine Providence (ver. 13). 3. The sanctification of special places by sweet and holy memories of deliverance and unexpected joy (ver. 14). (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *An educational command*:—Abraham must have been conscious that the way that led to the perfecting of his faith was the way of renunciation and self-denial. The sight of the Canaanite sacrifices of children must have led Abraham to self-examination, whether he would be strong enough in renunciation and self-denial to do what these heathen did, if his God desired it of him. But if this question was once

made the subject of discussion in Abraham's heart, it had also to be brought to a definite and real decision. That was the substratum for the Divine demand in Abraham's soul. Objectively, the following are the deduction from this point of view. The culminating point of worship in the religions of nature was human sacrifice. The covenant religion had to separate itself in this respect from heathenism; the truth in it had to be acknowledged, and the falsehood denied. In the command to offer up Isaac, the truth of the conviction that human life must be sacrificed as an unholy thing, is acknowledged, and by the arresting intervention of God, the hideous distortion of this truth which had arisen in heathenism is condemned and rejected. (Kurtz.) *Human sacrifices among the heathen*:—No reader of the Old Testament needs to be informed that this hateful kind of offering defiled the religious rites of the Canaanites several centuries later. But there are probably few readers who have sufficiently realized how ancient or how widespread among primitive religions was a custom which has come to be associated only with the lowest type of barbarism. Yet traces of it, reliable enough, though dimmed now through lapse of ages, meet the inquirer among the primitive population of far-sundered localities, and in stages of civilization which even we should call advanced. Its prevalence among all men of Hamitic race who observed the same type of religion as the tribes of Canaan is a fact well known. This of itself fastens the dark stigma on some of the most polished and powerful states of antiquity; on Tyre, for example, and on all the great Punic colonies, such as Cyprus, Rhodes, and Carthage. Egypt itself was not exempt. But what is less generally noticed is, that among Aryan peoples a similar custom widely obtained in the earliest periods, and sprang out of a similar nature-worship. It has left its mark on several of the most familiar legends of Greek literature. It was practised in the Mithras cult of Persia, which lingered to the age of Hadrian. It is found among the ancient Pelasgians, as at Eleusis in the worship of Demeter; in Attica and Arcadia, in that of Artemis; in Tenedos and Chios, in that of Bacchus. It is probable, indeed, that the immolation of a human victim to divinities like Bacchus or Demeter was reserved for great occasions. Among the milder Pelasgians, it did not become so regular a part of worship as those sacrifices, for example, which annually appeased the tutelary sun-god of Carthage, or the massacre of infants by passing them through the fire to the Chemosh of Moab or the Molech of Phœnicia. The general results of research on this painful subject, however, goes to show that even the milder faiths of early Greece sprang out of, or were grafted on, the same original idolatry of the generative and productive forces in nature which found favour among older races in Babylon, Phœnicia, and Canaan. Wherever the influence of that dark religion stretched, it bore of necessity two ghastly fruits—cruelty and lust: the orgies of the grove and the sacrifice of human blood. (J. O. Dykes, D.D.) *Mature faith—illustrated by Abraham's offering up Isaac*:—I. THE TRIAL ITSELF. Every syllable of the text is significant. If George Herbert were speaking of it, he would say the words are all a case of knives cutting at Abraham's soul. There is scarce a single syllable of God's address to him, in the opening of this trial, but seems intended to pierce the patriarch to the quick. Look. "Take now thy son." What! a father slay his son! Was there nothing in Abraham's tent that God would have but his son? II. THE PATRIARCH UNDER THE TRIAL. In Abraham's bearing during this test everything is delightful. His obedience is a picture of all the virtues in one, blended in marvellous harmony. It is not so much in one point that the great patriarch excels as in the whole of his sacred deed. 1. First notice the submission of Abraham under this temptation. 2. Abraham's prudence. Prudence may be a great virtue, but often becomes one of the meanest and most beggarly of vices. Prudence rightly considered is a notable handmaid to faith; and the prudence of Abraham was seen in this, that he did not consult Sarah as to what he was about to do. 3. Abraham's alacrity. He rose up early in the morning. 4. Abraham's forethought. He did not desire to break down in his deeds. Having cleft the wood, he took with him the fire, and everything else necessary to consummate the work. Some people take no forethought about serving God, and then, if a little hitch occurs, they cry out that it is a providential circumstance, and make an excuse of it for escaping the unpleasant task. Oh, how easy it is when you do not want to involve yourselves in trouble, to think that you see some reason for not doing so! 5. Abraham's perseverance. He continues three days in his journey, journeying towards the place where he was as much to sacrifice himself as to sacrifice his child. III. THE BLESSING WHICH CAME TO

ABRAHAM THROUGH THE TRIAL OF HIS FAITH. The blessing was sevenfold. 1. The trial was withdrawn; Isaac was unharmed. 2. Abraham had the expressed approval of God. "Now I know that thou fearest God." 3. Abraham next had a clearer view of Christ than ever he had before—no small reward. "Abraham saw My day," said Christ. "He saw it and was glad." 4. More than that, to Abraham God's name was more fully revealed that day. He called Him Jehovah-jireh, a step in advance of anything that he had known before. "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." 5. To Abraham that day the covenant was confirmed by oath. The Lord swore by Himself. 6. Then it was that Abraham had also a fuller promise with regard to the seed. 7. God pronounced over Abraham's head a blessing, the like of which had never been given to man before; and what if I say that to no single individual in the whole lapse of time has there ever been given, distinctly and personally, such a blessing as was given to Abraham that day! First in trial, he is also first in blessing; first in faithfulness to his God, he becomes first in the sweet rewards which faithfulness is sure to obtain. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The gospel of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac:*—If the Messiah be anywhere symbolised in the Old Testament, He is certainly to be seen upon Mount Moriah, where the beloved Isaac, willingly bound and laid upon the altar, is a lively foreshadowing of the Well-beloved of heaven yielding His life as a ransom. I. First, THE PARALLEL. You know the story before you; we need not repeat it, except as we weave it into our meditation. As Abraham offered up Isaac, and so it might be said of him that he "spared not his own son," so the ever blessed God offered up His Son Jesus Christ, and spared Him not. 1. There is a likeness in the person offered. Isaac was Abraham's son, and in that emphatic sense, his only son; hence the anguish of resigning him to sacrifice. Herein is love! Behold it and admire! Consider it and wonder! The beloved Son is made a sacrifice! (1) Remember that in Abraham's case Isaac was the child of his heart. I need not enlarge on that, you can readily imagine how Abraham loved him; but in the case of our Lord what mind can conceive how near and dear our Redeemer was to the Father? (2) Remember, too, that Isaac was a most lovely and obedient son. We have proof of that in the fact that he was willing to be sacrificed, for being a vigorous young man, he might have resisted his aged father, but he willingly surrendered himself to be bound, and submitted to be laid on the altar. How few there are of such sons! "Though He were a Son yet learned He obedience." It was His meat and His drink to do the will of Him that sent Him. (3) It must not be forgotten, too, that around Isaac there clustered mysterious prophecies. Isaac was to be the promised seed through which Abraham should live down to posterity and evermore be a blessing to all nations. But what prophecies gathered about the head of Christ! What glorious things were spoken of Him before His coming! He was the conquering seed destined to break the dragon's head. He was the messenger of the covenant, yea, the covenant itself. 2. The parallel is very clear in the preface of the sacrifice. Let us show you in a few words. Abraham had three days in which to think upon and consider the death of his son; three days in which to look into that beloved face and to anticipate the hour in which it would wear the icy pallor of death. But the Eternal Father foreknew and foreordained the sacrifice of His only begotten Son, not three days nor three years, nor three thousand years, but or ever the earth was Jesus was to His Father "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Remember, that Abraham prepared with sacred forethought everything for the sacrifice. But what shall I say of the great God who, through the ages, was constantly preparing this world for the grandest event in its history, the death of the Incarnate God? All history converged to this point. 3. We will not tarry, however, on the preface of the sacrifice, but advance in lowly worship to behold the act itself. 1) When Abraham came at last to Mount Moriah, he bade his servants remain at the foot of the hill. Now, gather up your thoughts, and come with me to Calvary, to the true Moriah. At the foot of that hill God bade all men stop. The twelve have been with Christ in his life-journey, but they must not be with Him in His death throes. Eleven go with him to Gethsemane: only three may draw near to Him in His passion; but when it comes to the climax of all, they forsake Him and flee; He fights the battle singly. (2) Do you observe that Isaac carried the wood!—a true picture of Jesus carrying His cross. (3) A point worthy of notice is, that it is said, "that they went both of them together." He who was to smite with the knife, and the other who was to be the victim, walked in peaceful converse to the altar. "They went both together," agreeing in heart. It is to me delightful to reflect that Christ Jesus and His Father went both together

in the work of redeeming love. In that great work which we are saved, the Father gave us Christ, but Christ equally gave us Himself. (4) They proceeded together, and at last, Isaac was bound, bound by his father. So Christ was bound, and He saith, "Ye could have no power against Me unless it was given to you of My Father." (5) The parallel goes still further, for while the father binds the victim, the victim is willing to be bound. Isaac might have resisted, but he did not; there are no traces of struggling; no signs of so much as a murmur. (6) Yet the parallel runs a little further, after having been suspended for a moment—Isaac was restored again. He was bound and laid upon the altar, the knife was drawn, and he was in spirit given up to death, but he was delivered. Leaving that gap, wherein Christ is not typified fully by Isaac, but the ram, yet was Jesus also delivered. He came again, the living and triumphant Son, after He had been dead. Isaac was for three days looked upon by Abraham as dead; on the third day the father rejoiced to descend the mountain with his son. Jesus was dead, but on the third day He rose again. (7) What followed the deliverance of Isaac? From that moment the covenant was ratified. (8) Isaac, also, had that day been the means of showing to Abraham the great provision of God. That name, *Jehovah-jireh*, was new to the world; it was given forth to men that day from Mount Moriah; and in the death of Christ men see what they never could have seen else, and in His resurrection they beheld the deepest of mysteries solved. God has provided what men wanted. II. I have to hint at some points in which the parallel falls short. 1. Isaac would have died in the course of nature. When offered up by his father, it was only a little in anticipation of the death which eventually must have occurred. But Jesus is He "who only hath immortality," and who never needed to die. His death was purely voluntary, and herein stands by itself, not to be numbered with the deaths of other men. 2. Moreover, there was a constraint upon Abraham to give Isaac. I admit the cheerfulness of the gift, but still the highest law to which His spiritual nature was subject, rendered it incumbent upon believing Abraham to do as God commanded. But no stress could be laid upon the Most High. If He delivered up His Son, it must be with the greatest freeness. Oh! unconstrained love—a fountain welling up from the depth of the Divine nature, unasked for and undeserved! What shall I say of this? O God, be Thou ever blessed! Even the songs of heaven cannot express the obligations of our guilty race to Thy free love in the gift of Thy Son! 3. Isaac did not die after all, but Jesus did. 4. Isaac, if he had died, could not have died for us. (*Ibid.*) *A difficulty removed*:—How could God command Abraham to sacrifice his son? We reply: God never intended the death of Isaac. He saw the end from the beginning, and knew that the life of Isaac would not be taken. The command was only a severe test of the absolute faith and unswerving obedience of His servant Abraham. A story may illustrate this. In the Napoleon wars, it is said that once the emperors of Austria and Russia and the king of Prussia were discussing the relative absolute, unquestioning obedience of their soldiers. Each claimed the pre-eminence, in this regard, for his own soldiers. They were sitting in a room in the second story. To test the matter, they agreed that each in turn should call up the sentinel at the door, and command him to leap out of the window. First the Prussian monarch called his man. "Leap out of the window," was the order. "Your Majesty," said the soldier, "it would kill me." He was then dismissed, and the Austrian soldier was called. "Leap out of that window," commanded the emperor. "I will," said the man, "if you really mean what you say." He was in turn dismissed, and the Czar called his man. "Leap out of that window," cried the Czar. Without a word in reply, the man crossed himself, and started to obey, but of course was stopped before he had reached the window. Were the sovereigns guilty of murder? Surely not, because their purpose was not to sacrifice their soldiers, but only to test their obedience. This anecdote may throw more light on the first difficulty than perhaps many a logical argument could do. God's purpose must be judged, not by His command alone, but by the story in its completeness. Then only will our judgment be a correct one.

Ver. 5. *Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship.*—*Helps and hindrances of a Christian life*:—I. In the path of faith, HUMAN HELP IS PROFITABLE. II. In the path of faith, HUMAN HELP IS LIMITED. III. In the path of faith, HUMAN HELP MUST RECEIVE A TIMELY DISMISSAL. IV. In the path of faith, THE GRANDEST TRIUMPHS HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED ALONE. (*H. T. Miller.*)

Lessons :—1. Saints bent to the work of God will turn anything back that may trouble them in it. 2. Inferior things may and must be inhibited by souls above them in case of hindering from God. 3. Saints freed from incumbrances do speed to duties. 4. Humble submission to the hardest part of worship will God's servants readily yield. Both Abraham and Isaac. 5. Return to relations, and relation duties is just after the worship of God. 6. Better events come after believing worship sometimes than saints are aware of. (*G. Hughes, B.D.*)

Ver. 8. God will provide Himself a lamb.—*God's provision of a lamb in Christ* :—This incident shows us in what lies the value of that sacrifice, and with what feelings we should regard it. I. THE SACRIFICE WHICH GOD APPROVES MUST BE OF HIS OWN APPOINTING. II. THE SACRIFICE WHICH GOD HAS PROVIDED IS SUPREMELY WORTHY OF ACCEPTANCE, AND GRACIOUSLY SUITED TO OUR CONDITION. 1. It has reconciled us to God. 2. It has procured the forgiveness of sins. 3. It opens the way to endless bliss. III. THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE SACRIFICE GOD HAS PROVIDED IS THE TURNING POINT OF A MAN'S SPIRITUAL HISTORY. 1. It includes all the rest—repentance, faith, love, obedience. 2. It gives efficiency to all the rest. 3. It is the true test of spiritual character. *Abraham's answer to his son's question* :—I. THERE IS THE IDEA OF SUBSTITUTION. This is the pivotal fact in the scheme of redemption. II. THIS WAS AN ACT OF DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY. III. THE FUNDAMENTAL DEFECT IN THE RELIGION OF NATURE. It affords no lamb with which to complete the sacrifice. IV. THE IMMINENCE OF ISAAC'S PERIL SUGGESTS THE DANGER IN WHICH UNGODLY SINNERS CONSTANTLY LIVE. V. MUCH MIGHT BE SAID OF ISAAC'S FAITH IN THIS TRANSACTION—his weakness, his submission to parental authority, &c. VI. HERE IS THE FIRE : GOD'S UNAPPEALED JUSTICE ; AND HERE IS THE WOOD : YOUR UNHOLY HEART AND LIFE ; BUT WHERE IS THE LAMB ? God demands worship. A sacrifice He will have ; but, with those two factors, justice and sin, no acceptable offering can be made. Bring the Lamb of God to the altar of worship, or expect yourself to be immolated on that altar, a victim of His offended justice and His broken law ! (*E. O. Frierson, D.D.*)

Ver. 9. Bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar.—*The love of the Father* :—Of all the many parts of the great truths concerning our redemption, which stand out in the history of Abraham and his son, there is one which seems to need especial consideration. We have a very striking view, not only of the love of God the Son in consenting to go through, as man, the suffering of death, but also of the exceeding tender love of the Father towards us, who could consent to give His Son to death. We know, indeed, that, according to the mysterious decrees of God, it was the Son who suffered on the Cross, not the Father, though one with Him ; that the Son died for our sins, that the Son came down from heaven, that the Son was nailed to the wood, that the Son went through the sorrows of death, that the Son gave Himself for us all. But can it have cost the Father nothing, to have sent the Son down from heaven, to have bidden Him go forth from His sight, and to tarry in this evil, wicked world ? Can it have cost the Father nothing to have consented to that great task of suffering which the Son undertook ? Can He have looked unmoved on the shame and scorn which fell on Him, even in the hour of His birth ? Can He have looked unmoved on the Holy Child in the manger, and in His after scenes of reproach, when He was spoken against, blasphemed, hated, disbelieved ? Can He, above all, have seen Him, unmoved, in those still more sorrowful acts, when He flung Himself down upon the ground in the garden, in the anguish of His soul, when His sweat was as it were great drops of blood, when He was dragged to prison and to death, when the crown of thorns was bound around His head, when He was scourged and spit upon, when He trembled beneath the weight of His cross, when He was lifted thereon, when the sharp nails were driven into His hands and feet, when the great thirst came upon Him, when the blood streamed down the Cross ? Could an earthly father, with an earthly father's love, have watched his son through such acts as these, without the keenest, sharpest grief, without the deepest sorrow, even though no hand was laid upon him, and he had no such acts of suffering to go through himself ? And so does the Holy Ghost design, we must suppose, in picturing to ourselves Abraham's sorrow as he walked by his son's side, as he gazed upon him along that bitter road, as his heart swelled with grief, as he bound him with trembling fingers to the wood, as in an agony he lifted up the knife, that we should

see in these things the grief of our heavenly Father in giving His Son to die. And so in seeing His grief, we see also His exceeding tender love towards us; and without lessening one jot or tittle—which God forbid—the love of our Saviour, love which is unspeakable, unfathomable, past knowing, past finding out, we yet get to raise the love of the Father to a greater height than we have ever been wont to give it. And in truth, as we get to observe more truly the proportion of faith, and to know the love of the Father, so shall we also get to learn more deeply the love of the Son. Instead of contrasting the love of the one with that of the other, we shall get to combine them in our minds without confusing them. All our thoughts will be of love; the love of God, of the one true God, of the Father, of the Son, of the Holy Ghost, in their separate persons and offices, will engross our souls, and thus, our hearts being stirred within us in gazing on the mystery of Divine love, we shall, I trust, learn and show forth more and more of love ourselves; for this is the highest grace of all, this outlasts the world, this never faileth, this is the bond of perfectness, this is the very joy and occupation of heaven itself. (*Bishop Armstrong.*)

Ver. 10. **Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.**—*Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac*.—I. That we may properly ascertain the extent of Abraham's virtue, we must consider the RELATIVE SITUATION IN WHICH HE IS PLACED AT THIS CRITICAL PERIOD. Two Abrahams combated one against the other; but divine and heavenly principles raise him far above those which are carnal and terrestrial. Grace triumphs over nature. Abraham makes a double sacrifice to God; an exterior sacrifice upon the mountain, and an interior sacrifice in the secret of his soul. In the one he takes his son and binds him; in the other he immolates to God the sentiments of his soul. Outwardly it is Isaac who is offered up, inwardly it is Abraham who suffers and who sacrifices himself. Abraham goes out of himself, and rises indeed to God. Never did the Deity regard the sacrifice with so much pleasure—never did heaven behold so delightful a spectacle. II. In fact, the sacrifice of Abraham has been handed down to us as a GREAT AND SPLENDID TYPE OF THE SACRIFICE OF THE CROSS. Abraham immolates his only son. God also sacrifices His own Son. Behold the agreement which subsists between these two sacrifices, and which obliges us to consider one of these objects in the other as in the most perfect type; but behold the difference which distinguishes them, and which discovers to us how much the image sinks below the original. Go to Moriah, and you will there find a victim who follows the priest without knowing at first whither he is going, and who asks his father, where is the lamb for a burnt-offering? Turn your eye towards Calvary, and you will see Jesus Christ who exposes himself voluntarily to the sword of His Father, and who perfectly acquainted with His destiny, says to Him, Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God. There angels are sent from heaven to arrest the arm of Abraham; here devils issue from hell to hasten the death of Jesus Christ. In the sacrifice of Isaac, the fire, the knife, the sacrificer, are visible, but the victim does not at first appear; in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the victim appears first, but the knife, which is the sword of divine justice, and the fire, which consists in the ardour of his wrath and judgments, are invisible, are only seen by the eyes of faith. Upon the mountain of Moriah Abraham sacrifices his son to his Master, to his Benefactor, to his Creator, to his God; upon the mount of Calvary, God immolates his Son for the salvation of men, who are nothing but meanness, misery, and corruption. (*Abbadie.*) *The perfection of Abraham's friendship with God*.—God is to this man a friend to be trusted, even though He slay; to be loved better than an only son; to be obeyed where reason refuses its light to justify the command, and nature with all her voices can only exclaim against it. It is the perfection of a man's friendship with God to be thus loyal. It puts the all-perfect Lord, Whose name is Love, in His just place. It pays Him such honour as is His due. Irreligious minds, it is true, cannot rise so high as to comprehend this. To them, such an absolute sacrifice of everything to the Supreme must sound both unreasonable and unnatural. Even religious men are apt to find the air upon this height of sacrifice too rare for them to breathe with comfort. It is only at moments of somewhat similar trial, when the Christian is lifted above his usual self-indulgent level, that he can taste a similar blessedness, or feel his heart at one with that ancient saint upon Moriah. None the less does this act of Abraham express the kind of self-surrender which must be natural to any one who perfectly knows God, and is in close friendship with Him, and therefore can repose in Him an unflinching trust that He will act like

God. To souls made perfect and set free from the shadows of earth into that vision of the Eternal Face for which it is our present blessedness to long, such a temper of sacrifice as Abraham attained may prove to be not natural only, but easy, and even rapturous. (*J. O. Dykes, D.D.*) A typical transaction :—Isaac was eminently a type of Christ; but throughout the whole of this instance how beautiful and striking! Look at the father; can anything be more analogous than Abraham's conduct and our heavenly Father's? Why did God say to Abraham, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah: and offer him there for a burnt-offering"? Why did He make Abraham himself prepare all the materials? Why did He make him take the knife himself, and the fire in his hand? Because it was exactly what our heavenly Father Himself has done, and because it was to be an appeal to our feelings, that we might have some understanding of what our Father has done. Did not our Father take His Son, His only Son, whom He loved, and offer him up upon a Mount, as a burnt-offering for us? Did He not take the knife? Did He not say, "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd"? Did He not Himself bruise that Son? "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him." Did He not Himself lay on that Son all those afflictions, and Himself literally cause that death, that His own demands and justice might be satisfied for your transgressions and mine? The parallel runs entirely through the deed. Thus He prepared the Son; He prepared a body for Him; He sent Him into the world, sent afflictions on Him, bruised Him, grieved Him, unsheathed the sword against Him, and made Him a burnt-offering in the furnace of His own wrath. Where shall we find the Lamb? This is what perplexed Isaac, and what perplexed the whole universe. "My son," said Abraham, "God will provide Himself a Lamb." So He did. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son"; and therefore, when He came, "Behold the Lamb of God," said his precursor, "that taketh away the sin of the world." (*C. Molyneux, B.A.*) Prohibition of human sacrifice :—Several Greek myths have been compared with this narrative; but the similarity exists but remotely in some external circumstances. Iphigenia, Agamemnon's daughter, was to be sacrificed to Diana, and the priest Calchas was on the point of performing the fearful ceremony, when the virgin was carried away by the goddess in a cloud, and an animal offering was presented in her stead. But the motive for the intended sacrifice was perverse and barbarous; Agamemnon had killed a stag sacred to Diana; and the incensed goddess would only be reconciled if the king's eldest and dearest daughter were offered to her. The future fate of Iphigenia was enveloped in mystery; it was only many years later that her abode was accidentally discovered by her wandering brother Orestes. Thus, the cruel command, devoid of purpose or moral end, was the result of divine wrath and caprice. But the trial of Abraham was as important as regards the doctrine which it involved, as it was pure in the motive from which it arose. (*M. M. Kalisch, Ph.D.*)

Ver. 14. Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh.—*The Lord will provide*:—THE LORD WILL PROVIDE FOR THE BODY. Temporal blessings, no less than spiritual, come to us through the medium of the covenant of grace. 1. The Lord will provide food for the body. He will bring round the seasons without fail, and make corn to grow for the service of man. 2. The Lord will provide raiment for His people. For forty years in the wilderness, amid the wear and tear of journey and of battle, the raiment of the Israelites waxed not old because Jehovah provided for them; and doth He not still remember His own? 3. The Lord will provide for His people protection. Many times are they delivered in a most wonderful way, and to the astonishment of the world. II. THE LORD WILL PROVIDE FOR THE SOUL. 1. Jehovah has provided a Lamb; in the gift of His Son we have the guarantee for the supply of every needed blessing. 2. The Lord will provide for you His Holy Spirit. The gift of the Spirit comes to us through the atonement of Christ, and the sufficiency of the Sacrifice entailed and implied the promise of the Spirit, so that He who hath provided the Lamb is confidently to be trusted for this also. 3. The Lord will provide for the soul an eternal home, as is clear from that word, "I go to prepare a place for you." When the toils of life's pilgrimage are over there remaineth a rest for the people of God. (*J. Thain Davidson, D.D.*) Divine providence:—This incident teaches—1. God's right to our greatest blessings. 2. Man's duty in the highest trial. 3. God's providence in the greatest emergency. I. THE PROVISIONS OF THE DIVINE INTERPOSITION CORRESPOND EXACTLY WITH HUMAN WANTS. II. ITS PROVISIONS ARE OBTAINED IN CONNECTION WITH INDIVIDUAL AGENCY. III. ITS

PROVISIONS ARE OFTEN STRIKINGLY MEMORABLE. (*Homilist.*) *God's providence*:—In the season of extremity, God appears for the relief of His people. 1. Severe trials are intended to prove the strength and purity of our faith. The Christian must walk by faith, not sight. 2. And may not another reason be, to stir us up to fervency in prayer? 3. We may also add, that the hand of God appears more obviously when He delivers just at the crisis of danger. Lesson: We need never despair of Divine help when we are pursuing the path of Christian obedience. (*D. C. Lansing, D.D.*) *The Lord our Provider, and none other*:—I. In the first place it is a FACT. God will provide. It is His province. It is His, as the Lord. Providing is not the child's, but the father's business. Work as I may, care as I may, it is still the Lord who provides. I work and the Lord provides. 1. God does all His business thoroughly. Nothing that He ought to do, does He ever leave undone; and all that the Lord does, He does as God; not as man would do the thing, but as God alone can do it. If God provide, it must be in harmony with an eye that never sleeps, with hands that are ever working, with arms that are never weary, with a heart of paternal solicitude that never, never can change. 2. Then, observe, while providing is God's business, He does it in a Godly style. There is no doubt about God's plans being carried out. God has not pleased you always in the provision He has made; and yet the provision has been sure and good. In plain language God has never neglected anything which He ought to have done for you. II. Now look at THE TIME. When will He do it? Why, "in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen." God allows you to come to the mount before He provides for you; that is, before He shows the provision. The provision is made long beforehand, but He does not show it. What does this fact say? Why this simple fact says, "wait." If you cannot do a right thing to meet your own difficulties, do nothing. If you can do a right thing, and God give you the ability and the opportunity, that act may be God's instrument for meeting your wants; but if you can do nothing without doing wrong, then it is quite clear you are to do nothing, and you are to say, "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen." Now, why does God thus sometimes try you? Why! because you think too much of your own providing. Why! because you think too much of your fellow-creatures' providing. Why! because you make gods of His creatures. (*S. Martin.*) *The Lord will provide*:—I. Let us consider WHAT GOD HAD PROVIDED FOR ABRAHAM IN TIME PAST. 1. The Lord provided for him an unusual measure of faith. 2. God had provided for Abraham a ram for a burnt-offering in the stead of his son. II. Let us consider THE INFERENCE WHICH ABRAHAM DREW FROM WHAT GOD HAD PROVIDED FOR HIM IN TIME PAST. "Jehovah-jireh," said he, "the Lord will provide." So much as to say, "What He has done is a pledge and an earnest of what He will do. Since He has shown so much of His grace and goodness to me in time past, He will show more in time to come." Do you ask, What will He provide? 1. He will provide for us in the life that now is. 2. God will provide for us in that life which is to come. Conclusion: 1. How precious is the grace of faith. 2. How devoted should we be to the service of God. 3. And lastly, how firm and assured should be the Christian's confidence in his God. (*D. Rees.*) *Jehovah-jireh*:—I. WHAT WILL GOD PROVIDE? Two answers may be given to this question. One is furnished by the direct teaching of the passage, and the other by its inferential teaching. 1. It is clear from the direct teaching of this passage that God will provide for the greatest necessities of His people. This was what He did for Abraham. And now the cross of Jesus stands before us as the grand illustration of the truth and meaning of this great covenant name, Jehovah-jireh. The Lord promised to provide a ransom; and the ransom is provided. 2. And then there is an inferential teaching from this name—that He will provide for our lesser necessities. Jehovah has bridged the great gulf that once lay between us and heaven, and He will certainly bridge all the smaller gulfs that may meet us on our way. II. HOW WILL GOD PROVIDE? 1. Wisely. He seeth the end from the beginning, and is infallible in all His plans and purposes. "The work of the Lord is perfect." An important part of His work is to provide for His people. And when we apply the word "perfect" to this work, what an assurance we have of the wisdom that marks it! It is only when we lose confidence in this feature of God's work that our hearts are troubled. Not long ago a Christian merchant met, unexpectedly, with some very great losses. He began to doubt the wisdom of that Providence which could allow such trials to overtake him. He returned to his home one evening in a gloomy and despairing state of mind. He sat down before the open fireplace in his library,

"tossed with the tempest" of doubt and destitute of comfort. Presently his little boy, a thoughtful child of six or seven years, came and sat on his knee. Over the mantel-piece was a large illuminated card containing the words—"His work is perfect." The child spelled out the words, and pointing to them, said, "Papa, what does perfect mean here?" And then, before his father, who was somewhat staggered by the inquiry, could make a reply, there came another question from the little prattler: "Doesn't it mean that God never makes a mistake?" This was just the thought that troubled father needed to have brought before his mind. If the angel Gabriel had come down from heaven to help him, he could have suggested nothing more timely. And then the father, clasping the little one to his bosom, exclaimed, "Yes, my precious darling, that is just what it means." His confidence in God revived. The dark cloud that had settled down upon him was scattered. 2. Tenderly. He is the God of the dew-drop as well as of the thunder and the tempest. He is the God of the tender grass as well as of the gnarled and knotted mountain oak. 3. Faithfully. He will provide for His people, not the things that they would most like to have here—not those that are the most pleasant and agreeable—but those that are the best. The foundation promise of the covenant is—"No good thing will He withhold." II. WHY DOES HE THUS PROVIDE FOR HIS PEOPLE? Two motives operate with Him to do this. One of these has reference to His people; the other has reference to Himself. 1. The motive in His people which leads God thus to reveal Himself as their Provider is their need—their weakness, or their want. 2. The motive in Himself is because He has the fulness required to meet our necessities. In us is weakness, in Him is strength; in us is ignorance, in Him is wisdom; in us is poverty, in Him is riches; in us is emptiness, in Him is fulness. And it is from the blending of these two elements—this weakness in us and this strength in Him—that the resultant force is found which will lead us on to victory. Let us take a familiar illustration of this statement. Yonder is a little fly. It is walking over the ceiling of the room with its head downwards, and yet it walks as safely as you or I do on the floor of the same room with our heads up. And now let us take our stand near yonder massive rock, over which the waves of the ocean are dashing continually. See, there is a little mollusc clinging to the smooth side of that rock. The sea sends up its mighty billows to dash in foam and thunder on that rock. But they can no more move that mollusc that clings there, than they can move the rock itself from its firm base. And what gives to these feeble creatures the security that attends them in their positions of danger? Under the foot of the fly, as it walks over the ceiling, is a little vacant space, a point of emptiness. And there is the same under the shell of the mollusc, as it clings to the rock. The power of the atmosphere is brought to bear on that point of emptiness in the foot of the fly and the shell of the mollusc. This gives to the fly and to the mollusc all the security and support they realize. And the same principle applies to spiritual things. "When I am weak," said St. Paul, "then I am strong." When I feel my weakness, *i.e.*, and take hold of the strength that is offered me, then I am strong. The fly and the mollusc make use of the weakness that is in them to draw strength from the atmosphere by which they are surrounded. This gives to the fly the strength of the ceiling over which it walks, and to the mollusc the firmness of the rock to which it clings. And in the same way the Christian who feels his own weakness and takes hold of God's strength is made as strong—yes! tell it out with boldness, for it is the truth—is made as strong as the omnipotent arm on which he leans, and the Almighty Jehovah to whom he clings. (*R. Newton, D.D.*) *Jehovah will provide*:—I. Look at the words as THEY BEAR ON THAT GRAND CENTRAL EVENT IN THE WORLD'S HISTORY TO WHICH THEY HAD A PROSPECTIVE REFERENCE, AND IN WHICH THEY WERE DESTINED TO FIND THEIR FULL ACCOMPLISHMENT. For in this same place nearly two thousand years after—on or near the spot to which Abraham gave the name of "Jehovah will provide"—Jehovah did provide a Lamb for a burnt-offering, whose death will be the theme of all heaven throughout eternity! God never knew another from the beginning. I doubt not that Isaac was a Divinely ordained type of Him. Was Isaac the child of the promise? The true Child of the promise was Christ. Was Isaac long promised and long waited for before his birth? Four thousand years elapsed, of promise and long expectation, ere Simeon took up the Child Jesus in his arms, saying, "Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." Was Isaac's birth supernatural? "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." Did Isaac meekly submit to be bound to the altar on the wood?

"He is led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth." But here the resemblances seem to stop. Or, if there be anything, as I doubt not there is much, in the semblance of Isaac's death and resurrection, yet assuredly it is here but a shadow. For no sinner might ever die to expiate sin; and our God never would have a human sacrifice even to prefigure the true. But now behold, at last, "the Man that is God's fellow!" Behold the Lamb for a burnt-offering—O yes, consumed by the fire of that Divine holiness and justice, of which the fire of all the burnt-offerings was but the shadow. II. "HATH APPEARED." Abraham used the future tense—will provide. Are you in deep perplexity as to your path, and fearful of taking a false step? Write Jehovah-jireh. The Lord will provide counsel. The name of this Lamb is Wonderful, Counsellor—"I will instruct thee, and teach thee in the way in which thou shalt go; I will guide thee with Mine eye." Are you called to some arduous duty? Write Jehovah-jireh, the Lord will provide strength—"My strength is made perfect in weakness." Are you straitened as to temporal provision? Write still this word, Jehovah-jireh, for "your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things." Do you anticipate painfully the conflict with the last enemy? Write Jehovah-jireh—"O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction." And as for the eternity beyond, still write Jehovah-jireh, for "the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." (C. J. Brown, D.D.) *God the provider*.—I. WHAT DOES GOD PROVIDE FOR HIS PEOPLE? For their wants: 1. Here. 2. Hereafter. II. WHEN IS IT THAT GOD PROVIDES FOR HIS PEOPLE? Just when He sees fit; just as it accords with His infinite wisdom, and not as it accords with our carnal conceptions. He has "a set time" to favour Zion. 1. In life. 2. In sickness. 3. In death. III. HOW DOES GOD PROVIDE FOR HIS PEOPLE? Little do we know of the numberless expedients to which God has recourse in His providence. (R. Luggar.) *The Lord will provide*.—No man who will tread in the steps of Abraham, that is, believe God and obey Him, will ever want a place on which to write Jehovah-jireh. He who shall do this may inscribe Jehovah-jireh on his purse, his table, his cupboard, his trade, his temptation, his trials, his afflictions, his dying day, and his future immortality. Faith—Obedience—The Lord will provide, are three points in the economy of God, as inseparable as the attributes of the Divine nature. (J. Bate.) *Money provided*.—Long before the establishment of Bible societies, the Rev. Peter Williams, a pious, distinguished clergyman of Wales, seeing that his countrymen were almost entirely destitute of the Bible, and knowing that the work of the Lord could not prosper without it, undertook, though destitute of the means, to translate and publish a Welsh Bible for their use. Having expended all his living, and being deeply involved in debt, with the work unfinished, he expected every hour to be arrested and imprisoned, without the means or hope of release. One morning he had taken an affectionate leave of his family for the purpose of pursuing his pious labours, with an expectation that he should not be permitted to return, when, just as he was mounting his horse, a stranger rode up and presented him a letter. He stopped and opened it, and found, to his astonishment, that it contained information that a lady had bequeathed him a legacy of £300 sterling. "Now," said he, "my dear wife, I can finish my Bible, pay my debts, and live in peace at home." (Ibid.) *Food provided*.—A lady, who had just sat down to breakfast, had a strong impression upon her mind that she must instantly carry a loaf of bread to a poor man, who lived about half a mile from her house, by the side of a common. Her husband wished her either to postpone taking the loaf of bread till after breakfast, or to send it by her servant; but she chose to take it herself instantly. As she approached the hut, she heard the sound of a human voice. Willing to hear what it was, she stepped softly, unperceived, to the door. She now heard the poor man praying, and among other things he said, "O Lord, help me! Lord, Thou wilt help me; Thy providence cannot fail; and although my wife, myself, and children have no bread to eat, and it is now a whole day since we had any, I know Thou wilt supply me, though Thou shouldst again rain down manna from heaven." The lady could wait no longer; she opened the door. "Yes," she replied, "God has sent you relief. Take this loaf, and be encouraged to cast your care upon Him who careth for you; and when you ever want a loaf of bread, come to my house." (J. G. Wilson.) *Our Provider*.—The Lord has made full provision for every human being. Behold the fields of fertile earth! Count the millions of acres on which we can grow food for man

and beast. There is enough for each, for all, and for evermore. 1. He will provide a path for our life. You have seen a book without a title-page, and may have thought, "My life is like this book; I came into the world by chance, as a mite is found on the cheese." The Lord made provision for your life. He gave a body in which your spirit could live, eyes with which to see, the power of speech, the command of thought; and, having provided you with a beginning, He also prepared a path in the world for your life. 2. The Lord will provide us with love. When you came into the world, He looked upon you with love, and His heart never changes. God is said to be like a sun. You can open your door and let in the blessed sunlight; and in the same way, you may open the chambers of your soul and be filled with the love of God. 3. The Lord will provide us with pardon. 4. The Lord also provides salvation for us. 5. He has provided for us peace of soul. Yesterday, when coming down Oxford Street, I noticed a painter on the top of a very high ladder. People were passing to and fro continually, yet the painter did not look down, and he did not appear to have the slightest anxiety. I stood and heard him humming a song. He was in a dangerous position; on the top of a high ladder resting upon the flags with people passing who might jog against the ladder and knock it over; yet he sang forth in gladness, and when he saw me nodded with delight. What was the secret? I will tell you. At the foot of the ladder stood a man holding it firmly, and this man was his safeguard. The painter had perfect peace up there on the ladder; he knew that his friend at the bottom was holding it, and that if any one came near the ladder unawares, the man at the bottom of it would warn them off. Likewise, the Lord provides peace for all His people. He holds our souls in His hands, and nothing shall happen to us unknown to Him. He orders our steps, directs our paths, and numbers the very hairs of our heads. The man who knows this fact enjoys a solid peace which nothing can shake. 6. Let me close by showing that He will provide us with the power of true manhood. (*W. Birch.*) *The cure for care*:—I. The first thing that God provides for His people is—PROTECTION IN DANGER. It is wonderful how many illustrations we find, both in the Bible and out of it, of the way in which God provides protection in danger for His people. When we open the Bible for these illustrations, they meet us everywhere—Noah, Joseph, Moses, Jonah, Daniel. The animal and the vegetable kingdom afford us plenty of illustrations of this same truth. Look at the scales of the crocodile, and the thick, tough hide of the rhinoceros, and the powerful trunk of the elephant, and the strength and courage of the lion. Look at the turtle, with the castle that it carries about with it, and the snail crawling along with its house on its back. When you see how God provides for the protection of all these different creatures, you see how each of them illustrates the truth which Abraham was taught on Mount Moriah, when he called the name of it Jehovah-jireh. A friend of mine has a very powerful microscope. One day he showed me some curious specimens through it. Among these were some tiny little sea animals. They were so small that they could not be seen with the naked eye. They are made to live on the rocks under the water; and, to protect themselves from being swept away by the force of the waves, they are furnished with the tiniest little limbs you ever saw. Each of these is made exactly in the shape of an anchor. This they fasten in the rock; and as I looked at them with wonder through the microscope, I thought: Why, even among these very little creatures we see Jehovah-jireh, too! The Lord provides for their protection. And every apple and pear and peach and plum that grows shows the same thing, in the skin which is drawn over them for their protection. And so does every nut, in the hard shell which grows round its kernel. And so does every grain of wheat, and every ear of Indian corn, in the coverings so nicely wrapped around them to keep them from harm. And God is doing wonderful things all the time for the protection of His people. A Christian sailor, when asked why he remained so calm in a fearful storm, said, "If I fall into the sea, I shall only drop into the hollow of my Father's hand, for He holds all these waters there." II. The second thing that God provides for His people is—RELIEF IN TROUBLE. Here is a striking illustration of the way in which God can provide this relief, when it is needed. Some years ago there was a Christian man in England, who was in trouble. He was poor, and suffered much from want of money. A valuable property had been left to him. It would be sufficient to make him comfortable all the rest of his life, if he could only get possession of it. But in order to do this, it was necessary to find out some deeds connected with this property. But neither he, nor any of his friends, could tell where those deeds were to be found. They had tried to find them for a long time;

but all their efforts had been in vain. At last, God provided relief for this man in his trouble in a very singular way. On one occasion, Bishop Chase, who was then the Bishop of Ohio, in America, was on a visit to the city of Philadelphia. He was stopping at the house of Mr. Paul Beck. One day, while staying there, he received a letter from one of the bishops of the Church of England. This letter was written to Bishop Chase, to ask him to make some inquiries about the deeds relating to the property of which we have spoken. The letter had been sent out first to Ohio, and then to Washington, where the bishop had been. From there it had been sent on after him to Philadelphia. If Bishop Chase had received this letter in Ohio, or in Washington, he would probably have read it, and then have said to himself, "I can't find out anything about these deeds," and would have written to his friend, the English bishop, telling him so. But the letter came to him while he was at Mr. Beck's house. Mr. Beck was present when the letter was received. The bishop read it to him. When Mr. Beck heard the letter read, he was very much astonished. "Bishop Chase," said he, "it is very singular that this letter should have come to you while you are at my house. Sir, I am the only man in the world that can give you the information asked for in this letter. I have the deeds in my possession. I have had them for more than forty years, and never could tell what to do with them, or where to find the persons to whom they belong." How wonderful it was that this letter, after coming across the ocean, and going from one place to another in this country, should reach the bishop while he was in the house, and in the presence of the only man in the world who could tell about those lost deeds! And if the poor man to whom the property belonged, when he came into possession of it, knew about the singular way in which those deeds were found, he certainly would have been ready to write upon them, in big round letters, the words, "Jehovah-jireh—the Lord will provide." God provided relief for him in his trouble. III. But there is a third thing that the Lord will provide, and that is—**SALVATION FOR THE SOUL.** Here is an illustration of a man who was very much burdened with care on account of his soul, and who had this care cured by the salvation which Jesus provides. Many years ago there was a very celebrated preacher, whose name was the Rev. George Whitefield. He went travelling all over England and this country preaching the gospel, and did a great deal of good in this way. One day a brother of Mr. Whitefield's heard him preach. The sermon led him to see what a sinner he was, and he became very sorry on account of his sins. He was burdened with care because he thought his soul could not be saved; and for a long time it seemed as if he could get no relief from this burden. And the reason of it was that he was not willing to believe the word of Jesus. It is only in this way that we can be saved. When we read the promises of Jesus in the Bible, we must believe that He means just what he says. We must trust His word, and then we shall be saved. Well, one evening this brother of Mr. Whitefield was taking tea with the Countess of Huntingdon. This was an earnest Christian lady, who took a great interest in all good ministers, and the work they did for Jesus. She saw that the poor man was in great trouble of mind, and she tried to comfort him as they took their tea by talking to him about the great mercy of God to poor sinners through Jesus Christ. "Yes, my lady," said the sorrowful man, "I know what you say is true. The mercy of God is infinite. I am satisfied of this. But, ah! my friend, there is no mercy for me. I am a wretched sinner, a lost man." "I am glad to hear it, Mr. Whitefield," said Lady Huntingdon. "I am glad in my heart that you have found out you are a lost man." He looked at her with great surprise. "What, my lady!" he exclaimed, "glad, did you say? glad at heart that I am a lost man?" "Why, certainly I am, Mr. Whitefield," said she; "for you know, Jesus Christ came into the world 'to seek and to save them that are lost.' And if you feel that you are a lost man, why, you are just one of those that Jesus came to save." This remark had a great effect on Mr. Whitefield. He put down the cup of tea that he was drinking, and clasped his hands together, saying, "Thank God for that! Thank God for that!" He believed God's promise then. That cured his care. It took away his trouble. It saved his soul. He was taken suddenly ill and died that same night, but he died happy. *Jehovah-jireh*:—Observe, as you read this chapter, that this was not the first time that Abraham had thus spoken. When he called the name of the place *Jehovah-jireh* he had seen it to be true—the ram caught in the thicket had been provided as a substitute for Isaac: Jehovah had provided. But he had before declared that truth when as yet he knew nothing of the Divine action, when he could not even guess how his extraordinary trial would end. His son Isaac had said to him,

"Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" and the afflicted father had bravely answered, "My son, God will provide." In due time God did provide, and then Abraham honoured Him by saying the same words, only instead of the ordinary name for God he used the special covenant title—Jehovah. That is the only alteration; otherwise in the same terms he repeats the assurance that "the Lord will provide." That first utterance was most remarkable; it was simple enough, but how prophetic! 1. It teaches us this truth, that the confident speech of a believer is akin to the language of a prophet. The man who accepts the promise of God unstaggeringly, and is sure that it is true, will speak like the seers of old; he will see that God sees, and will declare the fact, and the holy inference which comes of it. The believer's child-like assurance will anticipate the future, and his plain statement—"God will provide"—will turn out to be literal truth. 2. True faith not only speaks the language of prophecy, but, when she sees her prophecy fulfilled, faith is always delighted to raise memorials to the God of truth. 3. Note yet further, that when faith has uttered a prophecy, and has set up her memorial, the record of mercy received becomes itself a new prophecy. Abraham says, "Jehovah-jireh—God will see to it"; what was he doing but prophesying a second time for future ages? I. When Abraham said "Jehovah will provide," he meant us, first of all, to learn that THE PROVISION WILL COME IN THE TIME OF OUR EXTREMITY. The Lord gave our Lord Jesus Christ to be the Substitute for men in view of the utmost need of our race. II. Secondly, upon the mount THE PROVISION WAS SPONTANEOUSLY MADE for Abraham, and so was the provision which the Lord displayed in the fulness of time when He gave up His Son to die. III. But, thirdly, we ought to dwell very long and earnestly upon the fact that for man's need THE PROVISION WAS MADE BY GOD HIMSELF. The text says, "Jehovah-jireh," the Lord will see to it, the Lord will provide. None else could have provided a ransom. Neither on earth nor in heaven was there found any helper for lost humanity. I will only interject this thought here—let none of us ever interfere with the provision of God. If in our dire distress He alone was our Jehovah-jireh, and provided for us a Substitute, let us not think that there is anything left for us to provide. O sinner, do you cry, "Lord, I must have a broken heart"? He will provide it for thee. Do you cry, "Lord, I cannot master sin, I have not the power to conquer my passions"? He will provide strength for thee. Do you mourn, "Lord, I shall never hold on and hold out to the end. I am so fickle"? Then He will provide perseverance for thee. IV. That which God prepares for poor sinners is a PROVISION MOST GLORIOUSLY MADE. God provided a ram instead of Isaac. This was sufficient for the occasion as a type; but that which was typified by the ram is infinitely more glorious. In order to save us God provided God. I cannot put it more simply. He did not provide an angel, nor a mere man, but God Himself. Come, sinner, with all thy load of sin: God can bear it; the shoulders that bear up the universe can well sustain thy load of guilt. God gave thee His Godhead to be thy Saviour when He gave thee His Son. But He also gave in the person of Christ perfect manhood—such a man as never lived before, eclipsing even the perfection of the first Adam in the garden by the majestic innocence of His nature. When Jesus has been viewed as man, even unconverted men have so admired His excellence that they have almost adored Him. Jesus is God and man, and the Father has given that man, that God, to be thy Redeemer. V. Fifthly, THE PROVISION WAS MADE EFFECTIVELY. Isaac did not die: the laughter in Abraham's house was not stifled; there was no grief for the patriarch; he went home with his son in happy companionship, because Jehovah had provided Himself a lamb for a burnt-offering. The ram which was provided did not bleed in vain; Isaac did not die as well as the ram; Abraham did not have to slay the God-provided victim and his own son also. No, the one sacrifice sufficed. Beloved, this is my comfort in the death of Christ—I hope it is yours—that He did not die in vain. VI. Turn we then, sixthly, to this note, that we may well glorify Jehovah-jireh because THIS PROVISION WAS MADE FOR EVERY BELIEVER. VII. But now I close with a remark which will reveal the far-reaching character of my text. "Jehovah-jireh" is true concerning all necessary things. The instance given of Abraham being provided for shows us that the Lord will ever be a Provider for His people. As to the gift of the Lord Jesus, this is a PROVISION WHICH GUARANTEES ALL OTHER PROVISION. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The Lord will provide*:—A poor woman, holding the hand of her little boy, recently said to the preacher, "Sir, the word 'Jehovah-jireh' has been a great comfort to us through this child. Owing to my

husband's long illness we were in great want. But one Sunday Robert came running home and said: 'Cheer up, father and mother, the Lord will be sure to provide; Jehovah-jireh!' And often after that, when we have been in trouble, he has said: 'Come, let us sing a verse of Jehovah-jireh—

"Though troubles assail and dangers affright,
Though friends should all fail, and foes all unite,
Yet one thing secures us, whatever betide,
The Scripture assures us—The Lord will provide."

"Once, when we had no food left, he again told us not to forget Jehovah-jireh. He went out, but came back in a few minutes holding up a shilling he had found on the pavement, and saying: 'Here's Jehovah-jireh, mother; I was sure He would provide!'" Who will say this betokened childish ignorance and not Christian wisdom? Might not our philosophy be more sound, if we were more as "little children"? We know who said, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise." Hast not help often come to the people of God as unexpectedly, giving rise to the proverb, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity"? Should we not gratefully acknowledge such "interposition of Providence"; such special help from Jehovah the Provider. (*Newman Hall, LL.B.*) *In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen:—*1. The Lord will be seen. In His special providence to His servants in their afflictions. 2. The time when He will be seen. "In the mount," i.e., when things are brought to an extremity; when we think there is no more help nor hope, that is the time when the Lord will be seen. I. It is God's USUAL MANNER TO BRING HIS CHILDREN TO EXTREMITIES. 1. And the first cause why the Lord doth so usually do it is, when He brings afflictions on His children; He lets it run along till they may think there is no more help nor hope, that so it may be an affliction to them. If a man were in a smoky house, and had a door opened, it were no difficulty for him to shift himself out of it; but when we are shut up, that is it which makes it difficult; and that it might be so, the Lord suffers it to come to an extremity. 2. Secondly, the Lord brings us to an extremity because the Lord might be sought to; for so long as the creatures can do us any good, we will go no further; but when they fail us, we are ready to look up to the Lord; as it is with men which are on the seas, when they are in an extremity, those that will not pray at any other time, will pray now, and be ready to say with these in the prophet Hosea, "Come and let us return unto the Lord; for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up" (vi. 1); and the reason is, because where the creature ends, the Lord must begin, otherwise there can be no help at all. 3. Thirdly, the Lord doth it, because that hereby it comes to pass that the Lord may be known to be the helper; that when we are delivered He may have all the praise. 4. Fourthly, the Lord doth it, because all that we have, we may have as a new gift; therefore the Lord suffers us, as it were, to forfeit our leases, as it were, that He may renew them; otherwise we should think ourselves to be freeholders. 5. Fifthly, the Lord doth it because He may teach us by experience to know Him. But here some man will be ready to say, Why cannot that be without these extremities? To this I answer, you must know when a man goes on in a course, without any troubles or changes, his experience is to no purpose; for he hath no great experience of the Lord. But when a man is in tribulation, that brings experience; and experience, hope; for it is another kind of experience that is so learned, than that which comes without it; and indeed nothing is well learned till it be learned by experience. 6. Lastly, the Lord does it for proof and trial, as in the case of Abraham. II. IN THE TIME OF EXTREMITIES WILL THE LORD BE SEEN, AND NOT BEFORE. Why? 1. Because the Lord knows this is the best way to draw forth the practice of many graces and good duties, which otherwise would be without use. 2. Because He would give a time to men to repent and meet Him in, which is good for His children; otherwise we would not seek unto the Lord. 3. To let us know the vanity of the creature. The use of it is to teach us not to make too much haste for deliverance in the time of distress, but to wait upon the Lord, yea, depend upon His providence when we seem to be without help. If we look upon the creature, yet then are we to depend upon the Lord, so as never to say there is no help, but on the contrary to say, "I will trust in Him though He kill me." III. GODLY MEN'S EXTREMITIES ARE BUT TRIALS, SENT FOR THEIR GOOD; NOT PUNISHMENT SENT FOR THEIR HURT AND RUIN. Ay, but what is that good? Why, this: first, it shall increase grace in your hearts; for as the gold which is tried

loseth nothing but dross, and so is made the better thereby, so it is with our afflictions, for "the trial of our faith," saith the apostle, "bringeth forth patience"; for the greater thy trial is, the more it strengthens thy faith, and so increaseth comfort; for when the afflictions of the apostle abounded, his consolation abounded also. Again, you shall have the greater wages; for when a man hath a friend that hath been employed about any great thing for him, why, the greater the trouble was which he did undergo for him, the more will he be beholden to him, and the greater reward will he bestow upon him; even so, the greater the trials are from the Lord, the greater benefit will come to us by them. (*J. Preston.*) *God's providence*:—The celebrated Richard Boyle, Earl of Cork, who rose from a humble station in life to the highest rank, and passed through strange and trying vicissitudes, used these words as his motto, and ordered them to be engraved on his tomb: "God's providence is my inheritance." (*Old Testament Anecdotes.*) *Trust in the Lord*:—Paul Gerhardt, the German poet and preacher, after ten years of pastoral work in Berlin, was deprived of his charge by the King of Prussia, and expelled from the country. He turned towards Saxony, his native land, accompanied by his wife and little children, all on foot, without means and without prospect. They stopped at a village inn to pass the night, and there the poor woman naturally gave way to a burst of sorrow and anxiety. Her husband endeavoured to comfort her, especially dwelling upon the words of Scripture, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding; in all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." The same evening two gentlemen entered the inn parlour, and mentioned that they were on their way to Berlin to seek the deposed clergyman, Paul Gerhardt, by order of Duke Christian, of Merseburg, who desired to settle a considerable pension on him as a compensation for the injustice from which he had suffered. (*Fifteen Hundred Illustrations.*)

Ver. 16. *By Myself have I sworn.*—*God Himself the foundation of our hopes*:—"By Myself have I sworn." By Himself God swears to us; by His power, His tenderness, His sympathy, He assures our hearts. 1. If we take up afresh any work for God, He is pledged—by Himself pledged to us—not to despise that work, to guide us in it, to accept it at our hands. 2. If we turn again to any cross—find the home darkened, or business difficult, or health still failing—if we find that holiday and rest do not sweep away the cloud: behind the cloud is God, strengthening for the cross is God, and by Himself He swears to us that, bearing that cross, it shall lead us to a crown. 3. If we are troubled by the dimness of the future, if perplexities thicken even as the years—and the responsibilities of the years—increase day by day, God is pledged—by Himself pledged—to guide every trustful follower. Only follow on to know the Lord. Why, beyond all that dim future there is heaven, our Father's home and ours. And every step between the little now and that bright home is as sure as is that home and as is this now. (*T. Gasquoine, B.A.*) *The promise confirmed to Abraham by an oath*:—"Often before had God promised," says Augustine, "but never sworn." It was in recognition of the evidence which had just been afforded of His servant's staunch loyalty to the covenant, that the Eternal was pleased in this unexampled manner to reduplicate securities for His own faithfulness. Previous to this oath, Abraham had the word of God, and no more, on which to build his confidence. On that bare guarantee he had shown that he could build securely. Because he had judged it impossible for God to lie, therefore he had that day surrendered the one visible security which he possessed for the fulfilment of God's word, by sacrificing the life on which its fulfilment turned. He trusted the All-truthful and Almighty to keep faith with His friend in His own way. For that very reason did a generous promiser vouchsafe to the man something more than a naked word. "To him that hath shall be given." "Because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only one, from Me, therefore by Myself have I sworn that in blessing I will bless thee." Thenceforth, as the New Testament explains, the believer possessed, not one, but "two immutable things" on which to rest. Through Abraham's obedience have we all obtained this "strong consolation." (*J. O. Dykes, D.D.*)

Ver. 18. *In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.*—*Blessing in Abraham's seed*:—1. There was to be a seed, a natural seed, including a spiritual seed, and this again including an individual seed. 2. The seed of Abraham is to have a relation to all the families of the earth. As Abraham was not a

head of all mankind, like Adam or Noah, it was necessary to emphasize the universality of the blessing. 3. The benefit conveyed by the seed is here characterized by the word "blessed." Blessing is like mercy in this: that it sums up in one word the whole salvation of which the Bible is the gospel. It involves redemption and regeneration, both of which are necessary to salvation. (*Prof. J. G. Murphy*). *A great promise*:—1. This promise (1) narrows down previous Messianic anticipations, inasmuch as it points to the family instead of the race, as the source whence the Great Benefactor should arise; (2) vastly widens them, inasmuch as it indicates that the beneficent work of that Benefactor will be universal. 2. We conclude that this is an anticipation of Christ, because (1) it has proved to be an accurate description of Him; (2) it is only true of Him; (3) New Testament distinctly applies the Scripture to Him. This warranted, we look for the advent of Christ as for—I. THE ADVENT OF A BENEFACITOR FROM AMONG THE JEWS. This suggests—1. The proper interest we should take in the Jewish people. 2. The solemn warning that contact with what is most sacred does not ensure blessing. II. THE ADVENT OF A BENEFACITOR FOR THE WORLD. We may adoringly notice—1. The way in which Christ has already been a universal blessing. 2. The future that there yet must be for Christianity. (*Homilist*.) *All nations blessed in Abraham's seed*:—I. SOME OF THE REASONS FOR GIVING THIS DESCRIPTION OF THE MESSIAH: "The seed of Abraham." 1. Christ is called the seed of Abraham because He was to assume human nature; to be truly man; a man like ourselves. 2. Christ was called the seed of Abraham, that additional evidence of His claims as Messiah might be given when He came into the world. 3. There is a third reason why He is called, why, in fact, He was made, the seed of Abraham. There is, after all, a peculiar relation between Christ and the Jews, as His brethren after the flesh. II. Let us now consider THE IMPORT OF THE DECLARATION, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." 1. In the first place, there is its Divinely revealed truth. 2. The religion of Christ is calculated to produce human happiness, because it exhibits the Divinely-prescribed method by which the guilty may obtain pardon; in other words, that great doctrine of human hope and joy, that of justification by faith in the atonement and intercession of the Saviour. 3. In further examining this Divine system, to discover its adaptation to human happiness, we find the great, the singular, promise of the Holy Spirit. 4. Another adaptation to human happiness in Christianity is found in its explicit enforcement of those relative duties on which the welfare of society so much depends. 5. The last of these adaptations is, the kind and merciful spirit of the Gospel. (*R. Watson*.)

Ver. 19. *Abraham dwelt at Beersheba.*—*Man's first hour in heaven, illustrated by the probable feelings of Abraham at Beersheba, immediately on his return from the offering up of Isaac*:—I. ABRAHAM NOW AT BEERSHEBA HAD THE SATISFACTION OF HAVING PRACTICALLY RECOGNIZED GOD'S ABSOLUTE CLAIM UPON HIM. 1. An immense claim. 2. Yet righteous. II. ABRAHAM AT BEERSHEBA HAD THE SATISFACTION OF HAVING PURSUED THE PATH OF RECTITUDE THROUGH THE GREATEST TRIALS. 1. In relation to the period at which it occurred. 2. In relation to the sentiment of his age. 3. In relation to his theological creed. 4. In relation to his domestic association. 5. In relation to his own nature. III. ABRAHAM AT BEERSHEBA HAD THE SATISFACTION OF KNOWING THAT HE HAD OBTAINED THE APPROBATION OF HIS MAKER—expressed in three ways. 1. By a signal interposition. 2. By an unequivocal assurance. 3. By the unfolding of a glorious future. (*Homilist*.)

CHAPTER XXIII.

VERB. 1, 2. *Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her.*—*Abraham in the house of mourning*:—What lessons would such a man as Abraham learn in this house of mourning? I. THAT IN VIEW OF THE AWFUL FACT OF DEATH THE LITTLENES OF HUMAN LIFE IS SEEN. II. TO REALIZE THE FACT OF HIS OWN MORTALITY. "I may be the next to go." III. TO FEEL THAT THERE IS A LIFE BEYOND. IV. THE SACREDNESS OF SORROW FOR THE DEAD. (*T. H. Leale*.) *Mourning for the departed*:—The true mourning a sanctified feeling of death. 1. A fellow-feeling of death with the dead. 2. An anticipation of death or a living preparation for one's

own death. 3. A believing sense of the end or destination of death to be made useful to the life. (*J. P. Lange, D.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. On Mount Moriah we find Abraham doing God's will; here we find him suffering it. 2. Look at Abraham buying a grave; the best man of his age here bargains for burial ground. Ponder well this transaction, and consider that in return for four hundred pieces of silver Abraham gets a burying-place. 3. The behaviour of the children of Heth calls for appreciative notice. They treated Abraham with generous pity and helpfulness. 4. Man's final requirement of man is a grave. In the grave there is no repentance; the dead man cannot obliterate the past. V. Abraham mourned for Sarah. Consecration to God's purpose does not eradicate our deep human love; say, rather, that it heightens, refines, sanctifies it. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *A break in the home circle*:—Perhaps we who lead briefer and, at the same time, more stirring and varied lives, with rapid change and a multitude of interests to divide attention, cannot fully realize how the members of such a home circle as Abraham's grew into each other, or how one out of such a circle would be missed. Through long unbroken periods they lived constantly together, and were everything to one another. Of society, except that of their own slaves, there was little or none. The round of easy occupations which made up their shepherd life left ample leisure for domestic converse. It was inevitable that their lives should grow together as if welded into one. Husband and wife, parent and child, must have moulded one another's character to an extent hardly possible in other states of society. Stronger natures impressed themselves upon feebler ones. The older generation made that which succeeded it. The experiences and the teaching of the aged father created an unwritten family code, which ruled alike his son and his grandson. Each memorable incident in the family annals crystallized itself, no doubt, through constant repetition, and passed down with hardly any change of form as part of the family tradition. From such a close circle of relations the disappearance of one loved and familiar face would leave a blank never to be filled and scarcely ever to be forgotten. This must have been especially the case when death made its first breach in the family, and, at the ripe age of a hundred and twenty-seven years, Sarah, princess, wife, and mother, fell asleep. Her death made Abraham a lonely man. It broke the final link to his ancestral home. It robbed him of the only one who cherished with him a common memory of his father's house and the happy days of youth. She alone was left of those who, sixty-two years before, had shared his venturous emigration from Haran. He was her senior by ten years; and her removal must have come to him like a warning that before him likewise there lay another emigration, more venturous than the last—one final journey into a land still farther off. (*J. O. Dykes, D.D.*) I. THE DEATH. 1. Of Sarah, princess. Kings and great men die. "Wealth cannot deliver in the day of his power." 2. The wife of a great man. Derives her chief dignity from this connection. Little expected the honour that would befall her from this marriage. The source of Abraham's joy, as well as the occasion of some of his sins. 3. The mother of the free. The ancestress of Jesus, and those who believe in Him. 4. Died at Hebron = alliance. The alliance with Abraham dissolved, and her eternal alliance with Abraham's God, and one who was before Abraham (*John viii. 58*), now inaugurated. Happy are those who compose the bride—the Lamb's wife; the day of death is with them the day of their espousals. The alliances of earth, abandoned for a better and more lasting one. II. THE GRAVE. 1. A cave. We are of the earth, earthy. Dust, and must return to dust. 2. Purchased. Abraham selected one that would receive his own remains. ("The family meeting-place" is an epitaph at Père la Chaise.) Men sometimes think more of their sepulchres than of death; and make greater preparation for the temporary repose of the body than the eternal rest of the soul. It was all that Abraham purchased of the promised land. The country was given to the living. The promised land of heaven for the living is a free gift, and there will be no bargaining for graves there. Man sells a place for the dead, God gives a home for the living. III. THE BURIAL. "That I may bury my dead out of my sight." The object that once most pleased the eye must be put "out of sight," as a loathsome thing. Life, a fountain of beauty and attractiveness. How glorious that world must be where they die no more, and are never put out of sight. Those who die in the Lord, and are put out of sight, will presently be in sight for ever. The aged man before the grave of his wife. The parting is not for long. A few more steps, and he will be at home with his princess for ever. But with all this Christian hope, the loss of dear friends and the Sunderings of long companionships is painful. At such times may we be able to say, "Thy will be done." Learn: 1. The great and

good and best loved must die. 2. The earthly dissolution may be the beginning of our eternal union. 3. It is little the world can furnish us besides a place to lie down in at the end of the journey. 4. Happy are those who, being saved themselves, have a good hope of meeting those who are "not lost, but gone before." (J. C. Gray.) *Tears over the dead*:—In those tears of Abraham was anguish; but there might have been remorse. Apparently Abraham had nothing to reproach himself with. Quarrels in his married life are recorded, but in all he behaved with tenderness, concession, and dignity. In all things he had supported and cherished his wife, bearing, like a strong man, the burdens of the weak. But oh! let us beware. There are bitter recollections which enhance the sorrow of bereavement and change it into agony—recollections which are repeated to us in words which remorse will not cease to echo for ever and ever. "Oh, if they would but come again, I'd never grieve them more." It is this which makes tears scald. To how many a grown heart have not those childish words of the infant hymn gone home, sharp, with an undying pang! (F. W. Robertson, M.A.) *A burying-place*:—Constantine the Great, in order to reclaim a very worldly man, marked out, with a lance, a piece of ground the size of a human body, and then said, "If you could increase your possessions till you acquired the whole world, in a short time such a spot as this will be all you will have."

Vers. 3-20. **Abraham buried Sarah his wife.**—*Abraham burying his dead*:—I. CONSIDER HIM AS A MAN. II. CONSIDER HIM AS A MAN OF BUSINESS. 1. His independence (vers. 4, 6). 2. His exactness (vers. 17, 18). 3. His courtesy. III. CONSIDER HIM AS A GODLY MAN. 1. He believed in immortality. 2. He believed that God would grant his posterity to inherit the land. 3. He believed in a future state of blessedness for the righteous. (T. H. Leale.) *Circumstances connected with Sarah's burial*:—1. Observe the honour which the ancients paid to the dead. This proves that they had a secret glimmer of immortality. 2. Observe the transaction with the children of Heth. A scriptural precedent for exactitude in business. 3. Observe also how courteous phrases contain a higher excellence than they mean. "What is that betwixt me and thee?" The children of Heth had no intention whatever of being taken at their word any more than a man has now when he calls himself your humble servant or bids you command him. We must go back to an earlier age when phrases were coined and meant something, when gifts were gifts and nothing was hoped for in return, in order to catch the life that was once in our conventional phraseology. So now language preserves, as marble preserves shells of hoar antiquity, the petrified phrases of a charity and humbleness which once were living. They are dead, but they do at least this, they keep up memorials of what should be. So that the world, in its daily language of politeness, has a record of its duty. Take those phrases, redeem them from death, live the life that was once in them. Let every man be as humble, as faithful, as obedient as his language professes, and the kingdom of God has come! 4. Lastly, we find in connection with Sarah's burial a Divine provision for the healing of Abraham's sorrow. He was compelled to exert himself to obtain a place to "bury his dead out of his sight." Had he not had to arouse himself and procure a grave for Sarah, he would have brooded over his grief. This is the merciful plan of compensation which God has provided for us; the necessities of life call us from our sorrow. All these merciful provisions plainly show us that we are in a Father's world. (F. W. Robertson, M.A.) *Machpelah, and its first tenant*:—I. WE ARE FIRST ARRESTED BY ABRAHAM'S TEARS. II. NOTICE ABRAHAM'S CONFESSION. III. NOTICE ABRAHAM'S FAITH. (F. B. Meyer, B.A.) *The purchased grave*:—I. IN ITS CONNECTION WITH SARAH IT IS A TOKEN OF RESPECT TO THE DEAD. The body deserves this. 1. Because it has been the man's dwelling-place. 2. Because it has assisted the soul to express itself. 3. Because it is destined for a higher and nobler service. II. IN ITS CONNECTION WITH ABRAHAM HIMSELF IT SHOWS THAT HE PREPARED FOR DEATH. 1. It taught him that the highest earthly possessions terminate in a grave. 2. It implies that he waited for death. —I. IN ITS CONNECTION WITH THE JEWISH NATION IT SERVES AS A MONUMENT FOR THEIR INSTRUCTION. 1. Its purchase taught them that it would soon be theirs. 2. Its stillness taught them to be active. 3. Its solemnity taught them to seek that country where there is no grave. (Homilist.) *The cave of Machpelah*:—I. ABRAHAM'S SORROW. II. ABRAHAM'S PURCHASE. Strange possession to be the first portion in the land which was promised! A place to bury the dead in—yet observe how this very purchase is an act of faith and a pledge for the future fulfilment of God's promises. III. ABRAHAM'S HOPE (Heb. xi. 13-16). We Christians

to whom more light has been granted concerning the hopes of "the heavenly city" beyond this earthly life can see how, in Jesus Christ and His gospel, the sorrow for the dead and the fear of death are changed into thankfulness and hope. In Christ's death, burial, resurrection we trace an upward course to life eternal. Death is conquered. "Paradise" is the peaceful resting-place of those who "sleep in Jesus." Heaven is the final fullness of joy. (*W. S. Smith, B.D.*) *Death and burial*.—Abraham declares himself a stranger and a sojourner in the land, and humbly prays for a burying-place to bury his dead, once so dear and so lovely, "out of his sight"; expressing thus a sad, universal, and most humiliating fact, that death "changes the countenance" of its victims, as well as "sendeth them away"; and so changes them that disgust succeeds to delight, terror to affection; and so dreadful is the mixture of the memory of past beauty and the sight of present decay, that the survivor needs no exhortation to hide his friend in the grave, but with eager haste commits parent, or child, or brother, or wife, or lover, into the dust, and almost rejoices as he shuts the coffin to know that that disfigured countenance he shall see no more. What a strange view of the power and mystery of death is implied in the thought of not hatred, but love, crying out for the eternal removal of its object out of its sight! But often it is not the mere physical rottenness which awakens this desire; often, too, there arise painful, agonizing, terrible thoughts on the sight of a departed friend. The whole of the past history of the friendship or love; its first commencement and the joys connected with it; the trials and troubles, perhaps partial estrangement or complete alienation for a time, which darkened its progress; the exquisite pleasures, or no less exquisite pangs, which alternated; benefits received from the departed which were unrequited, or injuries done to them which were never fully repaid; every harsh look or word on the side of the living remembered, while on that of the dead all but their smiles and kindness are forgotten; the scenes of the sick-bed; the last farewell on the brink of eternity; all these heartquaking, melting, rending images arise, and clustered around and pictured as they are on the mirror of that pale face and shut eye, might drive to insanity and howling despair, were it not that a veil for that mirror of past joy became sorrow, and past grief became distraction, has been provided in the merciful lid of the coffin—a lid which henceforth only the worm, the eye of imagination sometimes venturing to peep into darkness, but as speedily withdrawing the gaze, and the light of the last morning, shall be able to penetrate. (*G. Gilfillan.*) *Significance of behaviour in the presence of grief*.—Circumstances test the true quality of men. Irreverence in the presence of grief is an infallible sign of the deepest degeneracy; it marks the ultimate deterioration of the human heart. On the other hand, to be chastened by sorrow, to be moved into generous pity and helpfulness, is to show that there is still something in the man on which the kingdom of Jesus Christ may be built. Never despair of any man who is capable of generous impulses. Put no man down as incurably bad, who will share his one loaf with the hungry, or give shelter to a lost little one. Poor and crude may be his formal creed, very dim and pitifully inadequate his view of scholastic theology; but there is a root in him which may be developed into much beauty and fruitfulness. For this reason, I cannot overlook the genial humanity and simple gracefulness of this act of the Hittites. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Ephron and Abraham—a life-like picture*.—It was quite in accordance with Eastern usage that Abraham did not apply directly to the proprietor of the plot in which the cave lay, Ephron by name, the son of Zohar, but made interest with him through the leading men of the city. Courtesy required, too, that their consent should be secured for the proposed arrangement. The whole narrative, which is most minute, wears the strongest local colouring. Abraham's respectful attitude, his repeated prostrations with his face to the ground, the polite hospitality of the townsmen, the difficulty in coming to a bargain, the offer of Ephron to waive the question of price, his indirect mention of the four hundred shekels, the conclusion of the sale at the city gate in the place of concourse, the weighing of uncoined rings or ingots of silver which served for a medium of exchange, and the copious phraseology as of a legal document, by which, before witnesses, the cave, with the field, the fence around it, and the trees on it, were all conveyed in perpetuity to their new owner—these particulars correspond, we are assured by Dr. Thomson, a competent witness, to what may be seen at this day in Eastern bargain-making. It is true that nowadays the courtesy is merely formal, and such generous phrases as those of Ephron and his fellow-citizens are grown very hollow indeed. Still, it seems questionable to conclude, as Dr. Thomson himself has done, that they meant no more in that simple age, when the ceremonies of

intercourse were newer and more truly reflected its spirit. Besides, it is hardly fair to place an occasion like that before us quite on a level with the ordinary chaffering of an Arab market-place. One must take care, no doubt, not to read all the incidents of a story, which is sacred as well as ancient, through such an unreal light as will invest them with fictitious dignity. On the other hand, we may equally err if, in our efforts to be realistic, we rob the record of its native dignity, or vulgarize the manners of antiquity because the manners of to-day are vulgar. (*J. O. Dykes, D.D.*) *Sarah's tomb*.—Around the grotto which thus became the sepulchre of Abraham's family, and which afterwards was to receive, not only his own dust, but that of his son and grandson with their wives, there has grown up an interest as enduring, and an obscurity as deep as attach to any grave on earth save one. The piety of some unknown age, probably Jewish, erected round the spot massive walls of noble masonry, which still exist. Inside these walls the devotion of early Christians consecrated a church, and over the church the devotion of the Mussulman a mosque. The gates of that mosque, the famous Haram of Hebron, had been closed against Western unbelievers for six centuries, when with extreme difficulty access to it was procured for the Prince of Wales and his suite in the year 1862. What they saw inside an enclosure so jealously guarded has been told with his accustomed precision of statement by Dean Stanley. Railed off, each one within its separate chapel, there lie the coffin-like shrines to which are attached the venerable names of Sarah and Abraham, of Isaac and Rebecca, of Leah and Jacob. These, however, are only empty monuments. The real tombs, if they exist at all, must be sought beneath the floor of the building, in the rocky cavern underground. To this vault a trap-door in the pavement promises to give access; but as yet its darkness remains unvisited and unviolated. So far as could be ascertained through such a brief and partial inspection of the mosque, it is clear that the contents of that sacred place answer exactly to the requirements of the scriptural narrative. Unfortunately, more than this cannot be said. It is reserved for some explorer more fortunate than even the Prince of Wales to disclose the well-kept secret of the tomb of the patriarchs. (*Ibid.*) *Sarah's tomb*.—Only one European, Pierotti, an Italian architect in the service of the Sultan, has ever seen more than the floor of the upper chamber, with its six tawdry erections, placed there in accordance with a practice usual in Mahometan sepulchres. Pierotti, daringly pressing after the chief Sanon, or priest of the mosque, when he was entering the lower story on a special occasion, found the entry was by a horizontal door in the porch. First a carpet, then a grated iron door, was lifted; after which a narrow stair appeared, cut in the rock. Undeterred by blows and violence, he managed to descend this far enough to see into the lower cavern in a northern direction, and to notice sarcophagi of white stone; the true tombs of some of the illustrious dead, in striking corroboration of the statement of Josephus, that they were of fair marble, exquisitely wrought. There can be little doubt, indeed, that the remains of the three generations of patriarchs and their wives, Rachel alone excepted, still lie safely in this their venerable sepulchre. (*C. Geikie, D.D.*) *Origin of money*.—When he required this sepulchre, he offered so much money we are told—shekels of silver—and this money was weighed. This informs us that silver came so early as this period of the world to be currency. I mentioned, I think, before, that the earliest money was cattle. Hence, the Latin word *pecunia*, from which our expression pecuniary transactions is derived, comes from *pecus*, which means cattle. And it is very singular that in the Greek language every word that is used for purchase or property is a derivation from some other word denoting an animal. Thus the Greek word *ἀρνυσθαι*, which means, “to bargain,” is derived from a Greek word that means a lamb. Again, *πωλεω*, to sell, is derived from the word used for a colt. Again, the Greek word *ωνεομαι*, to profit, comes from a word signifying an ass. Again, the Greek word *προβασις*, revenue, is derived from the Greek word *προβατον*, sheep or cattle. In short, all the words in Greek and Latin that mean property transactions, buying and selling, are derived from cattle, and the earliest figures that were struck upon ancient coins were figures of cattle. A man was said to be possessed of so many thousand oxen or sheep, and when they entered into a bargain, they gave so many sheep or so many oxen to the person from whom they were purchasing. Here, for the first time, we have silver introduced as currency—that which, in fact, is still the currency of the greatest portion of the nations of the earth—gold being restricted to very few countries, as the representative of property—mainly, I believe, in this country; whereas on the continent it is,

I believe, chiefly silver. (*J. Cumming, D.D.*) *Abraham at Machpelah*.—What I wish to emphasize here is the open, manly honesty of Abraham. There was no cheapening of the price—nothing of “It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer : and when he is gone his way, then he boasteth.” Here were only civility, courtesy, and integrity. He did everything in a business way, but he had respect for others as well as for himself. He recognized that there was another hearer than the multitudes assembled at the city gate, even God Himself, and he did not choose that He should hear anything of rudeness, or selfishness, or dishonesty from his lips. Oh, how much more pleasantly business would be conducted among ourselves if we were to act in this way ! But too many of us are constantly on the watch for an advantage ! The seller’s maxim too frequently is the selfish one of the Romans, “*Caveat emptor*”—“let the buyer look out for himself.” And the buyer, on his side, is too frequently just as eagerly anxious to over-reach the seller. It is far too often “diamond cut diamond” between them. But that both are bad does not excuse either, and God is listening to both. Ah ! if we all remembered that, our stores would be different places from what they often are, and business would rise to its ancient and irreproachable renown. Faith in God—such faith as Abraham had—that is still the great necessity of life. For pureness, for integrity, for liberality, for courage, for courtesy, this is what we mainly need. It is as true to-day as when John wrote the words, “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Courtesy*.—It is related of Pope Clement XIV. (*Ganganelli*), that when he ascended the papal chair, the ambassadors of the several states represented at his court waited on him with their congratulations. When they were introduced, and bowed, he returned the compliment by bowing also ; on which the master of the ceremonies told his highness that he should not have returned their salute. “Oh, I beg your pardon,” said the good pontiff, “I have not been pope long enough to forget good manners.” *Civility*.—When old Zachariah Fox, the great merchant of Liverpool, was asked by what means he contrived to realize so large a fortune as he possessed, his reply was, “Friend, by one article alone, in which thou may’st deal too if thou pleasest—civility.” (*Moral and Religious Anecdotes.*) *Courtesy to enemies*.—After the battle of Poitiers, in which the Black Prince fought and defeated the French king, the prince waited upon his captives like a menial at supper ; nor could he be persuaded to sit at the king’s table. This was quite in accordance with the chivalry of the day. (*Little’s Historical Lights.*)

Ver. 4. **I am a stranger and a sojourner among you.**—*Strangers in the earth*.—**I. THE EXHORTATION.** A true Christian’s life should be that of a stranger and a sojourner. 1. Such persons are at once recognized. Marks of nationality may be more or less prominent. Sometimes the foreigner wears a strange costume, and speaks a strange language ; and sometimes these things are studiously avoided ; he assumes our dress, converses in our dialect ; nevertheless, there is always something about him which bespeaks “the sojourner.” And so should it be with the Christian. 2. These peculiarities will be observable in all the common business of life. Not, indeed, in any disregard of useful industries and occupations. A wise foreigner, passing through a strange country, will make the best use of his time, mingling with its inhabitants, studying its institutions, observing its manners and customs, examining minutely its improvements in science and art, perhaps investing largely in its agricultural implements, and mechanical machinery, and scientific apparatus, and many of its products and fabrics, ornamental and useful. He may for the time appear, more even than native citizens, attentive to and engrossed by such matters ; nevertheless, every man who deals with him perceives that his interest in them is that of a sojourner, who examines and purchases with a view to some use or enjoyment in his own distant land. Just so should it be with the Christian. 3. These marks of a foreigner will be manifest in all the pleasures of life. 4. A foreigner may be known by the opinions he forms and expresses of all things that surround him. Many such things, which to us, through custom and familiarity, seem proper and consistent and natural, will often strike him strangely. This point is finely illustrated in Oliver Goldsmith’s “*Citizen of the World.*” **II. AS A CONSOLATION.** If we are “strangers and sojourners on earth,” then—1. Our better portion and grander heritage and home are in heaven. Like the patriarchs, we should “look for a city whose maker is God !” and, like the apostles, should rejoice to think that presently we shall be “absent from the body and present with the Lord.” 2. Strangers and foreigners think ever and most tenderly of their distant native lands.

Of the dear doors that will open, and the loved voices that will welcome them, when, having accomplished the ends of their brief sojourn in those stranger-scenes, they cross the ocean, and cast anchor in distant harbours, and go ashore to their own cities. And herein they should be our models. Good as Christian life may be on the earth, yet there are better things in heaven. (*The Preacher's Monthly.*) *The believer and the world; or, Abraham the stranger and sojourner*:—We shall attempt the task of analysing the relations which Abraham sustained to his heathen neighbours. We perceive at once that they were those of entire friendliness, but of absolute separation. We shall follow, therefore, this simple division of the subject of this chapter. I. HIS FRIENDLINESS. Mark you, not his "friendship." Let it not be implied that there was any agreement of his principles with theirs, any community of interests between them, or any sympathy in character. He was indeed their friend, but he was not their fellow, and in his friendship there was no fellowship whatsoever. Their life was abhorrent to him. Their practices were such as gave him the greatest pain. The neighbours of Abraham were cruel, covetous, and licentious beyond the very conception of the vast majority who live in Christian lands to-day. But Abraham never ceased to be on friendly terms with them. He never manifested towards them an amicable disposition, treated them with noticeable courtesy and did them signal favours. But Abraham always kept the peace, and never made an enemy among them all. Some of the stories are exceedingly beautiful, as illustrating the existing friendliness. Look, for example, at that of the covenant between Abimelech and Abraham. The feelings which neighbouring chiefs entertained toward Abraham is nowhere better shown than at the time of the sack of Sodom and the capture of Lot and his family. But this was not all. His magnanimity took a higher form and his friendliness was of nobler nature than could possibly have been displayed in any affair of temporal character. Those heathen lay upon his heart. No one ever pleaded for guilty men as Abraham did—save only their Divine Saviour. A praying friend is the best friend, and such was Abraham! II. Is it possible, then, for one who shows such friendliness to the ungodly, to be also ABSOLUTELY SEPARATE from them? Yes, Abraham made it plain: so plain that it was clear, not only in his own secret soul—as is so often the case; but clear also to all among whom he sojourned. They would have been glad to have had him identify himself with them. But he would not do so. Nearly seventy years he lived among them; but he was not of them. He was a "confederate" only, never a "compatriot"; a sojourner, never a citizen. As his separation from these sinners is the important thing for us to study, note the following particulars wherein it was manifested. Beginning with the simpler, observe that it appeared—1. In the food which he ate. A trifling thing, you say, but nothing is trifling whereby the holy is set apart from the unholy. Leaven is produced by fermentation, and fermentation is a species of corruption. Therefore Abraham would have none of it. So, when the three angels appeared to him as he sat in his tent door (Gen. xviii. 1-5) he was ready to entertain them, and offered at once to "fetch them a morsel of bread" for their "comfort." Ah! it is worth our while to remember that in just such trifles there is a vast difference between the clean and the unclean. As some one has so wisely said, it is by trifles that we reach perfection, and perfection is no trifle. 2. In his dwelling. It was a tent, which could be easily moved from place to place. Had Abraham ever built a house, the whole meaning of his outward life would have been destroyed. It would have indicated that he had come to stay, and have rendered ridiculous his declaration, "I am a sojourner with you." 3. In his private business. His avocation was in keeping with his mission, and his covenant relations to his God. He did not mingle with the ungodly multitudes. The cities, with the glare and glitter of their iniquitous life, had no attraction for him. Lot became covetous of their wealth, ambitious for their preferment, and settled in Sodom; but Lot was not a party to the everlasting covenant—not a "church-member." 4. In his business transactions. He must needs have dealings with men of the world; but he so dealt with them as to emphasize his separateness. He became rich, but he never manifested any undue haste to be rich, nor took any "short cut" to fortune. Observe several illustrations. What a noble spirit he manifested in the dissolution of the partnership existing between himself and Lot. But his principles are more plain, if possible, in his transaction with Ephron, the Hittite (Gen. xxiii.). The custom of the country was not the law of his life. He was the only man in all the land who conducted his business in this way. 5. Once more: his separation from the world appears in his conquest of the world. Though Abraham was a man of peace, as we have seen, yet it seems most

appropriate that once, at least, in his long life, he should have exhibited his peculiar power over the men and agencies of this world. It was spiritual power for physical ends—something of which the world as yet knows little. Chedorlamer and his allies had sacked Sodom, and were hastening away with the spoils and captives. (*D. R. Breed, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XXIV.

VERS. 1-9. *Thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell : but thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac.*—*Abraham's provision for the marriage of his son*:—I. HUMAN PRUDENCE. 1. He accepts the fact that his time for making such a provision is short (ver. 1). 2. He is careful about the family from whence his son's wife is to spring (ver. 3). 3. He relies upon human faithfulness. II. RELIGIOUS FAITH. 1. He gratefully recognizes the hand of God in all his past life (ver. 1). 2. He recognizes the supreme control of God over all things. 3. He acts upon the known will of God. 4. While he trusts in human faithfulness, he recognizes the importance of binding men by a sense of religious fear and duty (vers. 3, 9). (*T. H. Leale.*) *Isaac's marriage*:—I. THE SELECTION OF THE BRIDE. Abraham gave this command—1. Because the Canaanites differed from Isaac in their taste. They were steeped in vile sins and disgusting depravity. 2. Because a bad influence might be exerted on Isaac's mind. 3. Because the Canaanites were to be destroyed. II. THE MEANS EMPLOYED TO ENSURE SUCCESS. 1. Human instrumentality. 2. Trust in God. 3. Self-renunciation. III. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH THIS MARRIAGE WAS CONSUMMATED. 1. In a modest spirit (ver. 65). 2. In a confident spirit (ver. 58). 3. In a loving spirit (ver. 67). (*Homilist.*) *How Isaac got his wife*:—I. THE CAREFUL FATHER. 1. Abraham's godliness (ver. 3). 2. Abraham's steadfast faith in God's promises and God's providence (vers. 7, 8). 3. Abraham's prudent precautions. II. THE PRAYERFUL SERVANT. 1. His prayer. 2. His patience. 3. His praise, 4. His prudence. III. THE WISHED-FOR WIFE. 1. Her beauty. 2. Her graciousness. 3. Her energy. 4. Her resoluteness. IV. THE ISSUE. 1. What Abraham desired. 2. What Eliezer prayed for. 3. What Isaac wanted. (*W. S. Smith, B.D.*) *Abraham's conduct in this matter*:—In this domestic concern of Abraham we see several of the most prominent features of his character. 1. His decided aversion to idolatry (ver. 3). Had Abraham then contracted a prejudice against his neighbours? This does not appear by what occurred between them in the last chapter. He does not complain of their treatment of him, but of his God. He has no objection to an exchange of civilities with them; but to take their daughters in marriage was a sure way to corrupt his own family. The great design of God in giving the land to Abraham's posterity was the eventual overthrow of idolatry, and the establishment of His true worship on earth. To what purpose, then, was he called from amongst Chaldean idolaters, if his son join affinity with those of Canaan? 2. His godliness. There does not appear in all this concern the least taint of worldly policy, or any of those motives which usually govern men in the settlement of their children. No mention is made of riches, or honours, or natural accomplishments; but merely of what related to God. Let not the woman be a daughter of Canaan, but of the family of Nahor, who had forsaken Chaldean idolatry, and with Milcah his wife had settled in Haran, and who was a worshipper of the true God. 3. His faith and obedience. The servant being about to bind himself by oath, is tenderly concerned lest he should engage in more than he should be able to accomplish. "Peradventure," saith he, "the woman will not follow me into this land: must I needs bring thy son again into the land whence thou camest?" No; as Isaac must not marry a daughter of Canaan, neither must he leave Canaan to humour a daughter of Haran; for though Canaan's daughters are to be shunned, yet Canaan itself is to be chosen as the Lord's inheritance bestowed on the promised seed. Nor do these supposed difficulties at all deter Abraham; "The Lord God of heaven," saith he, "who took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and who spake unto me, and sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land, He shall send His angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence." (*A. Fuller.*) *A worthy servant*:—Melancthon s

friends were astonished at his liberality, and wondered how, with his small means, he could afford to give so much in charity. It is said to have been principally owing to the care and good management of an excellent and faithful servant named John, a native of Sweden. The whole duty of provisioning the family was entrusted to this domestic, whose care, assiduity, and prudence amply justified the unbounded confidence reposed in him. He made the concerns of the family his own, avoiding all needless expenditure, and watching with a jealous eye his master's property. He was also the first instructor of the children during their infancy. John grew old in his master's service, and expired in his house amidst the affectionate regrets of the whole family. Melancthon invited the students of the university to attend the funeral of his faithful servant, delivered an oration over his grave, and composed a Latin epitaph for his tombstone.

A sympathetic servant :—They that are in power should be extremely cautious to commit the execution of their plans, not only to those who are able, but to those who are willing. As servants and instruments it is their duty to do their best, but their employers are never so sure of them as when their duty is also their pleasure. To commit the execution of a purpose to one who disapproves of the plan of it is to employ but one-third of the man; his heart and his head are against you, you have commanded only his hands. (*Colton.*) *A marriage contracted in the Lord* :—I. Abraham, in this matter, is evidently guided by a higher wisdom than his own; although he is left apparently to consult and act for himself. Both Abraham and his servant regard the transaction in which they are now engaged as essentially connected with the covenant of which Isaac, or rather Isaac's seed, was to be the heir. They look upon the arrangement of this marriage as an important step in the way of the fulfilment of the covenant. And hence, by an appeal to the covenant and to its seal, they hallow it. II. Such being the spirit in which this commission is given by the aged patriarch, and undertaken by his confidential servant—the execution of it is in entire harmony with its commencement. The preparation for the journey is simple; the execution of it is safe. He forms his plan of conduct—the most expedient and most likely to be successful that could well be devised. He spreads it out before God. And he humbly seeks Divine countenance and co-operation. III. It is a striking and singular thing that now presents itself. The incident at the well, &c. IV. The preliminaries of this affair having passed off so auspiciously—so manifestly, as all the parties concerned acknowledge, under the immediate and supernatural providence of God—the negotiation proceeds happily to its issue, and the marriage-treaty is simply and satisfactorily concluded. V. Thus, as to all that is essential to it, the treaty of marriage is fully ratified, according to all the usages of Eastern hospitality, and in a sense, too, with all the munificence of princely state. It is now merely a question of time and circumstance—as to when and how the treaty is to be carried out. VI. And now the strange embassy is well ended. The journey back to Canaan is without adventure or interruption. The caravan, with its attendant camels and bands of servants, is drawing near to the place where Abraham's tents are pitched. What tumultuous thoughts are filling the bosom of the young stranger! Her venerable friend is not unmoved himself. The first glimpse of his master's encampment, in the distance afar off, stirs his soul to its warmest depths. He has right joyous news to impart to the aged pilgrim; he has a gracious daughter to present to him. And that daughter—may she not well be agitated as she approaches the unknown scene of the great crisis of her life, in profoundest darkness as to what the colour of that life is to be? What a meeting on that calm summer's night! It is faith meeting faith—faith venturesome and bold, meeting faith meditative and meek! (*R. S. Candlish, D.D.*) *A bride for the heir* :—On the mother's funeral there followed, after an interval, the wedding of her son. The sequence is according to nature. As one generation goes, the next succeeds; and life is made up of just such contrasts. There was no unseemly haste. With that leisurely disregard for time which characterized the age, three whole years were given to mourning. A connection can be traced, notwithstanding, between the funeral and the marriage. For one thing, the loss of his wife must have warned Abraham of the passing away of his own generation, and recalled him to the duty of providing for the permanence of the chosen line. Already Isaac was verging on the age of forty; yet he does not appear of his own accord to have contemplated marriage or taken any steps towards it. His placid and inactive temper seemed likely to cling to memories of the past rather than provide for the future. One can well believe how tender must have been Sarah's affection for a son long waited for, divinely bestowed, and worthy of her love. With not less warmth did the son

return his mother's fondness. As the months grew into years, his grief for her loss seems to have grown more settled. There came to be some risk of its sapping the healthy vitality of his manhood. For Isaac's own sake, it was time to rouse him by a fresh interest, and fill up the blank over which he was disposed to brood. (*J. O. Dykes, D.D.*)

Vers. 10-14. And the servant . . . departed.—*The embassy of Abraham's servant*:—I. HE USES ALL POSSIBLE HUMAN MEANS OF SUCCESS. II. HE EXPECTS DIVINE HELP. 1. His prayer to God for success (ver. 12). 2. Prayer for special Divine guidance (ver. 13, 14). 3. Prayer for what was good in itself. (1) He looks for the best qualities in the bride. She was to be amiable, modest, kind—all qualities of the heart, and without which all other endowments were vain. (2) He desires the Divine confirmation of his choice. (*T. H. Leale.*) *The mission of Abraham's servant*:—I. THE MISSION. 1. This delicate mission was delegated to a servant, because Isaac was too inexperienced to go himself; but the choice was left to God. 2. Observe the touching confidence between master and servant. 3. The servant was enjoined by oath. Allowable in Judaism; but Christ says, "Swear not at all." The word of a Christian is to be so true that no oath could add to its security. II. THE DISCHARGE OF THE MISSION. 1. The servant's expectation of Divine help. 2. The principle on which the selection was made. The qualities required were amiability, sincerity, modesty. III. REBEKAH'S ARRIVAL. 1. She found Isaac engaged in prayer and meditation; two things from which we have sadly fallen. 2. As soon as Rebekah knew her husband was coming, she veiled herself. And this, brethren, is what we so much want; I know it to be the bane of domestic life, the want of modesty and delicacy; without Rebekah's veil affection becomes alienated, and often turns to hatred; love, to be constant, must be kept pure. (*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*) *Eliezer's mission, journey, and suit*:—I. ELIEZER'S MISSION. 1. Representative. 2. Delicate. 3. Important. 4. Successful. II. ELIEZER'S JOURNEY. 1. His company consisted of the men who went with him, and the ten camels laden with presents, &c. The ten camels were intended, doubtless, not only to express the circumstances and wealth of his master, but also to convey the bride and her personal possessions to her husband. The men needful to look after the camels, and also to protect Eliezer and the presents. 2. His destination. Many days' journey across a wilderness inhabited by warlike tribes, to the city of Nahor. Great skill required in making a safe journey. 3. His arrival. Rests outside the town, where was a well (11). His reliance on God. Here he offered a prayer (12-14). God heard the prayer and conducted to the spot a damsel who in all things fulfilled Abraham's desire (4) and his own wish (14). III. ELIEZER'S SUIT. 1. The approach of Rebekah. Her coming providentially ordered in answer to prayer. Though beautiful (16), she seems not to have been vain. And whatever the circumstances of her family, she conformed to the primitive habits of the people. Went to draw water for household purposes. 2. The request of Eliezer. Putting her to the test. Was the sign to be fulfilled by her? She cheerfully complied. Told the story of her kindred. 3. The presents. Such as a bride might expect to receive. Her acceptance of them promised a favourable compliance with the suit. 4. Eliezer's gratitude to God. He worshipped (26). **Learn**: 1. Faithful servants a great blessing in households. 2. All undertakings should be conducted in the fear of God. 3. God gives "journeying mercies" to the faithful. 4. God is to be praised for all our successes. (*J. C. Gray.*) **Lessons**:—1. Faithfulness in making vows will be diligent in the performing them. 2. Prudence will teach men to suit provisions unto undertakings (ver 10). 3. Providence makes stops to creatures where it hath more to discover to them. 4. It is better staying in the field by a little water with God, than to go into cities without Him. 5. Rest for man and beast is but reasonable after labour and travel. 6. Honest labours become the greatest ladies even in household affairs; it was an honour among the saints of old (ver. 11). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Good speed for the day*:—Matthew Henry wrote: "I forgot, when I began my work to-day, explicitly and expressly to seek help from God, and the chariot-wheels have driven heavily. God forgive my omissions, and keep me in the way of duty." **I pray Thee send me good speed.**—*The prayer of Abraham's servant beside the well at Nahor*:—We have here—I. PRAYER IN ITS ESSENTIAL NATURE. II. PRAYER IN ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE. III. PRAYER WITH ITS NEEDFUL ASSOCIATE. He puts himself "in the way." IV. PRAYER, WITH ITS FITTING SEQUEL. Praise (ver. 27). (*J. F. Poulter, B.D.*) *An admirable prayer*:—Truly he had not lived with Abraham in vain! Observe—

1. The character under which he addresses the great Supreme: "Oh, Jehovah, God of my master Abraham." He well knew that Jehovah had entered into covenant with Abraham, and had given him exceeding great and precious promises. By approaching Him as a God in covenant, he would find matter for faith to lay hold upon; every promise to Abraham would thus furnish a plea, and turn to a good account. Surely this may direct us in our approaches to a throne of grace, to make mention of a greater than Abraham, with whom also God is in covenant, and for whose sake the greatest of all blessings may be expected. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is to us what the God of Abraham was to Eliezer; and in the name of our Redeemer we may pray and hope for everything that is great and good.

2. The limitation of the prayer to the present time: "Send me good speed this day." We may in a general way ask for grace for our whole lives; but our duty is more especially to seek direction at the time we want it. Our Lord teaches us to pray for daily bread as the day occurs.

3. The sign which he presumed to ask for; that the damsel to whom he should say so and so, and who should make such and such answers, should be the person whom the Lord had appointed for his servant Isaac. In this he might be under extraordinary influence, and his conduct therefore afford no example to us. The sign he asked, however, was such as would manifest the qualifications which he desired and expected to find in a companion who should be worthy of his master's son; namely, industry, courtesy, and kindness to strangers.

4. The faith in which the prayer was offered. He speaks all along under a full persuasion that the providence of God extended to the minutest events, to the free actions of creatures, and even to their behaviour, of which at the time they are scarcely conscious. His words are also full of humble confidence that God would direct him in a matter of so much consequence to his Church in all future ages. (*A. Fuller.*) *Lessons*:—1. In hard undertakings it is best to call in God by prayer upon man's endeavours. He helps to purpose. 2. God in His being, power, grace, and covenant with his, is to be conceived by petitioners in their address by prayer to Him. 3. Good success in events desired, depend only upon God. 4. The success of faithful servants is mercy to their masters, which they should desire. 5. It is likely to prove best when matters are committed by masters to the care of praying servants. 6. God doth indulge sometimes visible signs to be asked, to assure His favour to His own. 7. It becomes man to wait when he desires God to appear. 8. In desiring any visible sign of God's respect, God must not be limited. 9. God doth appoint and determine wives eminently, for His own specially. 10. Ingenuity and courtesy to strangers is a good guess for one to make a good wife. 11. Observation of God's mercies unto faith and prayer is the true use of His signal manifestations. So did Abraham's servant. (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *The sign sought by Abraham's servant*:—It is important to observe in what sense and to what extent this capable servant asked a sign. He did not ask for a bare, intrinsically insignificant sign. He might have done so. He might have proposed as a test, let her who stumbles on the first step of the well be the designed wife of Isaac; or, let her who comes with a certain coloured flower in her hand—or so forth. But the sign he chose was significant, because dependent on the character of the girl herself; a sign which must reveal her good-heartedness and readiness to oblige and courteous activity in the entertainment of strangers—in fact, the outstanding Eastern virtue. So that he really acted very much as Isaac himself must have done. He would make no approach to any one whose appearance repelled him; and when satisfied in this particular, he would test her disposition. And of course it was these qualities of Rebekah which afterwards caused Isaac to feel that this was the wife God had designed for him. It was not by any arbitrary sign that he or any man could come to know who was the suitable wife for him, but only by the love she aroused within him. God has given this feeling to direct choice in marriage; and where this is wanting, nothing else whatever, no matter how astoundingly providential it seems, ought to persuade a man that such and such a person is designed to be his wife. (*M. Dods, D.D.*) *A sign of duty*:—If you are at present engaged in something that is to your own conscience doubtful, and if you are not hiding this from God, but would very willingly, so far as you know your own mind, do in the matter which He pleases—if no further light is coming to you, and you feel a growing inclination to put it to God in this way: "Grant, O Lord, that something may happen by which I may know Thy mind in this matter"—this is asking from God a kind of help which He is very ready to give, often leading men to clearer views of duty by events which happen within their knowledge, and which, having no special significance to persons whose minds

are differently occupied, are yet most instructive to those who are waiting for light on some particular point. The danger is not here, but in fixing God down to the special thing which shall happen as a sign between Him and you; which, when it happens, gives no fresh light on the subject, leaves your mind still morally undecided, but only binds you, by an arbitrary bargain of your own, to follow one course rather than another. This matter that you would so summarily dispose of may be the very thread of your life which God means to test you by; this state of indecision which you would evade, God may mean to continue until your moral character grows strong enough to rise above it to the right decision. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 15-31. And it came to pass, before he had done speaking, that, behold, Rebekah came out.—*The finger of Providence in the appointment of a bride for Isaac*.—I. IN THE PROMPT AND COMPLETE ANSWER GIVEN TO HIS PRAYER. The maiden appeared on the scene which he had pictured to his mind's eye, and displayed all the qualities which he had looked for in a bride for Isaac. She was civil and courteous, open and sincere, kind, simple, and unaffected. II. IN THE CONTROL OF APPARENT ACCIDENTS. III. IN THE IMPRESSION MADE UPON THE STEWARD HIMSELF. 1. He pauses to see whether Divine Providence is still leading on (ver. 21). 2. He acts upon the favours of Providence already received (ver. 22). 3. He engages in an act of praise (vers. 26, 27). IV. IN THE RECOGNITION OF GOD BY ALL CONCERNED (vers. 27, 28, 31). (*T. H. Leale.*) *The advantages of being found in the path of duty*.—I. THE PROMISES OF GOD LEAD US TO EXPECT HIS BLESSING IN THE PATH OF DUTY. II. BY ATTENDING THE MEANS OF GRACE, WE ENJOY COMMUNION WITH THE PEOPLE OF GOD. We should attend the means of grace too. III. BECAUSE BY THIS WE SHOW TO THE WORLD OUR ATTACHMENT TO THE CAUSE OF CHRIST, AND SET THEM AN EXAMPLE FOR IMITATION. IV. ANOTHER ADVANTAGE ARISING FROM THUS "BEING IN THE WAY" IS, THAT IT LEADS US OFTEN TO INDULGE IN THE DELIGHTFUL ANTICIPATION OF ENGAGING IN THE PERFECT AND NEVER-ENDING WORSHIP OF THE REDEEMED BEFORE THE THRONE ABOVE. (*Essex Remembrancer.*) *Lessons*.—1. God sometimes answers His in the instant of prayer. 2. Providence orders motions for time and place in fitting persons for marriage according to His will. 3. The fittest wives and husbands are such who are the answer of prayer. 4. Goodness of family, honesty of calling, comeliness of person, purity of conversation, industry in labour, concur sweetly to make a good consort (vers. 15, 16). 5. After praying to God, there must be acting by man to find God's answer. 6. Humble addresses become strangers in desiring courtesies as answers from God's mercy (ver. 17). 7. Ingenuity is quick and active in doing courtesy unto strangers. 8. Much kindness sometimes is shown in giving but a little water (ver. 18). 9. Ingenuous spirits are free to do good to beasts as well as men (ver. 19). 10. It is a sweet disposition to satisfy man and beast until they be full. 11. Providence makes good the signs He gives to His to the uttermost (ver. 20). 12. Wonderful are God's providences many times in answering prayer, and so to be admired. 13. A silent and serious consideration there should be about the rare events of God's providence. 14. The knowledge of God's mind in all providences is to be laboured after for man's duty and God's glory (ver. 21). (*G. Hughes, B. D.*) *Lessons*.—1. Ingenuous spirits perform what kindness they do offer. 2. Courtesies being finished, it is time to prepare for thanks. 3. Ornaments best suit with them that are of pure minds and ingenuous conversations. 4. Gifts are not unlawful, being justly bestowed in gratefulness, and in pursuance of lawful desires (ver. 22). 5. Prudence finds out by queries such as are appointed unto marriage by God's providence. 6. Inquiry for a night's lodging may conduce under Providence to further great affairs (ver. 23). 7. Providence ordereth the desired answer concerning persons sought for to them whom God sends. 8. Answers of abundant provision God maketh unto strangers sent about His business. All suits well (vers. 24, 25). 9. Whatever answers of good men have from creatures, they should produce worship to God (ver. 26). 10. Gracious hearts bless God by praising when He blesseth them by prospering. 11. Good servants bless God for mercy and truth to their masters as for guidance to themselves. 12. Though angels minister to us, God alone must have the glory of all good events (ver. 27). 13. In such returns God speeds instruments to further on His own designs of good to His servants (ver. 28). (*Ibid.*) *Children to be brought up to all honest employments*.—The patriarchs of old were principal men and princes in their generations, yet their tender daughters were brought up in doing household business. Rebekah went, with her pitcher on her shoulders, to give drink to her father's camels; and the seven daughters of the Priest of Midian accustomed themselves to draw water

and fill the troughs to water their father's sheep; and some say—how true is uncertain—that Christ Himself wrought as a carpenter at His father's trade. Such was the harmless simplicity of those days, and such was the obedience of children, that even she that was appointed to be the mother of patriarchs, prophets, and kings, refused not to set her hand to ordinary employments. But how is the case altered in these days of ours! Our delicate damsels are ready to urge Rebekah's example for the wearing of bracelets and jewels about their necks, but they will not hear of Rebekah's carrying the pitcher upon her shoulders; they would be clothed like the lilies of the field, but they cannot endure to spin nor work at all; so that, whereas Solomon's good housewife laid her hands to the wheel, they, for want of taking pains—especially if once married—set all upon wheels, and, while they do nothing, they undo themselves and bring all to nothing. (*J. Spencer.*) *Golden trinkets for presents*:—Golden trinkets were abundantly used among most of the Asiatic nations from early times; and those which Abraham's servant offered to Rebekah (ver. 22) belong to the most common ornaments. The nose-ring, chiefly, though not exclusively, worn by men, and applied by American tribes also, is inserted in the cartilage of the nose, either in the middle or in one side; it is often of considerable size, reaches generally beneath the mouth, and not always contributes to enhance the beauty of the face. It is here stated as having the weight of a beka, which is half a shekel, or a Greek drachm. The nose-rings worn at present by the Oriental women are often of ivory, or of gold; they are hollow, to render them less inconveniently heavy, and sometimes set with jewels—mostly a ruby between two pearls. Bracelets are such favourite ornaments with Oriental ladies, that they are not only worn by them in an unusual quantity, but are promised by Mohammed among the rewards of piety. Sometimes the whole arm, from the wrist of the hand to the elbow, is covered with them; sometimes two or more are worn, one above the other; and they are not unfrequently so heavy that they almost appear to be a burden to the fair owners. Two of them are here stated to have weighed ten shekels of gold—certainly a liberal present. Men also liked to adorn their wrist or upper arm with bracelets. On the Assyrian sculptures scarcely any person of wealth or station, or even any deity, appears without them. They were generally worn on one arm, and sometimes on both. Those who were unable to purchase gold or silver bracelets, contented themselves with procuring them of copper, ivory, horn, or glass. They were not always made with great skill or taste; they had not in all cases a lock, and often consisted merely of a large broad ring, through which the wearer forced the hand. The Egyptian bracelets, however, are in many instances not without elegance; and those represented on the Assyrian monuments, or found in the excavations of Mesopotamia, are scarcely inferior to them either in taste or in costliness. (*M. M. Malisch, Ph.D.*) **Blessed be the Lord God.**—*The servant's thanksgiving*:—1. The piety of it. He does not ascribe his success to chance or fortune, but to God. Moreover, he adores God by His covenant name as the Redeemer. 2. The confidence of it. (1) Founded upon God's dealings in the past. He had never failed in His mercy and His truth to Abraham. Therefore He might be thanked for the past with that confidence which is encouraged to hope much for the future. It is safe to trust Divine mercy and truth. (2) Founded upon a consciousness of his own integrity.

Ver. 27. **I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren.**—*Home coming*:—Where did this man want to go? To "the house of his master's brethren." Then he had a master! We all have. No one is his own master. There are two great masters—Jesus and Satan. Can we serve both? No; for they work against one another. The one pulls up what the other plants, and plants what the other pulls up; and no one can serve two masters whose ways are so contrary. Which is your master? If it is not Jesus, it must be Satan. A master you must have; oh, let it be Jesus! This master has many brothers. "I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren." A rich little boy was boasting one day to a poor little boy about his great relatives, and said at last, "My uncle is a lord." "So is my brother," said the poor boy. "Your brother a lord!" said the other, scornfully; "pray, what is he called?" "He is called the Lord Jesus," was the answer. Yes; Jesus is the Brother of every one who has the same spirit, the same heart, that He has. You can be His brother, or His sister; and oh! is it not grand to think that our elder Brother is the King of earth and heaven! These brothers of Jesus have a house. "The Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren." Where is that house? It is the church.

Every church is a house of the Master's brethren; and if you are in the Lord's way, you will most surely be led there very often. Yes, but they do not stay there always. There is another, a greater house and a finer one, into which they are led by and by. It is like this: When people are invited to go to the palace and be presented to the queen, they come up from all parts of the country and from beyond the seas; but they do not go straight to the palace. No; they first take up their abode in some house in the city, and there they wait till the day comes when they are to be presented to the queen, and then they leave the house they stayed in for the time, and go into the palace and see the queen. It is the same with the Master's brethren—with the Lord's brothers; they wait first in the earthly house of God, and then, when the time comes, one after another is called to go and see the King—and the King is Jesus! They find, as Joseph's brothers found, that He is their very own Brother who has all the power! How did this man the text speaks of get to the house of his master's brethren? It was by putting himself in the way. "I being in the way." That is the great thing, to get into the way. If I want to find out the road that leads to a distant place, I look up the map, and make inquiries as to whether there is a ferry at this river or a bridge at that, and so try to find out all I can about the road. But does that bring me any nearer to the place I want to go to? No; I am just as far from it as ever. There is but one way I ever can get there, and that is by putting myself on the road and going forward! It is the same with the way to the Master's house on high. The Bible is the map, and it shows us all we need to learn about the way. But we must do something more than study the map; we must go on the way ourselves. What is the way? It is doing what the Bible tells us; it is loving Jesus, and trusting Jesus, and doing things for His sake. It is trying to look on things as Jesus would look on them, and trying to do things as Jesus would do them. That is getting on the way. The way to Jesus is trying to be like Jesus. But how did this man keep the way? You know, many get on the right road at the first, but afterwards, when they come to cross-roads, and roads that lead out of roads, they often go astray. How did this man keep the right way? Because the Lord led him! "I being in the way, the Lord led me." Yes; and when we are on the way to the house of the Master's brethren, the Lord Himself goes with us, and leads us. We may not see Him, but He sees us. How does He lead us? Oh, in a thousand different fashions! When you do wrong, is not there something inside you that tells you you have done wrong? That is the Lord trying to lead you right. It is the Lord who whispers in your heart sometimes, saying, "Do not do that!" or, "Do not go there, it is wrong!" or, "Do this!" or, "Go there, that is right!" He is then leading you. And so this man got to the house of his master's brethren; and so will you, by putting yourself in the way—the way of love to Jesus, the way of trusting Him and praying to Him. Do this, and the Lord will lead you, step by step, till He brings you to the house of many mansions. (*J. Reid Howatt.*)

Ver. 31. Come in, thou blessed of the Lord.—*Confession of Christ; or, persuasives to church fellowship.*—As Laban said "I have prepared the house," so Christ has ordained the Church and provided it with all things necessary for the refreshment, repose, and invigoration of His people. As Abraham's servant was invited to enter, so the ministers and stewards of God's word, and all the members of His Church, should bless those whom the Lord has blessed, and affectionately invite them to participate in all the privileges of the Lord's house. **II. WHO ARE THE "BLESSED OF THE LORD"?** The Lord Jesus answered our question in the very first sentences of His great sermon on the mount. "He opened His mouth and taught them, saying, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.'" The Lord also said, "Blessed are they that mourn." The Lord also said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness." These are "blessed of the Lord." **II. Let us inquire WHY THOSE WHO ARE "BLESSED OF THE LORD" SHOULD ACCEPT THE INVITATION of the Church to "come in," by personal confession of Christ.** 1. The Lord commands it (*Matt. x. 32, 33; Mark viii. 38*). 2. The Church solicits it. A Christian who never confesses Christ and who holds aloof from fellowship with the Church, might as well not exist, so far as the interests of the Church are concerned. 3. The world needs it. The stronger the Church the more potent is the influence at work for the world's good. 4. Your own spiritual welfare requires it. The value of association is recognized in other things. And thus church fellowship is useful in strengthening the convictions of those who share in a common faith and love towards Christ. An additional safeguard is thus furnished in seasons of temptation. **III. Let us now**

examine some of the excuses adduced by those who, though "blessed of the Lord," yet "stand without." Some are ashamed of Christ, and shrink from the ridicule or enmity which confession might bring upon them. But these are not "blessed of the Lord," for He says to them: "He that is ashamed of Me, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed." Some keep outside that they may be free from the restraints of membership, and have more liberty for sin, or at least for folly. Others keep outside because they resolve to postpone repentance. But why do any who really trust in Jesus and who desire to love and obey Him "stand without"? They are hindered by unscriptural obstacles, erroneous opinions, or misapplied humility. (*Newman Hall, LL.B.*) *The blessed of the Lord*.—I. WHAT IT IS THAT CONSTITUTES REAL HAPPINESS IN THE SIGHT OF GOD. It is being blessed of the Lord. II. WHO ARE THEY THAT MAY BE SAID TO BE EMPHATICALLY BLESSED? 1. They who are justified in the sight of God. 2. Those who are sanctified by the Holy Spirit. III. IN WHAT RESPECT ARE THEY BLESSED? 1. In their souls. 2. In their trials and sorrows. 3. In their mercies and prosperity. 4. In their labours. 5. In their relationship. 6. Throughout all eternity. IV. And those, in the next place, who are thus blessed of the Lord, may TEST THE REALITY of their having that benediction by what they do for, or distribute amongst others, to whom the knowledge of that blessing has long been strange. He who is most blessed of God is always the greatest blessing to those that are about him. The greatest receiver of spiritual things is always the greatest giver; and the more he gives the more he gets, till he learns, by blessed and practical experience, "it is more blessed to give than to receive." (*J. Cumming, D.D.*)

Vers. 32-49. *Led me in the right way to take my master's brother's daughter unto his son.*—*The marriage treaty*.—I. ITS RELIGIOUS ELEMENT. 1. The sense of instant duty. 2. A recognition of God's gracious dealings. 3. A solemn sense of responsibility. (1) To man. (2) To God. II. ITS ECONOMIC ELEMENT. The steward gives an account of Abraham's wealth and position (ver. 35). He knew that the parents of this well-bred damsel would never consent to give their daughter to a man of mean circumstances and living one hundred miles away, nor to one of ignoble or degraded family. He takes care, therefore, to state that his master is rich, and that the bride would have a suitable home and congenial society. Still, with that pious feeling which marked him hitherto, he takes equal care to note that the riches of his master were righteously gotten. "The Lord hath blessed my master greatly" (ver. 35). He also gave suitable presents (ver. 47). He treats her as one who is to enter such a distinguished family. In all this transaction the religious and the economic elements are mixed in due proportion. The men who most believed in the supernatural, and who had most abundant witness of it, were the men who used the most care in the employment of common prudence and skill. This man does not blindly rely upon miracles alone, but uses human means and proprieties to their proper extent and trusts for the blessing of God. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Divine guidance*.—I. DIVINE GUIDANCE. God's gracious way of saving sinners is a "right way." II. THE IMMUTABLE CHARACTER OF THE GUIDE. III. THE DEVOTION OF THE GUIDED MAN. (*J. Irons.*) *Lessons*.—1. Fidelity makes servants own and honour their masters in performing their trust, especially in the Church (ver. 34). 2. Pious souls know and acknowledge God to be the only author of the prosperity of His servants. 3. Prosperity of believers is God's blessing. This maketh rich and adds no sorrow (Prov. x. 22). 4. God is not strained towards His in outward things, when they are good for them. 5. Greatness of estate and honour sometimes God uniteth unto godliness. So it was here with Abraham (ver. 35). 6. God's miracles should be related when they make to His praise, and His people's good. So doth he. 7. The heir of promise may be the heir of all things here below. So Isaac. So eminently Christ was. 8. It is but rational in seeking marriage to declare the state in measure which God hath given (ver. 36). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*)

Ver. 55. *Abide with us a few days.*—*Delay is dangerous*.—We shall not have anything more to do with Laban to-night, than to use his desire to retain his good sister Rebekah as an illustration of the way in which this wicked world endeavours to meet the invitations of the gospel, by trying to retain the awakened sinner a little longer in its grasp. Satan's last counsel to his servants seems to have been, "Do not openly oppose the gospel; give way to it, but suggest delay." I. I want to draw your attention, first of all, to THE WORLD'S PRETEXT FOR THIS DELAY. I stand knocking to-night at the world's door, and I say, "There is a young heart here I

want for Christ"; the world replies, "All right, you shall have it one of these days, but there is time enough yet." I say of another, "Here is a man whose strength and vigour I want for the Saviour." "All right," says the world, "do not be in such a fever about it; we are all agreed with you; we all think as you do that religion is important, but wait awhile, put it off, take time, tarry a little; there is no cause for all this hurry and this fuss." Then the world says, "O stop a little longer; we should like these young people to know something about life." Well, but, base world, what dost thou mean by that? What hast thou to do with life? We, too, want the young people to know something about life: but what is life? Why true life is to be found only in the followers of Christ, in Whom is life. "Ah! then," says the world, putting on its best smiles, "it is all very well for you to talk, but we do not want our young people to give up all their pleasure." And what hast thou to do with pleasure, thou painted Jezebel? what hast thou to do with happiness, false deluder of souls? II. Shall I tell you now WHAT IS THE DRIFT OF ALL THIS WAITING? Ten days did not seem too long; but they might have been ten days too late. To be too late for ever; yea, one minute too late is an eternity too late! Remember that if thou hast missed of Christ by but the ticking of a clock, thou hast missed of Christ for ever; so that minutes and ticks of clocks may be invested with a very solemn power, if we come to look at them in that light. But what the world means is just this, "Ah!" says Madam Bubble, "here is a young person impressed—if we laugh at him it will deepen the impression; but we will say to him, 'Come, come; let the impression go for a little while; this is not the fit time; when you have a more convenient season, you can bring it on again.'" Moreover, the world says, "Well, if they do go at last, yet we will exact from them as long a time of service as we can." III. Thirdly, having exposed the pretenses of the world, and tried to show its cruel designs, OUR REAL OBJECT IS TO HAVE OUR HEARERS SAVED, AND TO HAVE THEM SAVED NOW. There were three reasons why Abraham's servant wished Rebekah to go with him at once, and these move me to desire your conversion to-night. 1. First, he desired it for his master's sake. He knew that Isaac was looking forward to the happy day when he should be married to his chosen bride. And oh! the heart of Jesus is longing after sinners. 2. Abraham's servant, too, desired it for his own sake, because he was a faithful steward, and wanted to do his business well. And how we desire your conversion for our sake! It will make us so happy! There is no bliss that can come to the soul of the Christian minister like the bliss of knowing that he has been made the means of bringing some to Christ. 3. But the principal reason that the man wished it was for Rebekah's sake. He knew that Isaac would make a good husband to her. And we know that Jesus Christ will make a blessed husband to your souls. He will enrich you with all the treasure of His grace. IV. Now, lastly, WE BELIEVE THAT THIS DESIRE OF OURS IS A VERY REASONABLE ONE, and we think we can prove it without the necessity of entering upon a long argument. It is a snowy day, and some boys have put a few bricks together; they have made a sort of square box of them, and have set one up on edge on a piece of stick, and have scattered under it a few crumbs. Here comes a robin, and he picks up a crumb or two, and while he is picking, down comes the brick! "I did not wait long," says the robin, "but I am caught! I did not wait long, but I cannot get out! I did not wait long, but I have lost my liberty! I did not wait long, but it may be I shall lose my life!" Ah! little robin, thou shalt be a preacher to some here. They have gone a little intosin, and they are inclined to-night to wait a little while. Take care that this is not your song one of these days, "I did not wait long, but the devil caught me in his trap! I did not wait long, but I waited too long! I did not wait long, but I lost my soul for ever!" God grant that this may not be your lot. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 56. *Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way.*—*The Christian's hindrances*.:—The Lord hath prospered our way. He has provided means for our return to Him. He has awakened us from entire carelessness. He has bestowed upon us thus far all the comfort and peace which we have received, and enabled us to do all that we have done for Him. Our past prosperity is an unceasing encouragement to future effort, and may be employed as an answer to every hindrance. Under this view would I adopt the expression of our text. I. It is the entreaty of an awakened sinner returning to the Lord. "Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way." A new and living way of salvation invites him. But there are many adversaries. The worldly and careless around him scoff at his

fears, and deride his apprehensions. They know not the terrors of an awakened conscience, and they can mock when fear cometh. "Hinder me not," the persecuted penitent replies, "I have seen enough of worldly cheerfulness and mirth. I have seen that the end of that laughter is bitterness. The sorrows of a sinner's death-bed I will not try. The portion of the worldly shall not be mine. He offers me forgiveness, and I will embrace it." II. The words of our text may be the prayer of the new convert to Christ—the Christian who has just experienced the new creating grace of God; "hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way." The character of God appears to him full of glory, and shining in love. The great salvation which He has offered, seems worthy of all acceptance. His whole heart is arrested and occupied with the objects and excitements of this first love. But there are many hindrances surrounding this infantile state of grace. At one time he meets a sneer from some former companion in folly, at another, a false and unkind construction of the motives by which he is governed in his new determinations. The merely nominal Christian, the cold and carnally minded professor, hates him, as one who assumes a higher standard of religious character than he is pleased with. These various outward trials are severe. III. But hindrances do not disappear, even when men become old in grace. Our text may, therefore, be the petition of the Christian who is established in the faith; "hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way." Through the whole period of a mortal life, he not only dwells in a land of enemies, but drags about with himself a weight which is painfully retarding. There arises often around him a cloud of darkness, which hides all his evidences of grace, and conceals the blessed witness which God has given him within himself. Momentary feelings of unbelief intrude themselves into his breast. Occasional coldness and torpidity spreads itself through the members of his spiritual man, threatening permanent paralysis and death. He obtains larger conceptions of the depravity of his own heart; and his soul often sickens over the views which are presented to him, as the Spirit of God carries him still farther into its recesses, and exposes to his observation greater abominations than he has seen before. Then does he exclaim in the language of our text, "Hinder me not, for the Lord hath prospered my way." "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy, though I fall, yet shall I rise again; and though I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me. Sin has been pardoned; God has received, and is able to keep me. I have entered into a covenant with Him, from which I will never shrink, to walk before Him, and to be His for ever." IV. Lastly, I may consider this as the demand of the faithful minister of the Gospel. "Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way." This joy would be vastly increased were there none disposed to hinder his way, and to retard the progress of the word of God. (S. H. Tyng, D.D.)

Ver. 58. They called Rebekah and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go.—*The success of the marriage treaty*:—I. DUE TO THE MANIFEST INTERPOSITION OF PROVIDENCE (ver. 50). II. ACKNOWLEDGED BY SUITABLE ACTS OF DEVOTION. 1. By acts of worship (ver. 52). 2. By faith and ready obedience (vers. 55, 58). 3. By human benedictions (ver. 60). III. FOLLOWED BY A GRATEFUL SENSE OF RELIEF (ver. 54). It is the mark of a pious mind when we esteem the commandments of God more than our necessary food. (T. H. Leale.) *The soul's answer to the Divine summons*:—I. A LESSON TO THOSE WHO CARRY THE SUMMONS OF GOD. 1. Let us saturate our work with prayer. 2. We must also wait upon God for direction. 3. Let us say much in praise of our Master. II. THE SUMMONS ITSELF. Such a call as came to Rebekah is sent to every soul that hears the Gospel. In yonder azure depths lives the great Father God. He has one Son, His only-begotten and well-beloved. He has resolved to choose from amongst men those who as one Church shall constitute His bride for ever. He sends this call to you, not because you are worthy, or wealthy, or beautiful; but because He has so willed in the counsels of His own heart; and He longs that you shall be willing to detach yourself from all that you hold dear. III. HOW TO DEAL WITH THIS SUMMONS. 1. We must find room for it. 2. We must bear witness. 3. We must not procrastinate, or confer with flesh and blood. (F. B. Meyer, B.A.) *Rebekah*:—I. HER HOME LIFE. 1. She was fair, chaste, and modest. 2. She was industrious, courteous, and kind. 3. She was deferential and obedient. II. HER MARRIAGE. 1. Arranged for by proxy, according to Oriental custom. 2. This match was made in heaven. It was pre-ordained—love at first sight: love all through her life. III. HER MISTAKES—SINS. 1. She consents to

pass for Isaac's sister at the court of Gerar. 2. She is partial to Jacob. 3. She teaches Jacob how to deceive. 4. By the use of deception she secures the blessing for her favourite son. IV. HER SORROW. 1. A divided household—the result of favouritism. 2. Esau's marriage with two Canaanitish women. 3. The separation from Jacob : for she never saw him again after his flight to Mesopotamia. V. REFLECTIONS. 1. The choice of a wife is an appropriate subject of prayer, and worthy of grave deliberation. 2. Is it right for parents to be partial to their children? (*Lewis O. Thompson.*) *Lessons*:—1. God's favour being manifested in His providences, natural and comfortable refreshings may be used. 2. After refreshings needful, return to duty and just employments is befitting God's servants. 3. Sedulity and speed concern faithful servants in their trust committed by their masters to them (ver. 54). 4. Natural affection will not easily part with near and dear relations (ver. 55). 5. God's call, if apparent, is reason sufficient to take of the delays of natural desire. 6. Nothing but haste with good speed will content faithful servants entrusted (ver. 56). 7. Answers from creatures may help to know God's mind, and so far we are to be consulted (ver. 5, "Call the damsel and know," &c.). 8. Children's consent as well as parents' must be had in marriage. 9. God sometimes giveth in answers of His will by moving the hearts of creatures (ver. 58). 10. Fear of God in any measure will yield to God's will when so revealed. 11. Nearest relations must part to give way to the union of marriage. 12. Such dismission of relations should be suitable to the conditions of men (ver. 59). 13. The fear of God will not send away relations from a family without a blessing. 14. Fruitfulness of the womb is a great blessing from God on His people. 15. Tower and prevalency of the Church's seed over all enemies is a sweet blessing. 16. All this, even to the vanquishing of the gates of hell, is desirable by God's people (ver. 60). 17. Marriage should not be yielded without a blessing, especially in the Church. "And they blessed her and sent her away." (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *A love story*:—I. AN EXCELLENT SERVANT. In the early days of the Jews, when a servant loved his master, he sometimes said to him, "I will not leave thee : I will serve thee all my days." The master then placed the man-servant against his door-post, and bored his ear through with an awl, as a token that he should serve him for ever. We are not told whether or not Abraham's servant had passed through this ceremony, but it is certain that he was one of the most faithful of servants. Now, beloved brethren, you have not to undergo any outward ceremony in order to become a servant of God. There are some who believe that partaking of the Lord's Supper, and being baptized, are processes by which we become the Lord's people. On the contrary, when we become His servants, we then, because we are servants, do the Lord's will in these two matters. Then, if you would become a servant of God, the first process must be an inward desire. "My child, give Me thine heart," saith the Lord. The Christian is a servant of the Lord, and, as such, gives up himself, body, spirit, and soul, to do the will of his Heavenly Father. He is a consecrated vessel filled with the Spirit of the Almighty. 1. This servant of Abraham was a trusted one. All that his master had was placed in his keeping. Beloved servants of the Lord, what a blessing! what a privilege! what an enjoyment! to possess the fulness of God! Seek it; pray for it; believe it; and God shall pour His fulness into your being. Then, surely your lives, like the angels of heaven, shall be shrines for the indwelling of love. The providence of God sent across my path some years ago a thief who had been in prison above twenty times, and who had been twice in penal servitude. I could find no work for him here, because he was well known, and therefore I sent him across the ocean to America, but his character followed him, and he was returned to England. At length we obtained work for him out of Manchester; and he turned out to be a faithful servant. One day the manager of the works was removing his goods to a new house, and the mistress—who did not know what the man had been—called him, saying, "John, this basket contains all our silver; will you please be very careful about it, and carry it to the new house." I said to the man, "And what did you do?" He replied "When I got outside, I looked into the basket and saw the silver shining. I lifted it up, and it felt very heavy." "Well, what did you do then?" He said, "I cried, because I was trusted." Of course, he carried it safely. Brethren, God knows the past sin of our lives, yet He takes us into His service and trusts us with human souls, bidding us to take them to the mansion in heaven. 2. The servant of Abraham was under a special vow. And are not all who are servants of God under a vow to render faithful service? A mother whose son was about to leave her to fight the battles between the Northern and Southern States of

America, was called into her bedroom on the morning of his departure. She, weeping upon his neck and kissing him, bade him farewell; and drawing from her finger a ring which she prized exceedingly, she kissed it and placed it upon his finger, saying, "Promise me, my son, that you will not touch any intoxicating liquors whilst you are away." And he, looking at the ring, on which was the motto, "Never forget," kissed his mother and made the vow. When he joined the army, he manfully resisted the temptations of his comrades; but at length enticed beyond his strength, he went with them to the canteen. Lifting the foaming liquor to his mouth, he saw his mother's ring, and his conscience smote him. He dropped the glass upon the table, and rushing out, he prayed to God to forgive him and to help him to keep his promise. On the evening of that day, when the battle was over, he was found wounded and dying with his mother's ring pressed to his lips. Brethren, you also have made a vow not only to your parent, but to your God. And if the promise made to our earthly parents has such a power for good over us, how much more the promise we have made to our Heavenly Father! Brethren, will you not keep the vow? Will you not re-resolve it? 3. Abraham's servant was a believer. "O Lord God of my master Abraham." How sweet it is when the employer can lead the employed to God! 4. Abraham's servant believed in the Lord's presence. Beloved, our Saviour is not dead. He is here. All who are the Lord's servants have the inward testimony that Jesus Christ is a Saviour nigh at hand. 5. He believed in the Lord's guidance. If we acknowledge God in all our ways, He has promised to direct our paths. In Abraham's servants, we have an example of a man who trusted God. Brethren, trust Him also. Wherever you go your Father is with you; your path may be dark; but your Father holds your hand. The chart of every day's journey is before your God, and when you stand in the sunshine of heaven you shall then see that His hand did really direct your course. Go on! 6. This servant judged his errand to be more important than himself. He would not partake of food until he had told the mission on which he was sent. Brethren, we should not consider ourselves more important than the work which Christ has given us to do. Let us pray for grace to be enabled with Paul to say, "For me to live is"—not myself—but "Christ." Our purpose is to be conformed to the image of God's dear Son, and to live in the spirit of His loving life. 7. His heart was in it. In crossing over the Atlantic Ocean once, on the second day of the voyage, an unfortunate fellow was pulled up from the hold—a "stowaway." Desiring to go to America, and being too poor to pay his passage, he hid himself on board the ship. But the captain said, "You must work out your passage now that you are here." He was set to wash the decks, and do other rough work on the ship, but I noticed the man had no heart in it; he did it because he was compelled. How different with the true sailors! When they ran up the rigging they sang out with delight, and did their work with all their heart. It did one good to hear the hearty song of the man up near the top of the mast, but the hang-dog look of the stowaway caused gloom in the midst of sunshine. Now, brethren, do your work for Christ with all your heart; put your soul into it; do it with enthusiasm. It is the earnest men only who succeed in temporal things; and it is only God's earnest ones who bring in a plentiful harvest to the heavenly barn. Servants of God, awake! awake! When you speak to people about their souls, let them see that you mean it. II. AN IMPORTANT QUESTION. Rebekah was asked, "Will you go with this man?" And now I ask you, will you come with us to heaven? God gives every one of us at some period of our lives an opportunity of becoming His servants. It is said that "time and tide come to every man once in his life." I feel persuaded that salvation's tide has come to your very heart, and that every one of you may enter Christ's lifeboat and sail with us to paradise. This is your opportunity. Do not reject it. III. THE LOVING ANSWER. Will you not say, as did Rebekah to Abraham's servant, "I will go." Have you ever thought when you have read this chapter of the meeting? Isaac was walking in the field at eventide, and whilst he meditated, he lifted up his eyes and beheld the camels on their return, and noticed that all of them carried burdens. His heart filled with joy, and he said, "She is come." Will you come? Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world! Trust Him. (*W. Birch.*) *Isaac's marriage*:—I. THE DOMESTIC COUNCIL. 1. The family of Bethuel. Evening. Work of the day nearly over. The daughter gone to the well. Her long delay. Growing wonder. Rebekah's return. Shows the presents, and relates the story to her mother. Laban, hearing the tale and seeing the jewels, goes out to the well (ver. 29) and invites Eliezer to come into the house (ver. 31). 2.

Eastern hospitality. Provision for man and beast. 3. The council. (1) Eliezer states his mission (vers. 33-41). (2) States how he wished for a sign, and had it fulfilled in Rebekah (vers. 43-47). (3) Intimates that God is in this matter (vers. 42-48). (4) Bethuel and Laban reply. They see the hand of God (ver. 50), and give their consent (ver. 51). (5) Eliezer again acknowledges the good hand of the Lord (ver. 52), and produces more presents. 4. This council conducted with frankness and piety on the one hand, and a due respect for the will of God on the other. II. THE EARLY DEPARTURE. 1. Eliezer having performed his mission, is anxious to return. Thinks of his master, aged and anxious. Life uncertain. 2. Laban and her mother plead for delay. Suggestive of the lovable character of Rebekah, and her value in the household. Perhaps never more prized than now that she must go. Reminds us of the tenacity with which we cling to dear objects in the moment of separation. 3. Rebekah decides for a prompt departure. Having been a faithful daughter, she would now do her duty in her new relation. Her husband should not hear that she had been an unwilling bride. 4. She bids adieu to home scenes, in company with her nurse; and dowried with the blessing of her family. III. THE HAPPY MEETING. 1. The home of Abraham. The patriarch following his servants with his prayers. Reliant on God. 2. Isaac waits the issue of this negotiation for his marriage. 3. Goes out into the open country to meditate and pray (see marg. ver. 63). Much in the past and present and future for him to pray and think about. 4. Sees the camels and goes to meet them. 5. The well of the "living one that sees me." Happy would it be for the future life of many if their early meetings were ruled by the thoughts suggested by the name of the well near which Isaac first met Rebekah. Much sin and sorrow might be avoided. 6. Rebekah's modesty, the veil, and cordiality. Alights at once. 7. Isaac's welcome. He conducts Rebekah to the tent that had been his mother's. Learn: I. The advantage of family union in matters of domestic importance. II. The duty of consulting parents in affairs of such consequence. III. To be diligent in business, like Eliezer. IV. To have times and places for meditation and prayer. V. To remember "the Living that sees us" in all our intercourse with friends. (*J. C. Gray.*) *The chief thing to know about a suitor*:—After Mr. Philip Henry, who came to Worthembury a stranger, had been in the country for some time, his attachment to Miss Matthews, afterwards his wife, became manifest; and it was mutual. Among the other objections urged by her friends against the connection was this, that although Mr. Henry was a gentleman and a scholar, and an excellent preacher, he was quite a stranger, and they did not even know where he came from. "True," replied Miss Matthews, "but I know where he is going, and I should like to go with him." (*Bayley's Family Biblical Instructor.*)

Ver. 63. Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide.—*Meditation*:—Meditating was the same to Isaac that it is to us. Under all skies, in all times, thought has flowed in the same channel and observed the same laws. It is those who love to meditate that are most open to impressions from nature. It is the open eye before which the vision passes. Notice: I. THE MAN WHO MEDITATES. Isaac's meditations would be very different from those of a more stirring, energetic character; above all, very different from those of a mere secular man. A man's meditations are the pure outcome of what he is. The word itself is suggestive. It means to be in the midst of a matter, to have it in your very centre. Do not be afraid of losing yourself in meditation. The more you lose yourself in great themes the better. The dream is the way to reality, but let it be reality and impression and abiding results that you are seeking. The Hebrew word here rendered "meditate" means also to pray. The meditation of a devout spirit on almost anything will soon run into prayer. II. MEDITATION AND NATURE. Isaac went out to the field to meditate. The variety of nature draws us out. We all tend to make self a prison, and this leading us out of ourselves is perhaps the main benefit of nature. Nature takes down our prison walls. The twitter of a bird in a bush can emancipate us. Nature whispers of the supernatural, and the fleeting preaches the eternal. III. MEDITATION AND TIME. Isaac meditated in the evening. The evening is the darling hour of meditation. The quiet gloaming, with its glamour and mystery, its long shadows and dying light, whispers into the heart of man. Meditation is the twilight of thought. Its region lies between this world and the next, between definite ideas and dimmest yearnings. No one ever loved Christ deeply—no one ever was strong or high or pure or deep in any way without meditation. (*J. Leckie, D.D.*)

Religious meditation :—I. THE GREATNESS OF ITS OBJECTS. 1. It unfolds the volume of nature. 2. It discloses the principles and ends of the Divine government. 3. It reveals the dispensations of grace. 4. It draws aside the veil of mortality, and directs our view into a future and eternal state. II. ITS MORAL ADVANTAGES. 1. By meditation we shall acquire a competent knowledge of our own hearts. 2. It will enable us to form a just estimate of the world. 3. Meditation promotes holiness. As the architect, before he can erect an extensive edifice, must, in private, first prepare his plan; and as the philosopher, before he can enlighten the world with his discoveries by study, must first digest and arrange his system; so, before we can come forth into life as patterns of holiness, and skilful champions of the truth, we must, by meditation, have imbibed the principles of religion, and submitted our hearts to its influence. It is a practice that will produce repentance, by setting "our sins before us, our secret sins in the light of our countenance." It will humble the mind, and destroy its love to sin. It will produce fear and love towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It places the soul under the influences of the Divine Spirit, who transforms and renews it in the image of Christ. Thus changed, we shall come from retirement, as Moses from the mount, shining with the lustre of spiritual "glory and beauty." 4. Meditation leads to a union with God. "I will dwell in them, and walk in them. I and My Father will come in to him, and abide with him." But when are these words verified? Particularly in the hour of religious retirement. 5. Meditation prepares us for heaven. (*R. Watson.*)

Meditation :—I. WHAT MEDITATION IS. Before I can define it I must distinguish it. 1. There is that which we call occasional meditation, which is an act by which the soul spiritualiseth every object about which it is conversant. A gracious heart is like an alembic, it can distil useful meditations out of all things it meeteth with. Look, as it seeth all things in God, so it seeth God in all things. So small a matter as a grain of mustard-seed may yield many spiritual applications. 2. There is set and solemn meditation. Now this is of several sorts, or rather, they are but several parts of the same exercise. (1) There is a reflexive meditation, by which we wholly fall upon ourselves. This is nothing else but a solemn parley between a man and his own heart (*Psa. iv. 4.*) (2) There is a meditation, which is more direct, and that is of two sorts—(a) Dogmatical, whose object is the Word. (b) Practical, whose object is our own lives. These are the kinds of meditation. The definition may be formed thus: Meditation is that duty or exercise of religion whereby the mind is applied to the serious and solemn contemplation of spiritual things, for practical uses and purposes. I shall open the description by the parts of it. 1. It is a duty and exercise of religion. (1) That it is a duty and exercise of religion appeareth by the evidence of Scripture, where it is commanded (*Josh. i. 8.*) "This Book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night." It is made a character of a godly man (*Psa. i. 2.*) "His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law doth he meditate day and night." It is commended in the practice and example of the saints that were most famous in Scripture; Isaac in the text, Moses and David. And as it is plain by the evidence of Scripture; so by the light of nature and reason. God that is a Spirit deserveth the most pure and spiritual worship, as well as such as is performed by the body. The thoughts are the eldest and noblest offspring of the soul, and the solemn consecration of them is fit for God. (2) It is not a duty of an arbitrary concernment. It is not only a moral help that may be observed or omitted, but a necessary duty, without which all graces would languish and wither. Faith is lean and ready to starve unless it be fed with continual meditation on the promises; as David saith (*Psa. cxix. 92.*) "Unless Thy law had been my delight, I should then have perished in my affliction." Thoughts are the caterers of the soul, that purvey for faith, and fetch in food and refresh it with the comfort of the promises. Hope is low, and doth not arise to such a fulness of expectation till by meditation we take a deliberate view of our hopes and privileges (*Gen. xiii. 17.*)

II. THE NECESSITY AND PROFIT OF MEDITATION, OR MOTIVES TO PRESS TO THIS DUTY. I shall urge such as will serve also for marks; for when it is well performed, you will find these effects wrought in you. Meditation is the mother and nurse of knowledge and godliness, the great instrument in all the offices of grace; it helpeth on the work of grace upon the understanding, affections, and life, for the understanding of the doctrine of godliness, for the provoking of godly affections, and for the heavenly life. 1. In point of understanding it is of great advantage to us in the entertainment of the doctrines of religion. (1) To give us a clearer and more distinct sight of them. (2) That we may the better retain them. (3) That they

may be always more ready and present with us. 2. It is a great advantage to the work of grace upon the affections. 3. It is an advantage to the fruits of grace in the life; it maketh the heavenly life more easy, more sweet, more orderly and prudent. III. RULES TO GUIDE YOU IN THIS WEIGHTY AFFAIR OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. 1. Whatever you meditate upon must be drawn down to application. 2. Do not pry further than God hath revealed; your thoughts must be still bounded by the Word. 3. When you meditate of God you must do it with great care and reverence; His perfections are matter rather of admiration than inquiry. 4. In meditating on common things, keep in mind a spiritual purpose. God hath endowed man with a faculty to discourse, and employ his mind on earthly objects to spiritual purposes (Eccles. iii. 11). 5. Take heed of creating a snare to your souls. Some sins are catching, like fire in straw, and we cannot think of them without infection and temptation; the very thoughts may beget a sudden delight and tickling, which may pass through us like lightning, and set us all on fire (Ezek. xxiii. 19). 6. Meditate of those things especially which you have most need of. There is the greatest obligation upon the heart. The matter is not arbitrary; there you will find most help, and there the benefit will be most sensible. 7. Whatever you meditate upon, take heed of slowness. Transient thoughts leave no impression. See that you meditate but of one thing at once. 8. Come not off from holy thoughts till you find profit by them, either sweet tastes and relishes of the love of God, or high affections kindled towards God, or strong resolutions begotten in yourselves. 9. Be thankful to God when He blesseth you in meditation, or else you will find difficulty in the next. 10. Do not bridle up the free spirit by the rules of method. That which God calleth for is religion, not logic. 11. Your success in the duty is not to be measured by the multitude and subtlety of the thoughts, but the sincerity of them. 12. You must begin and end all with prayer. Duties are subservient one to another. In the beginning you must pray for a blessing on the duty, and in the end commend your souls and resolutions to God. There is no hope in your own promises, but God's.

IV. THE LETS OR HINDRANCES OF MEDITATION, TOGETHER WITH THE HELPS AND MEANS THAT MAY QUICKEN YOU TO THE PERFORMANCE OF IT. The lets may be sooner discovered than remedied. The lets and hindrances are of several sorts, some common to this with other duties, and others more peculiar to the duty of meditation. 1. I begin with the first sort, such hindrances as are common to other duties, and they are four—sloth, love of pleasure, a guilty conscience, and an unwieldy mind. How shall we do to shake off this spiritual sloth? I answer—(1) You must consider that a lazy spirit is most unfit for Christianity. The whole Christian life is carried on with much labour and diligence. (2) It is better to take pains than to suffer pains, and to be found with the cords of duty than with the chains of darkness. (3) There is nothing so hard in God's service but He hath manifested love enough to sweeten it. (4) There is no difficulty in religion wholly insuperable and too hard for an active and industrious spirit. Those that follow on after God do at length find Him to their comfort. (5) A lazy, backward heart must be urged forward with the greater importunity. 2. Another let and hindrance is love of pleasures. Men that would pass their time in mirth are unwilling to be so solemn and serious. When children's minds are set to play, it is irksome to hear of school or of their books; so when the heart is set for pleasure, it is a hard matter to bring the soul to religious performances. How shall we do to wean the soul from pleasures? (1) Consider to love pleasure is to gratify the beast in us rather than the angel. (2) Consider the sweetness of religious exercises is far better than that of carnal pleasures, as that heat is more manly that is gotten by exercise than by hovering over the fire. 3. The next general hindrance is a guilty conscience. What shall we do to remedy this? (1) Get your conscience cleansed by the hearty application of the blood of Christ. (2) There are matters comfortable that may be of excellent relief to the spirit (Heb. vi. 18; Psa. xciv. 19). 4. Another let and hindrance is unwieldiness of spirit to spiritual and heavenly duties. This our Saviour bids His disciples have a care of (Luke xxi. 34). What shall we do to help this? (1) Learn a holy moderation and sobriety in outward businesses and pleasures. As the apostle says of prayer (Eph. vi. 18), "Watching thereunto"; the same rule holds good in meditation. (2) Keep the body in a fit frame, that it may not be a clog to the soul, but a dexterous instrument. There is a sanctification of the body (1 Thess. v. 23). There are hindrances that are peculiar to the duty of meditation. I shall name but two—barrenness of thoughts and inconstancy. 1. Leanness and barrenness of thoughts.

Now to remedy this—(1) You must not give way to it, but try and use constant exercise. The more we work, the more vigorous and free is the soul for the work of God. (2) Get a good stock of sanctified knowledge. Let there be a treasure in your hearts (Matt. xiii. 52). (3) When the heart is barren, think of your own sins and corruptions, and the experiences of God to your own souls. (4) You may season and affect your mind before meditation with some part of God's Word. Reading is a good preparative, and when we have taken in food, we may exercise our depastion and digestion upon it. 2. A loose garish spirit, that is apt to skip and wander from thought to thought. There is a madness in man; his thoughts are light and feathery, tossed to and fro, and like the loose wards in a lock, only kept up whilst we are turning the key. This doth much discourage Christians, that they cannot keep up their affections and command their thoughts. How shall we help and remedy this? (1) When you go to meditate, you should exercise a command and restraint upon yourselves. This is expressed in Scripture by trussing up the loins of your minds (Luke xii. 30). (2) Pray and call in the help of God's Holy Spirit (Psa. lxxxvi. 11), "Unite my heart to fear Thy name." Lord, make my heart one. He that could stay the sun can stay the fleeting of your thoughts. (3) Dry up these swimming toys and fancies with the flame of heavenly love. Love unites the heart, and where we have a pleasure, there we can stay (Psa. cxix. 97). (4) Let the course of your lives be grave and serious. The mind is according to the course of the life. (5) Watch against the first diversion; how plausible soever it be, look upon it as an intruding that breaks the rank. (6) When you come to meditate in God's presence, do not bring the world with you; purge yourselves of all carnal affections (Ezek. xxxiii. 31), "Their heart goeth after their covetousness." Always consider this: the prevailing lust will engross the thoughts. (*T. Mantou, D.D.*) *The duty and advantage of solemn meditation*:—I shall first explain the duty, and then apply the subject. I. I AM TO SHOW WHAT MEDITATION IS. 1. A choice of some spiritual subject to meditate upon. Many meditate upon sin with delight, and so ride post to hell with little din. "He deviseth mischief upon his bed, he setteth himself in a way that is not good; he abhorreth not evil. Others employ their thoughts only in the meditation of things of the world. But he that would meditate aright must choose some spiritual subject to think upon. And it is needful we should select some one, and not abide in generals (Psa. lxxiii. 6; Song i. 4). (2) A calling in of the heart from all other objects. The mind of man is too narrow to be taken up to purpose about many things at once, especially with thoughts of divers kinds; therefore prays David, "Unite my heart to fear Thy name." (3) Employing the heart on the spiritual subject so chosen, to think upon it, study it, and seriously consider of it; to lay it before our understandings, so as to move our affections and improve our hearts. II. LET US APPLY THE SUBJECT. I exhort you to make conscience of this duty of meditation, and particularly of fixed meditation, setting yourselves as solemnly to it as to prayer and other duties. Motive 1. Consider it is the command of God. "Commune with your own heart upon your bed." "And meditate upon these things," says Paul to Timothy. Why do you perform other duties but because God commands you? Well, He that bids you do other duties, bids you do this also. 2. It is made desirable by the testimony which it hath from the practice of the people of God. 3. It is of notable use for a Christian's improvement. It much increases knowledge: "I have more understanding," says David, "than all my teachers, for Thy testimonies are my meditation." It is the way to comfort under affliction. When David's enemies plotted against him, "thy servant," says he, "did meditate in thy statutes." It makes a Christian tender in his way. "I will meditate on Thy precepts, and have respect unto Thy ways." It gives a Christian a sweet relish of the goodness of God (Psa. lxxiii. 5, 6). (*T. Boston, D.D.*) *A lost art*:—The text brings before us the lost art of meditation. Here are three things that it is very difficult to get, indeed almost impossible—solitude, leisure, and a field. Solitude which shuts out the sight and sound and thought of the busy world, how can we get that in this great Babel? And leisure, who can find that in times of rush and whirl like ours? So it comes that meditation is almost a lost art, and with it goes, and must go, all great attainment in the religious life. There are but two things that can loose a man from the world, and set him free from its tyranny and put him outside and above it—those two are meditation and sleep. Now this is what meditation does for us. It gives us freedom from the littleness of earth; it is the unfolding within us of other and greater faculties; the escape from the prison of ourselves and our circumstances that we may soar into the heavens. 1. Man can only find himself in God; and he can only

find God by meditation. A man has heights and depths and lengths and breadths which only God can reveal to him. We know how it is in the smaller round of our life. We are put into possession of ourselves by others. He who has most soul and heart is he who gives me not only most of himself, but most of myself. Charity, gratitude, faith, love, service, inspirations, do not these come from contact with those about us? We are like a musical instrument, we only know what can be got out of us when others play upon us. The clapper puts the bell in possession of itself. But God and God alone can put us in full possession of ourselves. Take, for instance, the faculty of reverence. Only by knowing God is reverence begotten. And only by meditation is it that we can know God and enter into any true relationship with Him. As I commune with Him my soul is bowed in lowliness. I may think of Him as all this without being solemnized and awed, for my thought is indeed a narrow and a shallow vessel to hold the glory of the Most High. But meditation is the way of revelation—it is the lifting of the veil that we may pass into the very Holy of Holies. So is it that God comes near to us and reveals Himself to us as our Gracious Father. 2. And briefly glance at the range of this truth—it covers everything. As a man finds himself in God, so does he find his brother. If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. 3. So again, this meditation puts a man in possession of the world. The little things of earth sink down in that Presence into their true estimate. 4. Again, meditation puts a man in possession of all the ages. The past comes up and yields him its tribute. All these great saints of old do speak comfortably to us of the faithfulness and love of our God. Take some other aspects of meditation. 1. It possesses what thought only sees. There is a well-known shop that I often pass, where the windows are filled with all manner of daintiest sweets set forth in most attractive shapes. I have seen a crowd of little children flattening their noses against the window-panes, and ragged, hungry men and women standing looking within. But out of the door with paper parcels have come tripping little children and happy men and women laden with good things, beaming and smiling, possessing what others only look at. Meditation does that. It is as I begin to let the truth sink down within me that my love is kindled and my faith is stirred, and all my soul goes out in triumphant possession of that which I have heard. 2. Again, meditation retains what hearing lightly loses. Photography can secure the picture in a second, but in a second it is lost. There is a process of developing and a process of fixing for which retirement and solitude and darkness are necessary. Then the picture is secured. Truth is mostly lost because it is heard only and not retained. Meditation has not come in to develop and fix it. There is, too, a process by which the photograph is eaten into the plate, bitten into it by means of some acid. That also is what meditation can do for us—we want the truth graven upon us, we want the name and the message and the word of Jesus our Master wrought thus into us. 3. Again, meditation turns into life and strength what otherwise is but a burden. A man can carry a sack of flour and yet be very hungry. He must eat the bread if he would live thereby. Yet it is not what a man eats, but what he digests, that administers to him. And digestion is not all; he must assimilate it, turn it into his very life and being, into his blood and bones and muscles. 4. Meditation is the source of sweet serenity. I have sometimes sat with some old man sagacious, experienced, successful, quick to perceive at a glance the right course. And in the eventide, after the day's business is done, the son has come to talk over the day's work—an order from such a firm—a mishap there—this matter to be arranged, and such a thing to be seen to, and such a possibility to be considered. To talk with the Lord of these things of earth, to wait for the light which He gives and the wisdom of His guidance, is indeed to be at peace. 5. Meditation kindles the fire. While I was musing, says the Psalmist, the fire kindled. To meditate upon the goodness of God, to muse upon the love of Jesus, to trace the unfailing bounty, to spell the sweet promises of His Word, is to kindle afresh the flame of our love and to send it leaping and surging heavenward. 6. Of meditation the Word of God is the best basis. Do not read the Bible only, it is not meant only to be read. Even searching the Scriptures may be a dull, dead exercise. Turn from the Word to Him that speaketh, and let the heart commune with Him. But hearing all this and believing it will avail us nothing unless we set ourselves to learn and master this art of meditation. (*Mark Guy Pearse.*) *Meditation at eventide*:—The active duties of life, the calls of necessary business, the means required for our daily subsistence, may take up much of our time and employ most of our thoughts; but there is also a season when the mind should unbend from the weariness and troubles

of ordinary employments, should seek tranquillity and repose from the agitations of society, and when we should go forth in holy contemplation "to meditate in the field at the eventide." At such a season there is much to awaken our serious consideration, and to keep our souls in congenial mood with the quiet and peaceful features of nature around us. When we wander forth "at the eventide," or sit down absorbed in pensive meditation, we think of all that now convulses society and agitates the human breast; we think of the vanities and follies of the world, its strifes and animosities, its bitterness and woe, its incitements and excesses, its delusions and disappointments; and we look to the time when all these must soon end. When we "go out at the eventide," we may in sweet meditation look upon the works of creation around us, and read many a lesson of instructive wisdom. Actuated by a fine perception, we may dwell with rapture and delight on every object, may see in every tree and plant and flower the constructive hand of Deity displayed; and, when thus we discern the finger of God in all things, the world itself becomes a temple, and all its various parts harmoniously set forth the praise and glory and power of God. When "the burden and heat of the day" have passed away, and we go forth "at the eventide," we may well be insensibly carried away by contemplations on the character and nature of human life. We have seen during the day the sun shining over our heads in fullest power and brightest effulgence; and we are led to compare it to the noontide of human life, when the spirits of man are wrought up to the highest pitch, and his vigour and strength are put forth in the fullest exercise and liveliest animation. But we know how soon this passes away, and we feel ourselves intimately concerned in the lesson it teaches. (*Archdeacon Fothergill*.)

Meditation.—The word meditate is most suggestive in its etymology. It means to be in the midst of a matter, to have it in your very centre. Could anything more fitly express the most thorough kind of meditation? It would be a mistake to identify meditation with study which has always a distinctly intellectual purpose. It is not analysis, it is not synthesis, it is no kind of intellectual process. It is letting the mind seethe and work and play about a subject, guided by conscience or emotion or desire or strong resolution, till it gets impressed with the subject, till the sap and taste of it flow into the soul. Nothing, however great, is yours till you get the substance of it into you by meditation. It remains entirely outside of you. Neither faith, nor love, nor hope can dispense with meditation. Faith gets no good of its objects, love is unable to love, hope forgets to burn and to soar, ceases to hope—if there is no meditation. By meditation we pasture on the sky, we draw the secret strength from all truth, we serve ourselves heir to all things. You can poison yourself by meditation if you will. You can soothe and chasten and elevate yourself. Make your choice. You must meditate, but you may do it earnestly, or dully and drowsily. You must meditate, but you may meditate on things that will make you strong and good, brave and free in the service of God, or on things that will make you a fit companion for devils. You may so meditate as to make life a triumph and full of blessing to your friends and the world. You will be a slave or a free man, a starveling dwarf or a giant, a blessing or a curse, according as you meditate. You cannot make yourself good or right by any direct effort of will alone, any more than a man can make himself strong by wishing it. But you can feed yourself by meditation. You can decide what you shall meditate on. The whole universe of God and His truth is there for you to feed upon, and meditation is not a hard, ungrateful task. There is nothing more natural, easy, and pleasant. It is only brooding. (*J. Leckie, D.D.*)

Nature helps meditation.—What help, then, does nature give us in meditating? That she does give help you may have noticed from the aspect of companies gay, sprightly, and talkative, whom nature soon began to silence. Gradually the rattle of tongues died away, and each got isolated and absorbed in the world around; and yet it was no intentness of observation. It was no keenness of search. It was simply the hush of the spirit in a great, vast presence. The calm and quiet of nature infect the spirit. There is something that steals away the fret and worry and care. The babbling brook runs away with our fever and ache and burden. It cheats us out of our scheming and planning. It says to us, Come and be for a while like me. Nature whispers of the supernatural, and the fleeting preaches the eternal. Nature suggests thoughts to us, and breathes impressions that are beyond our explaining. A line of meditation is entered on, and we do not know how it rose. We never imagine that it was the wind sighing through the trees or the scent of the new mown hay. The sights and sounds of nature, her silence and repose, her vastness and variety, are always inviting us to meditation. Our old lines are broken and new

presented to us—sometimes pressed upon us. We can only resist the solicitation by a sort of forced and obstinate prepossession. It is a short path into the infinite from any point of our aggressive and contagious surroundings. How can a man by any possibility escape being reminded of the perfect, the vast, the beautiful, the solid, the eternal of which nature is always speaking through her sameness and change? Nature cannot quite force a man to let his thoughts go in these directions, though she sometimes comes to the very edge of force with her sudden surprises, her golden effulgence, her far tremulous haze, her flashes and outbursts, her mountain peaks, and awful chasms and abysses. If any one goes through the world in a thoughtless vein, if he sleeps the journey as men sometimes do in everyday travel, he cannot blame nature. She has been perpetually calling him, inviting, coaxing, wooing, hinting, insinuating, admonishing, and threatening him, that he may reflect and meditate. (*Ibid.*) *Eventide constrains thought*:—The twilight speaks of the flight of time, of the evanescence of all worldly glory, the vanity of all mere earthly hopes. It whispers that all days will soon be over as this is. Does it not require a most determined perverseness to shut out thoughts like these? And what a hardening process a soul must go through that has often and often, thousands and thousands of times, deliberately refused to listen to these twilight voices, and, it may be, sometimes laughed away the solemn, tender feelings as if they were idle phantoms of the brain. The great event of evening is sunset. The sun droops toward the west. As he approaches the horizon he darts rays of marvellous brilliance. The clouds become transfigured, glorified. No mortal tongue can tell the enchanting beauty of many sunsets. It is a thing in the world that stands alone without rival. Its magnificence arrests the most heedless. Men stand transfixed by the celestial vision. I have seen a man with a heavy burden on his back arrested by it. That is nature constraining men to think, and filling them with vague and vast delight, mixed with regret and longings. The setting sun is an appeal to the love of pleasure and glory. It does say that there is glory somewhere. It tells of joy beyond imagination. (*Ibid.*) *Rules for contemplation*:—Conceive of things clearly and distinctly, in their own nature; conceive of things completely, in all their parts; conceive of things comprehensively, in all their properties and relations; conceive of things extensively, in all their kinds; conceive of things orderly, or in a proper method. (*Dr. Watts.*) *Meditation*:—Of all the angels, the “cherub Contemplation” soars highest heaven. Of all moods of the mind, meditation is, in its serenity, depths, and seriousness, nearest what we could conceive to be the action of the soul of Him who seeth the end from the beginning, and things not as in their jagged edges, or protuberant parts, but as rounded holes. Meditation has not, perhaps, struck out very brilliant sparkles, but it has produced many solid orbs of truth. It is the intellect and imagination severed from the passions, and moving on without being either interrupted or falsely accelerated by their power. Of meditation, you may say that there is rest even in its motion, and motion even in its rest. It does not abruptly break, but silently eddies round, and gently solves great problems. It is the parent of all lofty resolves, genuine change of character, and of all continuous courses of worthy and energetic thoughts. Hence the masters of human nature, in history, in fiction, or in poetry, generally describe their heroes, ere conversion to the high purpose which gives them their ultimate fame, as being much alone and much in meditation. Hercules is meditating when Virtue and Pleasure meet him; and when his “choice” is made, Marius is meditating amidst the ruins of Carthage, when he forms his dread resolution to return and conquer Rome. Meditation, with such giants, is just the Antaeus act of touching the ground, to derive strength for renewed endeavours. (*G. Gilfillan.*) *Evening, the time for meditation*:—Morning is too fresh and hopeful; day, too bustling and sunny; even night too sombre and uniform for the sweet serenities and gentle fluctuations of contemplation. It is an exercise especially suited to the evening, when day and night meeting form the “conflux of two eternities”; when thought tends (like the bat in the twilight air), not to fly onward or backward, but to trace circles, now narrowing and again enlarging; when an autumnal feeling pervades, in a less degree, the mind during all the seasons of the year; when the sun becomes more spiritual as he departs, and the stars and planets arise in the sky like thoughts and feelings in the mind—some cold and glittering as the former, and others warm and panting in their purple light, like the latter; when the exquisite sensation of “moonlight approaching” is conveyed, reminding you of the first dim dawning of love in the heart, or of some grand and new conception slowly lifting itself up in the horizon of the soul; when the tender shade over the landscape, the mild com-

promise between light and darkness, and the feeling of general repose, excite anew a luxurious emotion, half of sense and half of imagination, as different from the stern clearness of noonday thought as it is from the unearthly speculations and excursions of the lonely midnight mind—then is the time for meditation on all the themes dearest to man—on nature, poetry, the great characters and actions of the past, on the future life, on heaven, and on God. (*Ibid.*) *Evening meditations*:—Most of us suppose we have some little plot of time railed off for God morning and evening, but how often does it get trodden down by the profane multitude of this world's cares, and quite occupied by encroaching secular engagements. But evening is the time when many men are, and when all men ought to be, least hurried; when the mind is placid, but not yet prostrate; when the body requires rest from its ordinary labour, but is not yet so oppressed with fatigue as to make devotion a mockery; when the din of this world's business is silenced, and as a sleeper wakes to a consciousness when some accustomed noise is checked, so the soul now wakes up to the thought of itself and of God. I know not whether those of us who have the opportunity have also the resolution to sequester ourselves evening by evening, as Isaac did; but this I do know, that he who does so will not fail of his reward, but will very speedily find that his Father who seeth in secret is manifestly rewarding him. What we all need above all things is to let the mind dwell on Divine things—to be able to sit down knowing we have so much clear time in which we shall not be disturbed, and during which we shall think directly under God's eye—to get quite rid of the feeling of getting through with something, so that without distraction the soul may take a deliberate survey of its own matters. And so shall often God's gifts appear on our horizon when we lift up our eyes, as Isaac "lifted up his eyes and saw the camels coming" with his bride. (*M. Dods, D.D.*) *Benefit of meditation*:—The Rev. Matthew Henry died in 1714, at the age of 52. His "Commentary on the Bible" will be a standing monument of his labour, piety, and zeal. He improved his time, and knew what it was by experience to enjoy communion with God. Of retirement and meditation he thus speaks:—"It will do us good to be often left alone, and sitting alone; and if we have the art of improving solitude, we shall find we are never less alone than when alone. Meditation and prayer ought to be both our business and our delight when we are alone; while we have a God, a Christ, and a heaven to acquaint ourselves with and to secure an interest in, we need not want matter either for meditation or prayer, which, if they go together, will materially befriend each other. Our walks in the fields are then truly pleasant, when in them we apply ourselves to meditation and prayer. We there have a free and open prospect of the heavens above us, and the earth around us, and the hosts and riches of both; by the view of which we should be led to the contemplation of the Maker and Owner of all." As to the time for meditation, the same hour may be seasonable to one and unseasonable to another. "I have always found," says Mr. Baxter, "that the fittest time for myself is the evening from sunset till twilight." In another case, when an orator was asked what was most eminent in rhetoric and oratory, he gave this answer, "Pronunciation, pronunciation, pronunciation." "So," says Dr. Bates, "if I should be asked what I think are the best means and way to advance the faculties, make the ordinances fruitful, increase grace, enlarge our comfort, and produce holiness, I should answer, 'Meditation, meditation, meditation.'" (*Buck.*) *Necessity of meditation*:—It is not enough to hear the Word, we must meditate upon it. If the bee went quickly from flower to flower it would never gather honey: but by resting there it secures great spoil. Meditation, like the harrow, covers the good seed, that it may not be dissipated by contact with the world. (*J. G. Pilkington.*) *Meditation before prayer*:—Meditation before prayer matures our conceptions, and quickens our desires. Our heart is like a watch that is soon run down, and needs constant winding up. It is an instrument that is easily put out of tune. And meditation is like the tuning of an instrument, and setting it for the harmony of prayer. What is the reason that in prayer there is such a slight discurrency in our thoughts, that our thoughts are like dust in the wind, carried to and fro; but only for want of meditation? What is the reason that our desires, like an arrow shot by a weak bow, do not reach the mark? But only this—we do not meditate before prayer; he that would but consider, before he comes to pray, the things that he is to pray for, pardon of sin, and the life of glory, how would this cause his prayers to ascend like incense towards God? The great reason why our prayers are ineffectual, is because we do not meditate before them. (*H. G. Salter.*) *Meditation and prayer*:—"During his seclusion at Enderley," writes one of the

biographers of Robert Hall, "almost entirely without society, he spent much of his time in private devotion, and not infrequently set apart whole days for prayer and fasting—a practice which he continued to the end of life, deeming it essential to the revival and preservation of personal religion. When able to walk, he wandered in the fields and sought the shady grove, which often echoed with the voice of prayer, and witnessed the agony of his supplications. He was frequently so absorbed in these sacred exercises as to be unaware of the approach of persons passing by, many of whom recollected with deep emotion the fervour and importunity of his addresses at the mercy-seat, and the groanings which could not be uttered. His whole soul appears, indeed, to have been in a state of constant communion with God; his lonely walks amid the woodland scenery were rendered subservient to that end, and all his paths were bedewed with the tears of penitential prayer. Few men have spent more time in private devotion, or resorted to it with more relish, or had a deeper practical conviction of its benefits and its pleasures, as well as of its obligation as a duty binding upon all." *Influence of meditation*:—"I lived alone," writes Channing, in mature life, speaking of his experience when a tutor at Richmond at the age of eighteen, "too poor to buy books, spending my days and nights in an outbuilding, with no one beneath my roof except during the hours of school. There I toiled as I have never done since. With not a human being to whom I could communicate my deepest thoughts and feelings, I passed through intellectual and moral conflicts so absorbing as often to banish sleep and to destroy almost wholly the power of digestion. I was worn well-nigh to a skeleton. Yet I look back on those days and nights of loneliness and frequent gloom with thankfulness. If I ever struggled with my whole soul for purity, truth, and goodness, it was there. There, amidst sore trials, the great question, I trust, was settled within me, whether I would obey the higher or lower principles of my nature—whether I would be the victim of passion or the free child and servant of God. It is an interesting recollection that this great conflict was going on within me, and my mind receiving an impulse toward the perfect, without a thought or suspicion of one person around me as to what I was experiencing." *Meditation, what it is*:—"Whoever has pondered long over a plan which he is anxious to accomplish, without distinctly seeing at first the way, knows what meditation is. It was in this way that one of the greatest of English engineers, a man uncouth, and unaccustomed to regular discipline of mind, is said to have accomplished his most marvellous triumphs. He threw bridges over almost impracticable torrents, and pierced the eternal mountains for his viaducts. Sometimes a difficulty brought all the work to a pause; then he would shut himself up in his room, eat nothing, speak to no one, abandon himself intensely to the contemplation of that on which his heart was set, and at the end of two or three days would come forth serene and calm, walk to the spot, and quietly give orders which seemed the result of superhuman intuition. *Placid, pastoral Isaac*:—"Crowded into a brief chapter or two, between the heroic life of Abraham and the adventurous life of Jacob, Isaac seems overshadowed by the father and the son. He is the longest lived of the patriarchs, with the shortest history. It is related of him chiefly that he dug wells—excellent wells, no doubt, and famous some of them, as Sitnah and Rehoboth and Beer-sheba; but, with this exception, he is notable chiefly as being the son of his father, and the father of his son. And yet the thought grows upon me at every resting-place among the labours of life, at every reminder of my personal ineffectiveness and unimportance—at every quiet Sunday evening pause between the work and strife of the week past and those of the week to come, how much comfort there is, here in this long, quiet, almost unrecorded interval between Abraham and Jacob, in pondering the peaceful story of a man who had neither the heroism of the one nor the subtlety of the other, but who, just as much as either of them, has this testimony, that he pleased God. When I think of my father's life, crowded with great and noble deeds for the Church and for humanity, and think of my passing years and of their meagre record, it is comforting to remember that God requires to be served also by other men than heroes; it is pleasant to turn from Abraham, sitting in his tent-door in the heat of the fiery noon-day, to placid, pastoral Isaac, meditating in the field at eventide. . . . In the margin of the chapter, we find over against the word "meditate" the alternative reading, "Or, pray." We do not need this marginal note to assure us that this evening meditation of the shepherd-lover was a prayer. In so grave a crisis of life, the meditation of one who believes in God of course becomes a prayer. What anxious questions of a lifetime's joy or wretchedness were to turn on what might be the result of that far-away embassy of the faithful slave, Eliezer! (L. II).

Bacon.) *Advantages of meditation*:—A garment that is double-dyed, dipped again and again will retain the colour a great while; so a truth which is the subject of meditation. (*Philip Henry*.)

Ver. 67. *She became his wife*.—*A primeval marriage*:—I. ITS SIMPLICITY. II. ITS PURITY. III. ITS GODLINESS. IV. IT ILLUSTRATES THE PRINCIPLE OF UNITY IN DIVERSITY. The characters of Isaac and Rebekah were most diverse. They were truly complements of each other, and when brought together made a complete whole. (*T. H. Leale*.) *A new home*:—I. THIS NEW HOME IS FILLED WITH LOVE. "Isaac loved her," and it is but fair to infer that she loved him. This love is not mere romance or sentiment. It is better than a transient conceit, and is that kind which only deepens and strengthens, as the ideal and the fanciful vanish away. It stands the strain of trial, and falters not before affliction, and what is more wonderful yet, it seems to be only purified by the mutual revelation of every phase of character and every mood of temper, and all the relations and duties of the household. There may be such a thing as "love at first sight," and if it be genuine it only gets more hallowed and more tender as the years roll; but if it is not genuine, if it be only a fancy, a dazzling flash, a temporary spell of lovely witchery, then you soon find either the divorce court in session or the domestic court disagreeing and contending with sensitive intolerance. In the case of the young couple before us, we find that their love, which seems to have been at "first sight," was deep and fond and lasting, and that it was ennobled and blessed with that piety which, like a divine chemistry, made even life's cares and annoyances a means of grace and gracious growth. What a beautiful spectacle this! Two frail natures on their way to the unknown land, maintaining a moral and life-long unity, proving a mutual blessing, constituting an affectionate representation of Christ and the Church, a bulwark for society, and a compound factor in the world's destiny. II. THIS HOME, AS TIME WORE ON, MADE UP FOR MUCH PAIN AND LOSS. "Isaac was comforted after his mother's death." Comforted! The record is not that he forgot her. Ah! he could not possibly do that, and doubtless the bereaved Abraham and he frequently talked about the precious dead! But such was Rebekah's influence, such her delicate and efficient ministry, such her care and company, that the heart of her husband began to heal, and the shadow of the sepulchre to shorten. Every human home ought to be a place of comfort. It is rough enough outside. The especial shade of that which I desire you to see now is this filling the place of the dead, this making up, in a measure, for their loss. These practical hints I have given, are essential elements; but then there is something beyond and more! The home should not only be one of comfort, but COMFORTING! Death is a strange magician even to the believer. He cannot do any real harm to my loved one, and yet he makes me tremble and cry out, as I imagine, say my mother, cruelly smitten and changed. And the wand is still further powerful in making me forget all her blemishes, all her weaknesses, all her failings. I only think of the virtues, the excellences, the splendid qualities of head and heart, and my loss seems irreparable. In many a home there is need for a bright, fresh, loving, tender Rebekah; need for a healing and restoring ministry. Your hand is like God's when it wipes the tear off the cheek; your heart is Christ-like when it makes the grave ring with prophecies of resurrection; your effort is angelic when you whisper comfort in the moonlight, under the olives, to some prostrate, bleeding form at your feet. No matter what relationship the bereaved one in your home sustains to you, the thought of the text holds good—be a comfort; be neither indifferent nor intrusive; do not draw a saintly lecture, nor grieve with a reckless folly; be all you can of that which is missed! III. THIS PARTICULAR HOME HAD ITS TRIALS. It would be passing strange if it had not. It would straightway become one of the world's wonders. If every heart knoweth its own bitterness, certainly every house has its own anxieties and adversities. Try to meet them with the grace of Him who was the friend and trust of Isaac. (*J. R. Kerr*.) *Rebekah: the chosen bride, wife, and mother*:—There are delineated here—I. SOME TYPAL VIRTUES OF MAIDENLY CHARACTER ESSENTIAL TO GOOD WIVES AND MOTHERS. Rebekah's name is significant. It means a cord with a noose at the end of it—that which can both catch and hold fast. An old Hebrew writer says, with a biting scorn and sarcasm—"Not unfit as the name of a girl who ensnares men by her beauty." It is a most unworthy saying, and it misses the very point and meaning of the designation, as such sayings generally do. Rebekah means winning in character and fast in friendship. It is the opposite of the

shallow, frivolous, and changeable butterfly beauty, as destitute of power as of sincerity. What was the attraction of Rebekah? what was the force by which she held those who yielded to her influence? 1. There was a deep religious basis on which her life was built up. You can never be what you ought to be unless you have possession of that pearl of great price, true religion, the friendship and favour of God. Commit thy way unto the Lord, young woman! Delight thyself in the Lord and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart. 2. There was in Rebekah calmness and self-control. Considering the general seclusion of Eastern women, there is a remarkable absence of excitement, flurry, and confusion in presence of the stranger and his attendants when she was accosted at the well. She had all her wits about her; had herself in hand, reined in and guided by true judgment; saying right words, doing right actions. This is a grace which comes of nature often, but may come of culture when nature has withheld the boon. 3. There was in Rebekah courteousness. There was a polish and refinement of manner about her which indicate the genial influence of true education. She was considerate of the rights and of the feelings of others; she endeavoured to put them at their ease; she tried to promote, and was pleased in their happiness. 4. Another grace in Rebekah's character was modesty. She was calm, ready-witted; but she was without forwardness, self-assertion, loudness. Nothing is lost to a true modesty, either of right or the respect of others. It is better to be retiring than self-demonstrative. Power is with the former and not with the latter. 5. Another point in her character was readiness to oblige. The stranger had not to ask twice; he received more than he asked. She was mindful to entertain strangers; ready to communicate; hospitable. Where need was she hastened to supply it. She had the happy art and faculty of making strangers feel at home. There was a wise sympathy in her heart which taught her what to do, and how to do it well. 6. And, last of all, she had great strength and decision. When she was asked whether she would go with the steward to Abraham's residence to be Isaac's wife, there was no hesitation about her, and no desire to tarry. She said, "I will go." Isaac was a quiet, yielding, contemplative-natured man; she was his very counterpart and help-meet. Decision of character is essential to all noble life. There are innumerable failures and innumerable evils attendant upon its absence. They who lack moral strength are open to all manner of evil inducements and temptations. The fierce conflicts of the flesh can only be maintained through resoluteness. To hesitate is to be lost.

II. THERE ARE CERTAIN PRINCIPLES AND LESSONS ASSOCIATED WITH AND GROWING OUT OF REBEKAH'S LIFE AND HISTORY WHICH MAY BE SUGGESTED FOR QUIET HOME THINKING. 1. The elevated distinction of the wife in the kingdom of God. Any woman would not do to be Isaac's wife. She had to be sent for from afar. She had to be richly endowed and beautiful. She had to be a woman of exalted character and capability. This was so because there was to be a typical life in the believing home, and because the regeneration of society was to go out from it. If women be not noble, homes cannot be pure and strong to withstand the deteriorating influence of the world on character and life. As the homes are, society must be. In Christianity the home virtues have a high, if not the highest, place. To rule the home a woman needs to possess abundance of grace. 2. The importance of strong-minded, strong-hearted, pious mothers in the kingdom of God. The great men of the Bible were all endowed with the greatness of their mothers. They owed to them what was best and brightest in their heart and lives. It was through them they achieved their successes. Never had women greater responsibilities thrust upon them than had the mothers of Moses, Jacob, Samuel, David, and Jesus Christ. Never did women more nobly fulfil their trust. It is of immense importance to a man, the first and most formative and lasting influence which moulds his character and directs the bent and tendency of his nature. 3. All social ties and relationships should be sanctified, consecrated, by prayer. The prayer of Eliezer, the prayer of Isaac—here called his eventide meditation—and the prayer of Rebekah's relatives, all suggest and convey the lesson that there is a religious aspect and element of those relationships of affection on which homes are to rest and be built up. If anywhere Divine direction should be sought, it is in connection with steps which are irrevocable—which once taken cannot be retraced. 4. The last word must be a word of caution. It is the temptation of the strong to be impatient of Divine delays. It was Rebekah's. (*W. H. Davison.*) *Isaac's marriage*:—In this tender manner is the admirable story closed. Who can forbear wishing them all happiness? The union of filial and conjugal affection is not the least honourable trait in the character of this amiable man. He "brought her into

his mother Sarah's tent"; and was then, and not till then, comforted for his loss of her. Dutiful sons promise fair to be affectionate husbands: he that fills up the first station in life with honour, is thereby prepared for those that follow. God in mercy sets a day of prosperity over against a day of adversity. Now he woundeth our spirits by dissolving one tender union, and now bindeth up our wounds by cementing another. (*A. Fuller.*) *Lessons*:—1. Honourable and due reception is but due to a wife sent from God. 2. Solemn taking of a wife as well as consent, is requisite for perfecting marriage. 3. Conjugal love must follow in all marriages made by God. 4. A wife's comfort may supply a mother's loss. So God makes up creature losses with creature revivings sometimes. (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Rebekah a suitable wife for Isaac*:—Isaac's continence had its reward. In the suitability of Rebekah to a man of his nature, we see the suitability of all such gifts of God as are really waited for at His hand. God may keep us longer waiting than the world does, but He gives us never the wrong thing. Isaac had no idea of Rebekah's character; he could only yield himself to God's knowledge of what he needed; and so there came to him, from a country he had never seen, a help-meet singularly adapted to his own character. One cannot read of her lively, bustling, almost forward, but obliging and generous conduct at the well, nor of her prompt, impulsive departure to an unknown land, without seeing, as no doubt Eliezer very quickly saw, that this was exactly the woman for Isaac. In this eager, ardent, active, enterprising spirit, his own retiring and contemplative, if not sombre disposition, found its appropriate relief and stimulus. Hers was a spirit which might indeed, with so mild a lord, take more of the management of affairs than was befitting; and when the wear and tear of life had tamed down the girlish vivacity with which she spoke to Eliezer at the well, and leapt from the camel to meet her lord, her active-mindedness does appear in the disagreeable shape of the clever scheming of the mother of a family. In her sons you see her qualities exaggerated: from her, Esau derived his activity and open-handedness; and in Jacob, you find that her self-reliant and unscrupulous management has become a self-asserting craft which leads him into much trouble, if it also sometimes gets him out of difficulties. But such as Rebekah was, she was quite the woman to attract Isaac and supplement his character. So in other cases where you find you must leave yourself very much in God's hand, what He sends you will be found more precisely adapted to your character than if you chose it for yourself. You find your whole nature has been considered—your aims, your hopes, your wants, your position, whatever in you waits for something unattained. And as in giving to Isaac the intended mother of the promised seed, God gave him a woman who fitted in to all the peculiarities of his nature, and was a comfort and a joy to him in his own life; so we shall always find that God, in satisfying His own requirements, satisfies at the same time our wants—that God carries forward His work in the world by the satisfaction of the best and happiest feelings of our nature, so that it is not only the result that is blessedness, but blessing is created along its whole course. (*M. Dods, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XXV.

VERS. 1-7. These are the days of the years of Abraham's life.—*The last years of Abraham*:—I. ON THEIR NATURAL SIDE. Active to the last. II. ON THEIR SPIRITUAL SIDE. He provided for the purity and peace of the chosen family, by sending away the sons of his concubines. He did this (1) to prevent confusion of race, (2) to avoid disturbance and quarrels. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Life and character of Abraham*:—I. THE FIRST PERIOD. I. ABRAHAM COMES BEFORE US AS AN EMIGRANT. II. ABRAHAM COMES BEFORE US AS A STRANGER. III. ABRAHAM COMES BEFORE US IN AN ASPECT OF BRIGHT MORAL BEAUTY (chap. xiii. 5-18). IV. A MORE OPEN AND SIGNAL EVIDENCE OF THE DIVINE COUNTERNANCE AWAITS THE PATRIARCH (chap. xiv.). V. CONSIDER ABRAHAM IN HIS PRIVATE COMMUNION WITH GOD. II. THE SECOND PERIOD. Abraham has shown how unreservedly he can give credit to God for the fulfilment of His mere word, however incredible it might seem to the eye of sense. Will he also and equally give credit to God for the fulfilment of it in His own way? I. IN THIS NEW TRIAL, THE PATRIARCH'S FAITH APPEARS AT FIRST TO FAIL. II. THE MANNER OF THE PATRIARCH'S REVIVAL IS EMINENTLY GRACIOUS (chap. xvii.). III. THE CULMINA-

TING POINT OF ABRAHAM'S EXALTATION IN CONNECTION WITH HIS CONDUCT TOWARDS LOT (chaps. xviii., xix.). IV. THE NEXT SCENE PRESENTS TO US THE PATRIARCH GRIEVOUSLY HUMILED (chap. xx.). V. THE ACTUAL FULFILMENT OF THE PROMISE DOES NOT COMPLETELY ABOLISH ALL STRIFE BETWEEN THE FLESH AND THE SPIRIT. VI. THE SCENE ON MOUNT MORIAH FORMS THE CLIMAX OF ABRAHAM'S WALK OF FAITH. VII. THE CLOSING INCIDENTS IN ABRAHAM'S EVENTFUL LIFE. (*Ibid.*) *Lessons*:—1. Piety as well as nature teacheth men to dispose of their estates which God hath given them unto their seed. 2. Abraham may not, will not alter the portion of the child of promise which God ordained. The best portion is for the children of promise. They have all (ver. 5). 3. Some portion below, the children of the flesh do carry away as theirs. 4. It is wisdom for good fathers to settle their families, while they are alive and stirring. 5. Some difference between the portion of the children of the flesh and of the promise God makes here below. 6. Transplantation into places not inhabited, to people, is a design allowed by God (ver. 6). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Educated by illusion*:—Let us hastily recapitulate his history, so chequered by vicissitudes. He began his wanderings at Chanan; then seeking a new country, he entered Canaan, feeding his flocks there as long as pasture lasted, and then passed on. After that we find him still a wanderer, driven by famine to Egypt; then returning home, parting with Lot, losing his best friend, commanded to give up the dearest object of his heart, and at the close of life startled almost to find that he had not a foot of earth in which to make for his wife a grave. Thus throughout his life he was a pilgrim. In all we see God's blessed principle of illusion by which He draws us on towards Himself. The object of our hope seems just before us, but we go on without attaining it; all appears failure, yet all this time we are advancing surely on our journey and find our hopes realized not here but in the kingdom beyond. Abraham learnt thus the infinite nature of duty, and this is what a Christian must always feel. He must never think that he can do all he ought to do. It is possible for the child to do each day all that is required of him; but the more we receive of the spirit of Christ, the larger, the more infinitely impossible of fulfilment will our circle of duties become. (*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*)

Vers. 8-10. Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people.—*Abraham's departure*:—"Full of years" is not a mere synonym for longevity. The expression is by no means a usual one. It is applied to Isaac at the close of his calm, contemplative life, to David at the end of his stormy and adventurous career, to the high priest Jehoiada, and to the patriarch Job. We shall understand its meaning better if, instead of "full of years," we read "satisfied with years." The words point to a calm close, with all desires granted, with hot wishes stilled, and a willingness to let life go, because all which it could give had been attained. We have two main things to consider. 1. The tranquil close of life. (1) It is possible, at the close of life, to feel that it has satisfied our wishes. Abraham had had a richly varied life. It had brought him all he wished. Satisfied, yet not sickened, keenly appreciating all the good and pleasantness of life, and yet quite willing to let it go, Abraham died. (2) It is possible at the end of life to feel that it is complete, because the days have accomplished for us the highest purpose of life. (3) It is possible, at the end of life, to be willing to go as satisfied. 2. Consider the glimpse of the joyful society beyond, which is given us in that other remarkable expression of the text, "He was gathered to his people." The words contain a dim intimation of something beyond this present life: (1) Dimly, vaguely, but unmistakably, there is here expressed a premonition and feeling after the thought of an immortal self in Abraham, which was not in the cave at Machpelah, but was somewhere else, and was for ever. (2) Abraham had been an exile all his life; but now his true social life is begun. He dwells with his own tribe; he is at home: he is in the city. (3) The expression suggests that in the future men shall be associated according to affinity and character. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The death and burial of Abraham*:—I. HIS DEATH. 1. The peaceful close of a long life. 2. The close of a satisfied life. 3. An introduction to a new and better life. II. HIS BURIAL. 1. An honourable one. 2. An occasion for peace among the members of his family. 3. The occasion of further blessing to the living (ver. 11). (*T. H. Leale.*) *Abraham's death*:—I. ABRAHAM DIED. 1. The best of men die. 2. The conquest pilgrimage ends. 3. Abraham was brought down to the grave in honour and peace. 4. He being dead, yet speaketh. II. MARK HIS FAITH (see

Heb. xi. 13, &c.). 1. His faith related to his posterity and the land of promise. Hence his interment in this particular cave. The field of his sepulchre was his own possession. 2. It related to himself. Though losing the earthly Canaan, he was sure of the heavenly Canaan. He was confident of a future life; and knew that his faith and piety would not go unrecognized or unrewarded in the world to come. So when we die, let it be in faith. (*The Congregational Pulpit.*) *Abraham's death in old age*:—The inscription on his tomb, if I may so call it, was "He died in a good old age." On this I have two remarks to offer—(1) It was according to promise. Upwards of four-score years before this, the Lord told Abraham in vision, saying, "Thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace: thou shalt be buried in a good old age." In everything, even in death, the promises are fulfilled to Abraham. (2) It is language that is never used of wicked men, and not very commonly of good men. It is used of Gideon, and of David; and I know not whether of any other. The idea answers to what is spoken by the Psalmist, "They shall bring forth fruit in old age"; or that in Job, "Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season." (*A. Fuller.*) *Lessons*:—1. God records the time of His saints' lives to set out the continuance of their faith and patient waiting for God and His promise (ver. 7). 2. Saints give up spirits to God; they are not snatched away. 3. It is good dying in an age full of goodness. 4. Saints, as Abraham, depart full and satisfied with life below. 5. Saints are gathered to their own people in their death (ver. 8). 6. Honourable burial is due to saints deceased by their surviving seed, or friends. 7. God was as good as His word to Abraham in his death (ver. 9). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Signs of age*:—We are as immortal as the angels until our work is done, and, that finished, the best thing that can happen to us is to be called home to rest at once rather than to be here, weak and worthless, in our tents waiting on the plains of Moab. When Dr. Rees preached last in North Wales a friend said to him—one of those who are always reminding people that they are getting old—"You are whitening fast, Dr. Rees." The old gentleman did not say anything then; but when he got to the pulpit he referred to it, and said, "There is a wee white flower that comes up through the earth at this season of the year—sometimes it comes up through the snow and frost; but we are all glad to see the snowdrop, because it proclaims that the winter is over and that the summer is at hand. A friend reminded me last night that I was whitening fast. But heed not that, brother; it is to me a proof that my winter will soon be over, that I shall have done presently with the cold and east winds and the frosts of earth, and that my summer—my eternal summer—is at hand." (*Heber Evans.*) *What men reap in age*:—A young man came to a man of ninety years of age and said to him, "How have you made out to live so long and be so well?" The old man took the youngster to an orchard, and, pointing to some large trees full of apples, said, "I planted these trees when I was a boy, and do you wonder that now I am permitted to gather the fruit of them?" We gather in old age what we plant in our youth. Sow to the wind and we reap the whirlwind. Plant in early life the right kind of a Christian character, and you will eat luscious fruit in old age, and gather these harvest apples in eternity. (*Dr. Talmage.*) *Age and Christ*:—A distinguished Oneida chief, named Skenandon, having yielded to the instructions of the Rev. Mr. Kirkland, and lived a reformed man for fifty years, said just before he died, in his hundred and twentieth year, "I am an aged hemlock; the winds of one hundred years have whistled through my branches; I am dead at the top" (he was blind); "why I yet live the great good Spirit only knows. Pray to my Jesus that I may wait with patience my appointed time to die; and when I die, lay me by the side of my minister and father, that I may go up with him at the great resurrection." *Weakness of age*:—To an acquaintance who inquired about his welfare, he gave this account: "I am but weak; but it is delightful to find one's self weak in everlasting arms; oh, how much do I owe my Lord! What a mercy, that once within the covenant, there is no getting out of it again; now I find my faculties much impaired." His relations answering that it was only his memory which seemed to be effected with his disease:—"Well," said he, "oh, how marvellous that God hath continued my judgment, considering how much I have abused it; and continued my hope of eternal life, though I have misimproved it!" . . . Speaking on the same topic afterwards he said very beautifully, "Were I once in heaven, a look of Christ would cure my failing memory, and all my other weaknesses. There I shall not need wine nor spirits to recruit me; no, nor shall I think of them, but as Christ was through them kind to me." (*Life of the Rev. John Brown of Haddington.*) *Gathered to his people*:—Dimly,

vaguely, veiledly, but unmistakably, as it seems to me, is here expressed at least a premonition and feeling after the thought of an immortal self in Abraham that was not there in what "his son Isaac Ishmael laid in the cave at Macpelah," but was somewhere else and was for ever. That is the first thing hinted at here—the continuance of the personal being after death. Is there anything more? I think there is. Now, remember, Abraham's whole life was shaped by that commandment, "Get thee out from thy father's house, and from thy kindred, and from thy country." He never dwelt with his kindred; all his days he was a pilgrim and a sojourner, a stranger in a strange land. But now he is gathered to his people. The life of isolation is over, the true social life is begun. He is no longer separated from those around him, or flung amidst those that are uncongenial to him. "He is gathered to his people"; he dwells with his own tribe; he is at home; he is in the city. Further, the expressions suggest that in the future men shall be associated according to affinity and character. "He was gathered to his people," whom he was like and who were like him; the people with whom he had sympathy, the people whose lives were shaped after the fashion of his own. Men will be sorted there. Gravitation will come into play undisturbed; and the pebbles will be ranged according to their weights on the great shore where the sea has cast them up, as they are upon Chesil beach, down there in the English Channel, and many another coast besides; all the big ones together and sized off to the smaller ones, regularly and steadily laid out. Like draws to like. Our spiritual affinities, our religious and moral character, will settle where we shall be and who our companions will be when we get yonder. Some of us would not altogether like to live with the people that are like ourselves, and some of us would not find the result of this sorting to be very delightful. Men in the Dantesque circles were only made more miserable because all around them were of the same sort, and some of them worse than themselves. And an ordered hell, with no company for the liar but liars, and none for the thief but thieves, and none for impure men but the impure, and none for the godless but the godless, would be a hell indeed. "He was gathered to his people," and you and I will be gathered likewise. What is the conclusion of the whole matter? Let us follow with our thoughts, and in our lives those who have gone into the light, and cultivate in heart and character those graces and excellences which are congruous with the inheritance of the saints in light. Above all let us give our hearts to Christ, by simple faith in Him, to be shaped and sanctified by Him. Then our country will be where He is, and our people will be the people in whom His love abides, and the tribe to which we belong will be the tribe of which He is Chieftain. So when our turn comes, we may rise thankfully from the table in the wilderness, which He has spread for us, having eaten as much as we desired, and quietly follow the dark-robed messenger whom His love sends to bring us to the happy multitudes that throng the streets of the city. There we shall find our true home, our kindred, our King. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Ver. 11. **God blessed his son Isaac.**—*Divine blessing*:—Two large and perpetual principles, on which the government of God proceeds, are involved in such commonplace incidents, as death, benefits received, and access to a well of water—(1) that God repeats Himself in His modes of training men; and (2) that God does not repeat Himself. God had blessed Abraham, and He blessed Isaac; He repeated His procedure. Isaac received the Divine blessing at the well Lahai-roi—where Abraham did not dwell: God did not repeat Himself. I. I ask you, fathers and mothers, to CONSIDER THE BEST INHERITANCE WHICH CAN BE LEFT TO CHILDREN. It is not property or riches. If your children never inherit from you anything but a few cheap well-used articles of furniture, yet can point to your grave and say, "Under that grassy mound lie the remains of one who lived a life of faith in the Son of God, and tried to make the world of his neighbourhood better," be sure they will inherit from you that which is more helpful and ennobling than cartloads of gold or silver. Be it yours to secure that. II. LET EACH ONE CONSIDER THE NECESSITY OF PERSONAL OBEDIENCE TO GOD, IN ORDER TO BE FULLY BLESSED. You may have not a few rich temporal blessings, but if you have not received the grace of the Holy Spirit so as to call Jesus Christ Lord, then you are rejecting that which alone conveys the favour in which is life eternal. No one can acquire this blessing for you. III. CONSIDER THE VARYING CONDITIONS TO WHICH THE DIVINE BLESSING COMES. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob—so different in their character—all were blessed by the Lord. IV. IN ORDER TO OBTAIN AND RETAIN DIVINE BLESSING, WE MUST KNOW THE SECRET OF SECURING IT. Isaac's knowledge of it is suggested by the words, "He dwelt by the well Lahai-roi"—the well of the Living,

Seeing One. Have you no memory of a private room, or a sick bed, or a communion, when there came a flow of light and impulse into your heart, and Jesus appeared to be your life as never before? Do you never return in spirit to that scene, and endeavour again to refresh yourself with its intimations? The Lord who blessed you then is the same still. (D. G. Watt, M.A.) *A word for quiet people*.—1. After the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac. What a contrast meets us as we turn to him. The longest lived of the patriarchs, yet what a little space he fills. Abraham has many chapters—so has Jacob, but Isaac has scarcely a single chapter to himself, this is the lesson of his life. We talk of most men because of their importance. I want to talk of Isaac because of his unimportance. His are the annals of a quiet life. God is the God of Abraham. Yes, we do not wonder at that—Abraham the hero, the warrior, the father and founder of great nations—the man of such gifts and such achievements. But God is the God of Isaac, too—the God of the quiet uneventful life. The heavenly Father hath room in His heart for all His children. He who maketh us to differ, loves us in all the separateness of our character. 2. Remember that Isaac is needed as well as Abraham. It is well that there should be some few men here and there, lifted up above the rest like the high hills that touch the sky. The sight of them is needful to refresh us, to expand our thought, to break the dead level of life, and to bring down blessings from heaven. But we need the quiet fields as well as the mountain heights—they give us the grass of the meadow and the corn of the valley. Earth has need of common people—and indeed most need of them. Some one said one day to Abraham Lincoln, referring to some prominent man, “He is a common-looking person.” “Friend,” said Abraham Lincoln, “the Lord prefers common-looking people, that is why He has made so many of them.” If folks were all splendid geniuses, whirling to heaven in chariots of fire, who would do the humdrum work of life? Let us learn to think rightly of common-place people, including ourselves. George Eliot preaches a needed gospel when she writes of one of her characters, “He whose fortunes I have undertaken to relate was in no respect an ideal or exceptional character . . . a man whose virtues were not heroic, and who had no undetected crime within his heart; who had not the slightest mystery hanging about him, but was palpably and unmistakably common-place. . . . But, dear madam, it is so very large a majority of your fellow-countrymen that are of this insignificant stamp. Yet these common-place people—many of them—bear a conscience, and have felt the sublime prompting to do the painful right; they have their unspoken sorrows and their sacred joys; their hearts have perhaps gone out towards their first-born, and they have mourned over the irreclaimable dead. Depend upon it you would gain unspeakably if you would learn to see more of the poetry and pathos, the tragedy and comedy, lying in the experience of a human soul that looks through dull grey eyes and that speaks in a voice of quite ordinary tones.” 3. Remember the advantages of such a life. “Isaac went into the field at eventide to meditate.” Of such life, this is its distinction. If it have less of action, it certainly has more room for meditation. If it knows fewer things, yet it generally knows them better and deeper. If it has less glory and triumph, yet it has closer and steadier communion. If it cannot fight the Master’s battles, it can sit at the Master’s feet and learn of Him. The quiet life has its blessings. Down by the stream the little meadow lay; and it heard afar off the roar of the great city, and it saw the ruddy glare of its lights flung up against the murky sky. “Alas!” it sighed, “how dull a life is mine! Yonder, in the city, with its thousands, one might do some good. But I am so far away and useless.” But in the night time came the stars and sang to it—“Foolish creature, we are thine in all our silvery brightness, we whom they scarcely see in the city.” Then the dew fell and whispered to its heart—“And I am thine, I that am of no use on the hard city ways.” And up rose the sun and woke the flowers and painted them afresh, and it said—“I am thine, I who have to fight with city fogs for many an hour yonder.” And the meadow thought it had something to sing about after all, and the lark went soaring heavenward with music. But one day it heard some stray city sparrow tell a tale about the hungry little children, and the drunken men, and the wretched women, and about weary rich folks. And it grew sad again and said—“What can I do down here, out of the way, and so common-place!” Then came the breeze and it cried in a hurry, “Quick! give us your freshness and fragrance that we may bless the crowded courts and streets,” and it was off. And there came some that picked the flowers from beside the stream, and told how they should gladden many a weary heart, and smile upon sick children, and light up many a dreary home. Then the meadow sang a sweeter song than ever, and was glad that

He who maketh all hath so much room for the quiet and unknown, and can turn these to such good account. God blessed Isaac. 4. Remember, again, that if quiet people do not go up so high as others, they do not go down so low. "Happy is the nation whose annals are dull," said an authority. Think of Abraham and David and Elijah, and you will see that the life of Isaac has its compensations. 5. Again—there is a special beauty of character belonging to the quiet life. Take another of the few incidents in Isaac's life—that recorded in the sixty-seventh verse of the twenty-fourth chapter—"And he brought Rebekah into his mother Sarah's tent, and he loved her, and was comforted after his mother's death." The gentle heart grieving for his mother, and solaced by the love of Rebekah, is an aspect of the quiet life worth lingering over. These are the gifts with which the quiet people do enrich the world. We do not wonder now that God blessed Isaac. 6. Notice further—that the quiet life has its trials. We see it in the picture of the dim-eyed Isaac sitting in the tent door, bidding his son fetch for him the venison which his soul loved—an ease that breeds a self-indulgence is the besetment of the quiet life. It needs to be stirred up, and that sharply at times, and so there comes the famine, rousing him—making the somewhat sluggish life beat more vigorously. Bringing new wants that require new devices. Bringing new conditions that must be dealt with. No harvest ever did so much for Isaac as that famine. Yet another tendency of the quiet life is to fear and to cunning. We see it in Jacob the quiet man, the smooth man. But here in Isaac is the possibility. The story of the men of Gerar and Rebekah shows this tendency in Isaac. They who are weakest need most of all the help of God and have most room for it. They who have no other gifts must make the most of this. 7. Again, the quiet uneventful life has its victories—victories as brave and oftentimes alike more noble and complete than the victories of the warrior. Isaac pitched his tent in the Valley of Gerar and dwelt there, and Isaac digged the wells of water which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father (chap. xvi. 23). Then the Philistines came and stopped up the well. Ishmael would have fought for it, but that would have taken time and men's lives, and have established a feud between himself and his neighbours. And after all he would have had to dig out the well again. So it was a saving of trouble and time and of much else at once to dig the well. So he digged again, and the Philistines came and filled that also. Again he might have fought about that too—but all that made it worth while to dig before made it worth while to dig again. So he removed from thence and digged another well; and for that they strove not. He had got to Rehoboth—"room." It is a good place to live, Rehoboth—where there is room for forgiveness and patience there is room for peace. And the Lord appeared to him the same night and said, "Fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee." Where there is room for love there is room for God. Then came the kings and chief captains who had sent him away and won by his gentleness, they sought an alliance with him—"We saw certainly, that the Lord was with thee: and we said, let there now be an oath betwixt us, and let us make a covenant with thee. Thou art now the blessed of the Lord. And he made them a feast, and they did eat and drink." It was a great triumph of peace principles; as pure a victory as was ever won. So the quiet man was a hero all unbeknown to himself, and won a more noble victory than ever came of cruel bloodshed. These gentle souls have a mighty power, mightier than we reckon—like the silent stars that rule the darkness by shining. Lastly, let us remember that it was not Isaac's natural character that singled him out for distinction; but it was his relation to the coming Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. This was Abraham's greatness; and here was Isaac as great as Abraham. And herein is our greatness too. Not in what we are can we find our glory, but in Him, our Saviour and our King. (*Mark Guy Pearse.*)

ISAAC:—I. THE PERSONAL CHARACTER OF THIS MAN TAKES ROOT IN THE BLESSING OF GOD. 1. His natural life commences with a special benediction, for he was a child of promise. 2. Isaac had a remarkable dedication in his youth. 3. But it is now, when Abraham is dead, that he more largely receives the blessing. 4. More deeply impressed at the last than at the first, he solemnly prepares to transmit that blessing which he had inherited.

II. THIS MAN'S MARKED INDIVIDUALITY GROWS UP AND SHAPES ITSELF IN THE GODLY HABITS OF A PROTRACTED LIFE. 1. His habit of thought. 2. His habit of dealing with men. 3. His habits at home.

III. THE MARKED INDIVIDUALITY OF THIS MAN IS SEEN IN THE AMPLE FRUIT WHICH IT BORE. 1. It is in Isaac that we get the best expression of patriotism. 2. Come within the radius of this man's influence, and you feel that he, too, in the best sense, was a man of the world. 3. But notably you feel in Isaac's case what is that influence which leads a man to make ample and timely disposition of

his secular affairs, that he may give himself more fully to better things. (G. Woolnough, M.A.)

Vers. 12-18. These are the generations of Ishmael.—I. *The generations of Ishmael*.—I. THAT THOSE WHO ARE NOT APPOINTED TO THE MOST HONOURABLE PLACE ARE YET CARED FOR BY PROVIDENCE. II. THAT PROVIDENCE AFFORDS ENCOURAGEMENTS FOR THE SUPPORT OF FAITH AND VIRTUE. III. THAT THE FAITHFULNESS OF PROVIDENCE MAY BE PROVED ON DIFFERENT LINES. Past and present condition of (1) Jews, (2) Ishmaelites. (T. H. Leale.) *The genealogies of the wicked*.—1. The genealogies of the wicked, God sometimes recorded for His own glory and the sake of the Church (ver. 12). 2. God doth by name punctually perform His promise unto His servants, though it be concerning the wicked. 3. God doth vouchsafe a more abundant seed sometimes to the children of the flesh than to the children of the promise. Ishmael hath many sons, it is long till Isaac hath any. 4. Great dignities, commands, and powers below God doth cast upon bondmen in the Church (ver. 16). One drachm of grace is above monarchies. 5. A long age may betide an Ishmael, but not a good one. 6. A like death may seem to be both to the righteous and the wicked, but it is not so in truth. 7. The wicked in death are gathered to their people as well as the righteous unto theirs (ver. 17). 8. God giveth the lot of habitation, motion and cessation unto the worst of men on earth (ver. 18). (G. Hughes, B.D.)

Vers. 19-23. The generations of Isaac.—*The holy seed*.—1. God hath a special care to commend unto posterity the line of His Church, and His providences towards it. 2. The eminent line of the Church visible begins from Abraham (ver. 19). 3. The holy seed run not foolishly nor hastily into the marriage covenant, but in maturity and prudence. 4. God separates the mother of His Church from all superstitious relations. In calling any to His Church God separates them from corrupt relations (ver. 20). (G. Hughes, B.D.) *Lessons*.—1. In God's answer of prayer the greatest mercies may be given in, with the greatest temptation. 2. Hard temptations may sometimes cause gracious souls to be discontented with their mercies. 3. In such temptations gracious hearts make their resource to God to know His mind and do it (ver. 22). (Ibid.) *Lessons*.—1. Jehovah vouchsafes answers to His troubled petitioners suitable to their desires. 2. God hath by natural symptoms in some declared the two great parties of the world and of the Church. 3. God's oracle hath foretold heavy divisions between them. 4. God hath so ordered that the people of the world may be outwardly stronger than the Church. 5. It is God's oracle that the greatest in the world shall serve the least in the Church. 6. The preferring or undervaluing of creatures either for outward or inward, temporal or eternal good, depends wholly upon God's will (ver. 23). (Ibid.) *Rebekah's barrenness*.—The intended mother of the promised seed was left for twenty years childless—to contend with the doubts, surmises, evil proposals, proud challenges of God, and murmurings, which must undoubtedly have arisen even in so bright and spirited a heart as Rebekah's. It was thus she was taught the seriousness of the possession she had chosen for herself, and gradually led to the implicit faith requisite for the discharge of its responsibilities. Many young persons have a similar experience. They seem to themselves to have chosen a wrong position, to have made a thorough mistake in life, and to have brought themselves into circumstances in which they only retard, or quite prevent the prosperity of those with whom they are connected. In proportion as Rebekah loved Isaac, and entered into his prospects, must she have been tempted to think she had far better have remained in Padan-aram. It is a humbling thing to stand in some other person's way; but if it is by no fault of ours, but in obedience to affection or conscience we are in this position, we must, in humility and patience, wait upon Providence as Rebekah did, and resist all morbid despondency. This second barrenness in the prospective mother of the promised seed was as needful to all concerned as the first was; for the people of God, no more than any others, can learn in one lesson. They must again be brought to a real dependence on God as the Giver of the heir. The prayer with which Isaac "entreated" the Lord for his wife "because she was barren" was a prayer of deeper intensity than he could have uttered had he merely remembered the story that had been told him of his own birth. God must be recognized again and again and throughout as the Giver of life to the promised line. Learn, therefore, that although God has given you means of working out His salvation, your Rebekah will be barren without His continued activity. On His own means you must re-invite His blessing, for without the continuance of

His aid you will make nothing of the most beautiful and appropriate helps He has given you. It was by pain, anxiety, and almost dismay, that Rebekah received intimation that her prayer was answered. In this she is the type of many whom God hears. Inward strife, miserable forebodings, deep dejection, are often the first intimations that God is listening to our prayer and is beginning to work within us. (*M. Dods, D.D.*)

Vers. 24-26. Twins.—Birth of Esau and Jacob :—I. THEIR MARKED INDIVIDUALITY. II. HOW HEREBY IS POINTED OUT THEIR FUTURE DESTINY. III. HOW THEIR CHARACTERS, SO EARLY DEVELOPED, AFFECTED THE PREFERENCES OF THEIR PARENTS. (T. H. Leale.) *The twins :—*The children whose birth and destinies were thus predicted, at once gave evidence of a difference even greater than that which will often strike one as existing between two brothers, though rarely between twins. The first was born, all over like a hairy garment, presenting the appearance of being rolled up in a fur cloak or the skin of an animal—an appearance which did not pass away in childhood, but so obstinately adhered to him through life, that an imitation of his hands could be produced with the hairy skin of a kid. This was by his parents considered ominous. The want of the hairy covering which the lower animals have, is one of the signs marking out man as destined for a higher and more refined life than they; and when their son appeared in this guise, they could not but fear it prognosticated his sensual, animal career. So they called him Esau. And so did the younger son from the first show his nature, catching the heel of his brother, as if he were striving to be first-born; and so they called him Jacob, the heel-catcher or supplanter—as Esau afterwards bitterly observed—a name which precisely suited his crafty, plotting nature, shown in his twice over tripping up and overthrowing his elder brother. The name which Esau handed down to his people was, however, not his original name, but one derived from the colour of that for which he sold his birthright. It was in that exclamation of his, “Feed me with the same red,” that he disclosed his character. (*M. Dods, D.D.*)

Ver. 27. And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter.—Esau, the hunter :—I. A man of strong physical nature, a man of passion, with little self-restraint. II. A man of swift impulse. III. A man reckless of consequences. The present, the immediate, arrests him. IV. Esau had no sense of spiritual things. (L. D. Bevan.) *The animal and the spiritual :—I.* Esau was full of healthy vigour and the spirit of adventure, exulting in field sports, active, muscular, with the rough aspect and the bounding pulse of the free desert. Jacob was a harmless shepherd, pensive and tranquil, dwelling by the hearth and caring only for quiet occupations. Strength and speed and courage and endurance are blessings not lightly to be despised; but he who confines his ideal to them, as Esau did, chooses a low ideal, and one which can bring a man but little peace at the last. Esau reaches but half the blessing of a man, and that the meaner and temporal half; the other half seems seldom or never to have entered his thoughts. *II.* So side by side the boys grew up; and the next memorable scene of their history shows us that the great peril of animal life—the peril lest it should forget God altogether and merge into mere uncontrolled, intemperate sensuality—had happened to Esau! For the mess of pottage the sensual hunter sells in one moment the prophecy of the far future and the blessing of a thousand years. Esau's epitaph is the epitaph of a lifetime recording for ever the consummated carelessness of a moment. Esau, “a profane person,” “who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.” Jacob, with all the contemptible faults which lay on the surface of his character, had deep within his soul the faith in the unseen, the sense of dependence on and love to God which Esau did not even comprehend. *1.* Cultivate the whole of the nature which God has given you, and in doing so remember that the mind is of more moment than the body, and the soul than both. *2.* Beware lest, in a moment of weakness and folly, you sell your birthright and barter your happy innocence for torment and fear and shame. (*Archdeacon Farrar.*) *Politie hunting :—I. HIS STRENGTH: A HUNTER.* Hunting in itself is a delight lawful and laudable, and may well be argued for from the disposition that God hath put into creatures. He hath naturally inclined one kind of beasts to pursue another for man's profit and pleasure. He hath given the dog a secret instinct to follow the hare, the hart, the fox, the boar, as if he would direct a man by the finger of nature to exercise those qualities which His Divine wisdom created in them. *1.* This practice of hunting hath in it delight. *2.* Benefit. Recreations have also their profitable use, if rightly undertaken. (1)

The health is preserved by a moderate exercise. (2) The body is prepared and fitted by these sportive to more serious labours, when the hand of war shall set them to it. (3) The mind, wearied with graver employments, hath thus some cool respiration given it, and is sent back to the service of God with a revived alacrity. II. HIS POLICY: A CUNNING HUNTER. 1. He had a ravenous and intemperate desire. This appears from three phrases he used: (1) "Feed me, I pray thee" (ver. 80); satisfy, saturate, satiate me; or, let me swallow at once, as some read it. The words of an appetite insufferable of delay. (2) To show his eagerness, he doubles the word for haste: "with that red, with that red pottage;" red was his colour, red was his desire. He coveted red pottage; he dwelt in a red soil, called thereon Idumea; and in the text, "therefore was his name called Edom." (3) He says, "I am faint," and (ver. 32) "at the point to die," if I have it not. Like some longing souls that have so weak a hand over their appetites, that they must die if their humour be not fulfilled. 2. His folly may be argued from his base estimation of the birthright; that he would so lightly part from it, and on so easy conditions as pottage. 3. Another argument of his folly was ingratitude to God, who had in mercy vouchsafed him, though but by a few minutes, the privilege of primogeniture; wherewith divines hold that the priesthood was also conveyed. 4. His obstinacy taxeth his folly, that, after cold blood, leisure to think of the treasure he sold, and digestion of his pottage, he repented, not of his rashness, but (ver. 34) "He did eat, and drink, and rose up, and went his way"—filled his belly, rose up to his former customs, and went his way without a *Quid feci*? Therefore it is added, "he despised his birthright." He followed his pleasures without any interception of sorrow or interruption of conscience. His whole life was a circle of sinful customs; and not his birthright's loss can put him out of them. 5. Lastly, his perfidious nature appeareth, that though he had made an absolute conveyance of his birthright to Jacob, and sealed the deed with an oath, yet he seemed to make but a jest of it, and purposed in his heart not to perform it. Thus literally; let us now come to some moral application to ourselves. Hunting is, for the most part, taken in the Holy Scripture in the worst sense. So (Gen. x. 9) Nimrod was a hunter, even to a proverb; and that "before the Lord," as without fear of His majesty. Now, if it were so hateful to hunt beasts, what is it to hunt men? The wicked oppressors of the world are here typed and taxed, who employ both arm and brain to hunt the poor out of their habitations, and to drink the blood of the oppressed. Herein observe—I. The persons hunted. II. The manner of hunting; and, III. The hounds. 1. The poor are their prey: any man that either their wit or violence can practise on. 2. You hear the object they hunt; attend the manner. And this you shall find, as Esau's, to consist in two things—force and fraud. They are not only hunters, but cunning hunters. 3. Now for their hounds. Besides that they have long noses themselves, and hands longer than their noses, they have dogs of all sorts. Beagles, cunning intelligencers—the more crafty they are, the more commendable. Their setters, prowling promoters; whereof there may be necessary use, as men may have dogs, but they take them for mischievous purposes. Their spaniels, fawning sycophants, who lick their master's hands, but are brawling ever at poor strangers. Their great mastiffs; surly and sharking bailiffs, that can set a rankling tooth in the poor tenants' ribs. Thus I have shown you a field of hunters; what should I add, but my prayers to heaven, and desires to earth, that these hunters may be hunted? The hunting of harmful beasts is commended: the wolf, the boar, the bear, the fox, the tiger, the otter. But the metaphorical hunting of these is more praiseworthy; the country wolves, or city foxes, deserve most to be hunted. (T. Adams.) **Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents.**—*First impressions of Jacob*:—I. JACOB WAS THE FATHER OF THE JEWISH RACE, AND A TYPICAL JEW. If we can understand the life of Jacob, we can understand the history of his people. The extremes which startle us in them are all in him. Like them, he is the most successful schemer of his times; and, like them, he has that deep spirituality, that far-seeing faith, which are the grandest of all qualities, and make a man capable of the highest culture that a human spirit can receive. Like them, he spends the greatest part of his life in exile, and amid trying conditions of toil and sorrow; and, like them, he is inalienably attached to that dear land, his only hold on which was by the promise of God, and the graves of the heroic dead. II. JACOB HAS SO MANY POINTS OF CONTACT WITH OURSELVES. 1. His failings speak to us. 2. His aspirations speak to us. 3. His sorrows speak to us. III. IN JACOB WE CAN TRACE THE WORKINGS OF DIVINE LOVE. "Jacob have I loved" (Mal. i. 2). 1. It was pre-natal love. 2. It was fervent love. 3. It was a discip-

linary love. IV. JACOB'S LIFE GIVES A CLUE TO THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION (see Rom. ix. 11). Election refers largely, if not primarily, to the service which the elect are qualified to render to their fellows throughout all coming time. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Childhood shows the man*:—I. THAT CONDUCT IN THE DAYS OF YOUTH FOREBODES THE PROCEDURE OF AFTER DAYS. II. THAT THE BIBLE INDICATES THE RIGHT WAY OF GROWING UP INTO A WORTHY MANHOOD. III. THAT NATURAL TENDENCIES MUST BE UNDER CONTROL FROM THE OUTSET OF LIFE. Conclusion: Read this item in the life of Jacob and Esau—1. To learn in what you may be tending to wrong. 2. To impress you with the truth that there are critical hours in every one's life. 3. To realize that there is present help against yielding. (*D. G. Watt, M.A.*) *Jacob's home life*:—I. FRATERNAL DISSIMILARITY. II. PARENTAL PARTIALITY. III. CONJUGAL CONTRARIETY. Lessons: 1. The responsibility of parents. 2. The need of love as a cementing influence in home life. 3. The baseness of unbrotherliness. 4. The downward course of sin. (*T. S. Dickson.*) *Dwelling in tents*:—Two things are observable in the holy patriarchs, and commendable to all that will be heirs with them of eternal life. 1. Their contempt of the world. They that dwell in tents intend not a long dwelling in a place. They are moveables, ever ready to be transferred at the occasion and will of the inhabitant. "Abraham dwelt in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise" (Heb. xi. 9). The reason is added, "for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." These saints studied not to enlarge their barns, as the rich cosmopolite (Luke xii.), or to sing requiems to their souls, in the hoped perpetuity of earthly habitations. "Soul, live; thou hast enough laid up for many years." Fool! he had not enough for that night. They had no thought that their houses should continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations; thereupon calling their lands after their own names (Psa. xlix. 11). God convinceth the foolish security of the Jews, to whom He had promised (by the Messiah to be purchased) an everlasting royalty in heaven, by the Rechabites (Jer. xxxv. 7), who built no houses, but dwelt in tents, as if they were strangers, ready on a short warning for removal. The Church esteems heaven her home, this world but a tent, a tent which we must all leave, build we as high as Babel, as strong as Babylon. When we have fortified, combined, feasted, death comes with a voider, and takes away all. 2. Their frugality should not pass unregarded. Here is no ambition of great buildings; a tent will serve. How differ our days and hearts from those! The fashion is now to build great houses to our lands, till we have no lands to our houses; and the credit of a good house is made, not to consist in outward hospitality, but in outward walls. (*T. Adams.*) *The advantages of plain dealing*:—1. The principal is to please God, whose displeasure against double-dealing the sad examples of Saul for the Amalekites, of Gehazi for the bribes, of Ananias for the inheritance, testify in their destruction. Whose delight in plain-dealing Himself affirms: "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" (John i. 17). 2. The credit of a good name, which is a most worthy treasure, is thus preserved. The riches left thee by thy ancestors may miscarry through others' negligence; the name not, save by thy own fault. It is the plain-dealer's reward, his name shall be had in estimation; whereas no faith is given to the dissembler, even speaking truth. Every man is more ready to trust the poor plain-dealer than the glittering false-tongued gallant. 3. It prevents and infatuates all the malicious plots of enemies. God, in regard to thy simplicity, brings to nought all their machinations. Thou, O Lord, hadst respect to my simple pureness. An innocent fool takes fearless steps, and walks as securely as if it stood girt with a wall of brass. 4. It preserves thy state from ruin. When by subtlety men think to scrape together much wealth, all is but the spider's web, artificial and weak. What plain-dealing gets, sticks by us, and infallibly derives itself to our posterity. If thou wouldst be good to thyself and thine, use plainness. 5. It shall somewhat keep thee from the troubles and vexations of the world. 6. The curses of the poor shall never hurt thee. Though the causeless curse shall never come, yet it is happy for a man so to live that all may bless him. Now the plain man shall have this at last. Gallant prodigality, like fire in flax, makes a great blaze, a hot show; but plain hospitality, like fire in solid wood, holds out to warm the poor, because God blesseth it. So I have seen hot spurs in the way gallop amain; but the ivy bushes have so stayed them, that the plain traveller comes first to his journey's end. 7. It shall be thy best comfort on thy death-bed: the conscience of an innocent life. On this staff leans aged Samuel: "Whose ox or ass have I taken?" 8. Lastly, thou shalt find rest for thy soul. Thou hast dealt plainly; so will God with thee, multiplying upon thee His promised mercies. (*Ibid.*) *Jacob's*

election ; or, Divine sovereignty in its relation to life :—I. Although Jacob obtained, in virtue of his election, a certain priority over Esau, yet was Esau also, equally with Jacob, the subject of Divine sovereignty. II. The appointment of God's sovereignty concerning these two brothers did in no wise determine their eternal destinies, but only the sphere of their human histories. III. It may have been the case that the positions severally assigned to both Jacob and Esau in the family of Isaac, were just those which were best adapted to ensure the blessedness of both. Perhaps the only way to bring such a disposition as Esau's to esteem his birthright in Isaac was to transfer it to another. And that this discipline was not lost on Esau the event distinctly shows. (*W. Roberts.*) *And the boys grew* :—I. They grew bodily. Natural provision for this. Food, air, exercise, increase bulk of body. Explain. Grew in stature and in strength. II. They grew mentally. Natural provision for this. Memory a storehouse for facts. Judgment a mill for grinding them up and digesting them. Some boys are careless, dull, disobedient, self-willed, grow slowly, become men bodily and remain children in mind. Providential provision for mental growth. Books, schools, &c. These boys had not these things. III. They grew very unlike each other. Sketch their differences, bodily, mentally, morally. See rest of verse. Brothers often unlike in temper, taste, &c. With all mental and other differences they should be alike pious. "Boy father of the man." IV. They grew up into history. Which became the most prominent? Why? The practice of prayer at length made Jacob the better man. He overcame evil. Esau degenerated. Learn : You are all growing bodily : are you growing mentally? Do you grow in wisdom and in grace, and in the favour of God and man? Are you growing like Christ, growing up into Christ, growing more fit for heaven? *Constancy and inconstancy in the two brothers* :—It has been pointed out that the weakness in Esau's character which makes him so striking a contrast to his brother is his inconstancy.

"That one error

Fill him with faults ; makes him run through all the sins."

Constancy, persistence, dogged tenacity is certainly the striking feature of Jacob's character. He could wait and bide his time ; he could retain one purpose year after year till it was accomplished. The very motto of his life was, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me." He watched for Esau's weak moment, and took advantage of it. He served fourteen years for the woman he loved, and no hardship quenched his love. Nay, when a whole lifetime intervened, and he lay dying in Egypt, his constant heart still turned to Rachel, as if he had parted with her but yesterday. In contrast with his tenacious, constant character stands Esau, led by impulse, betrayed by appetite, everything by turns and nothing long. To-day despising his birthright, to-morrow breaking his heart because for its loss ; to-day vowing he will murder his brother, to-morrow falling on his neck and kissing him ; a man you cannot reckon upon, and of too shallow a nature for anything to root itself deeply in. (*M. Dods, D.D.*) *Life revealed in its progress* :—One ship is as good as another in the harbour. It is outside of the harbour that the comparative merits of different vessels are made to appear. There their qualities, whether superior or inferior, show themselves. It is what ships do on the sea that determines that one is better or worse than another. And as with ships, so with men. Two men start about alike on the morn of life. They go along at first about together. But follow them five or ten years, and about the fifth, the sixth, or the seventh year, the one—a man of pleasure, a godless man, a man that does not believe in a Divine supervision of the affairs of this world—begins to degenerate ; while the other—a sober Christian man, who believes that God controls the world and all that are in it—in the beginning lays his foundation, going down so deep that he seems for a time to burrow like a marmot ; but then, little by little, he begins to work upward, and he builds so that every hour men see that he is building strongly and surely. (*H. W. Beecher.*)

Ver. 28. Rebekah loved Jacob.—*Rebekah ; or, undue natural affection and partiality in parents* :—I. While the account of Rebekah in Holy Scripture is so brief, that it would be difficult to draw many reflections from the study of her character, her position is suggestive, and her conduct by no means without important practical results. She first comes before our notice as the future wife of Isaac, and, in that capacity, at once attracts the interest of the student of the patriarchal age. She

found Isaac walking, meditating at eventide, and he received her into his tent. Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife — the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian, of Padan-aram, the sister of Laban the Syrian. Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and Isaac loved Esau because he did eat of his venison, but Rebekah loved Jacob. The next we hear of her was in Gerar, where her beauty attracting the notice of the inhabitants, Isaac called her his sister. Esau's marriage became a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah, for he married a Hittite. The next and hinging circumstance of Rebekah's life is the account of the deception passed upon his father by Jacob, at the suggestion of his mother. 2. The character which we have brought before us by the preceding acts is one, which to our eye, would wear the appearance of duplicity and self-seeking in a high degree; but placing aside for a moment the impression which is thus forced upon us, it will be well to study the many practical suggestions which are started by reading Rebekah's life. And first, this trait which I have just called duplicity, whatever it may be, belonged to the mother of Israel, and characterized each succeeding scion of her race. The Jew is essentially subtle. In whatever degree this may be traceable to Rebekah and her son, it nevertheless is very clear that a parent's fault is constantly transmitted to its child and onward to successive generations. More than this. If the parent yields to his natural disposition, he strengthens his own habit of evil and transmits to his descendants a nature more strongly inclined to the same evil; whereas if, on the other hand, he succeeds in checking his own disposition, the result becomes apparent in the healthier moral condition of his offspring. All this is very sad to contemplate, inasmuch as countless beings become responsible for the fault of one; but it is in accordance with the history of mankind, with the moral impressions of antiquity, and with distinct statements of Divine revelation. The sin of Adam has effected his remotest descendant; the oft told tales of the Atreidæ and Ædipus remind us how strongly the heathen world was impressed with the belief that the sin of the parent predisposed the child for the committal of a similar fault, and became the cause of punishment to distant posterity; while the second commandment tells us in clear terms, that God visits the sins of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation. But it is not only to punishment, but the physical tendency to a definite form of immorality to which I specially refer. It has been observed, with regard to the population of our own country, that in districts where certain crimes are prevalent children are born with bodily constitutions and mental conformations, such as strongly to predispose the will to yield the same faults of which the parents are guilty; and so remarkably is this the case, that in some places the brevity of life and the rapid increase of the committal of crime are appalling; and though perhaps in a less degree, the indulged fault of a parent is often seen to be the habitual condition of the child. This being the case, what a motive it offers to parents to check their own evil tendencies and to lead a godly and upright life. Rebekah's fault was perpetuated to onward centuries; and the wilfulness of overweening affection—mingled with a disregard to truthfulness—has marked the descendant of Israel down to the day we live in. So pride, vanity, extravagance, uncharitableness of judgment or opinion, though but perhaps a slight intentional offence in father or mother, may receive severe penalties inflicted on the descendants of the third and fourth generation. How striking to see the pride of aristocracy, though perhaps resulting from some acts of which a man may be proud, inherited by a child who has nothing on which to plume himself, except the fact of being descended from a parent who earned for himself his position and his titles. Yet we are frequently called upon to see this condition of childhood, the result of the indulged temper and feeling of the parent. 3. But the character of Rebekah is suggestive in other ways; she indulged favouritism, and, like a mother, loved her youngest son the best. Partiality of this kind is either selfishness or worse. If it simply flows from an actual preference, it is selfish to yield to it; if, as it often does, it springs from noticing a reflection of self in the child of our partiality, it becomes idolatry, or the worshipping of self in another shape. 4. But there is another lesson which Rebekah teaches us, which we cannot pass by; the way in which intense and partial affection blinds the eye to pure morality. Rebekah's love for Jacob was so great that she betrayed her husband for the sake of securing the birthright for her younger son; and she infringed God's law by indulging in deceitfulness. The forms of morality and religion are in themselves clear, keen, and definite, even as the statue carved from the hardest marble; but between our eye and those forms it is easy enough to let mists arise so blinding and deceiving as wholly to change the appearance of the form which we

are gazing at. This is especially the case with regard to the forms of truthfulness. (*E. Monro, M.A.*)

Vers. 29-34. Esau despised his birthright.—*The story of the birthright*:—The story of the birthright shows us what kind of a man Esau was: hasty, careless, fond of the good things of this life. He had no reason to complain if he lost his birthright. He did not care for it, and so he had thrown it away. The day came when he wanted his birthright, and could not have it, and found no place for repentance—that is, no chance of undoing what he had done—though he sought it carefully with tears. He had sown, and he must reap. He had made his bed, and he must lie on it. And so must Jacob in his turn. I. IT IS NATURAL TO PITY ESAU, BUT WE HAVE NO RIGHT TO DO MORE; WE HAVE NO RIGHT TO FANCY FOR A MOMENT THAT GOD WAS ARBITRARY OR HARD UPON HIM. Esau is not the sort of man to be the father of a great nation, or of anything else great. Greedy, passionate, reckless people like him, without due feeling of religion or the unseen world, are not the men to govern the world or help it forward. II. GOD REWARDED JACOB'S FAITH BY GIVING HIM MORE LIGHT; by not leaving him to himself and his own darkness and meanness, but opening his eyes to understand the wondrous things of His law, and showing him how that law is everlasting, righteous, not to be escaped by any man; how every action brings forth its appointed fruit; how those who sow the wind will reap the whirlwind. III. IT IS THE STEADY, PRUDENT, GOD-FEARING ONES, WHO WILL PROSPER ON THE EARTH, and not poor, wild, hot-headed Esau. But those who give way to meanness, covetousness, falsehood, as Jacob did, will repent it, the Lord will enter into judgment with them quickly. (*C. Kingsley, M.A.*) *The despised birthright*:—In forfeiting his birthright to his younger brother, Esau gave up—1. The right of priesthood inherent in the eldest line of the patriarch's family; 2. The promise of the inheritance of the Holy Land; 3. The promise that in his race and of his blood Messiah should be born. Esau parted with all this because, as he said in the rough, unreflective common-place strain which marks persons of his character even now, and which they mistake for common sense—"He did not see the good of it all." "What good shall this birthright do me?" I. IN MATTERS OF KNOWLEDGE WE FIND MEN DESPISING THEIR BIRTHRIGHT. Knowledge is power; but as the maxim is used now, it is utterly vulgarizing. Knowledge not loved for itself is not loved at all. It may bring power, but it brings neither peace nor elevation to the man who has won it. If we cultivate knowledge for the sake of worldly advantage, what are we doing but bidding farewell to all that is lasting or spiritual in knowledge and wisdom, and taking in exchange for it a daily meal? II. AGAIN, AS CITIZENS, MEN DESPISE THEIR BIRTHRIGHT. If, when it is given them to choose their rulers, they deliberately set aside thinkers; if they laugh at and despise the corrupt motives which affect the choice of rulers, and yet take no serious step to render corrupt motive impotent—then there is a real denial and abnegation of citizens to act on the highest grounds of citizenship. III. WE ARE IN DAILY DANGER OF SELLING OUR BIRTHRIGHT IN RELIGION. Esau's birthright was a poor shadow to ours. Esau had priesthood; we are called to be priests of a yet higher order. Esau had earthly promises; so have we. Esau had the promise of Messiah; we have the knowledge of Messiah Himself. IV. THE LOST BIRTHRIGHT IS THE ONE THING THAT IS IRRETRIEVABLE. Neither good nor bad men consent that a forfeited birthright should be restored. (*Archbishop Benson.*) *On despising one's birthright*:—Esau repeats here, as we all of us repeat, the history of the fall. Man's first sin was despising his birthright. The fruit of the tree was Eve's mess of pottage; the friendship, the Fatherhood of God, was the birthright which she despised. I. WHAT IS A BIRTHRIGHT? Briefly, it is that which combines high honour with sacred duty; it confers dignity and power, but it demands self-abnegation and unselfish work. Each of us is born with a birthright. God's infinite realm is large enough to confer on each one of us a title, and to demand in return a correspondent duty and work. The prize we strive for and have a right to strive for is the wealth of the universe through eternity. II. WHAT IS IT TO DESPISE A BIRTHRIGHT? Esau despised his birthright by holding it cheaper than life. All shrinking from the pain and sacrifice which are ever found in the path of duty is a despising of the birthright, a counting ourselves unworthy of the place in the mansion which God has made us to occupy. III. THE INEVITABLE FRUIT: the band of reprobate. Esau was rejected as "under proof." God sought a son: He found a slave; He marked him, like Cain, and sent him away. The birthright which we despise as a possession will haunt us as an avenger, and will anticipate upon earth the gloom of the second and utter death. (*J. B. Brown, B.A.*)

The sale of the birthright:—Esau may be regarded as the founder of the Epicurean sort, of all whose motto and philosophy of life is, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Such is the chief lesson of this history. But this history, considered in itself, shows us that both the parties to this bargain are to blame. It was unrighteous business, and altogether discreditable to the two brothers engaged in it. This is evident if we—I. CONSIDER THE PARTIES ENGAGED IN THIS TRANSACTION AS ORDINARY MEMBERS OF SOCIETY. 1. As to Jacob's conduct. (1) It was marked by unkindness unworthy of a brother. His conduct was most unfeeling. (2) It was marked by low cunning. To take an unfair advantage of his brother's need was a mean device. 2. As to Esau's conduct. (1) He abandoned himself to the delights and temptations of appetite. (2) He was lacking in a true sense of honour and nobility. (3) He was unconcerned for the peace of the future. II. CONSIDER THE PARTIES ENGAGED IN THIS TRANSACTION AS RELIGIOUS MEN. 1. As to Jacob's conduct. (1) It was irreverent. This birthright was a sacred thing, dignified with a religious importance; yet Jacob, in a most profane manner, mixes it up with things secular. He makes it a commercial business of the meanest order. (2) It showed a want of faith in God. (3) It was contrary to the broad, free spirit of true piety. 2. As to Esau's conduct. (1) It showed a powerlessness to resist temptation. (2) It was profane. (a) He preferred the present to the future. (b) He preferred the sensual to the spiritual. (c) He preferred the near and certain to the distant and probable. (T. H. Leale.) *Esau's contempt of his birthright*:—Let us consider—I. WHETHER THERE BE NOT A BIRTHRIGHT WHICH WE MAY SELL; OR BLESSINGS TO THE ENJOYMENT OF WHICH WE ARE BORN, BUT WHICH WE MAY FORFEIT. Compare our state with that of—(1) The inferior creatures; (2) The fallen angels; (3) The heathen. II. FOR WHAT CONSIDERATION THEY WHO SELL THIS BIRTHRIGHT PART WITH IT. (J. Benson, D.D.) *The two brothers*:—1. They differed in appearance. 2. They differed in pursuits. 3. They differed most in character. I. THE BIRTHRIGHT. 1. Not worldly prosperity. 2. Not immunity from sorrow. 3. The birthright was a spiritual heritage. It gave the right—which ever belonged to its possessor—of being the priest of the family or clan. It carried the privilege of being the depository and communicator of the Divine secrets. It constituted a link in the line of descent by which the Messiah was to be born into the world. The right of wielding power with God and men; the right of catching up and handing on—as in the old Greek race—the torch of Messianic hope; the right of heirship to the promises of the covenant made to Abraham; the right of standing among the spiritual aristocracy of mankind; the right of being a pilgrim of eternity, owning no foot of earth, because all heaven was held in fee—this, and more than this, was summed up in the possession of the birthright. II. THE BARTER. We cannot exonerate either of these men from blame. Jacob was not only a traitor to his brother, but he was faithless towards his God. Had it not been distinctly whispered in his mother's ear that the elder of the brothers should serve the younger? Had not the realization of his loftiest ambition been pledged by One whose faithfulness had been the theme of repeated talks with Abraham, who had survived during the first eighteen years of his young life? He might have been well assured that what the God of Abraham had promised He was able also to perform; and would perform, without the aid of his own miserable schemes. But how hard is it for us to quietly wait for God! We are too apt to outrun Him; to forestall the quiet unfolding of His purposes; and to snatch at promised blessings before they are ripe. And as for Esau, we can never forget the beacon words of Scripture, "Look diligently, lest there be any profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright" (Heb. xii. 15). Yet let us, in condemning him across the ages, look close at home. How many are there amongst ourselves, born into the world with splendid talents; dowered with unusual powers; inheritors of noble names; heirs to vast estates; gifted with keys to unlock any of the many doors to name, and fame, and usefulness—who yet fling away all these possibilities of blessing and blessedness, for one brief plunge into the Stygian pool of sensual indulgence! And the appeals to sense come oftenest when we are least expecting them. These appeals, moreover, come in the most trivial things. One mess of pottage; one glass of drink; one moment's unbridled passion; one afternoon's saunter; a question and an answer; a movement or a look. It is in such small things—small as the angle at which railway lines diverge from each other to east and west—that great alternatives are offered and great decisions made. (F. B. Meyer, B.D.) *Esau: a true idea of life and prosperity*:—I. A TRUE IDEA OF LIFE. Esau felt himself at the point of death, and all men are at this point. 1. The period of our

mortal life. 2. The nature of our mortal life. The moment we begin to live, that moment we begin to die. II. A TRUE IDEA OF WEALTH. Esau felt that his birthright was nothing to him when he died, and how patent this truth! Lessons: 1. To the aspirant for wealth. How foolish this eagerness. You are reaching after that which is no sooner clasped than let go for ever. 2. To the possessor of wealth. (1) Do not set your heart upon your possessions, because you will soon leave them. (2) Use them for purposes that will yield you happiness for ever. (*Homilist.*) *The birthright sold*.—I. THE CUNNING MAN. 1. He waited for the right opportunity. 2. He employed the likeliest means of gaining his object. 3. He took no account of natural ties. 4. He made the compact irrevocable. II. THE SENSUAL MAN. 1. He lacked resolution. 2. He despised an honourable position. 3. He lost sight of the future. Conclusion: Both characters are unjustifiable. (*Ibid.*) *Contempt of spiritual privileges*.—Hundreds and thousands of people are showing exactly the same sort of contempt for spiritual privileges which God extends to them to-day as Esau showed for the birthright. The hundreds and thousands with whom the present overbears the future; who allow the body, with its appetites and passions, to drown the voice of conscience, or obscure the vision of promise; who place things temporal before things spiritual, the world before heaven, the present before the eternal; who say of spiritual privileges, "What profit shall they be to me?" or, "What earthly use are they?" Let us take one or two very common and ordinary examples. 1. How few recognize the privilege of public worship as a privilege, as well as a clear duty! How readily is the privilege exchanged for something else, at the very smallest opportunity!—a country walk, a chat with a friend who happens to drop in just as you are starting for church, a call, some pleasure which might very well wait. A man hears the church bell ringing, and he debates within himself whether he will go or not go. It is just the merest matter of self-pleasing. There is no thought of the duty he owes to God; and as for the privilege, he would stare at you if you suggested it. "Privilege! Where is the privilege? What profit am I going to get out of it? It will not increase my wages, or find me work, or lower the price of bread! Privilege! What are you thinking about?" And so it ends in his finding "something better to do"! Something, that is, that is pleasing to the senses, or which helps him temporally. In other words, "he eats and drinks, and goes his way, and despises his Christian birthright." 2. Or take the case of one's private devotions; the reading of the Bible, and so forth. You are later than you should be in getting up. That puts other things late. There is much to be done which must be done, but something must be sacrificed, something must give way. What is it to be? The adornment of the body must not be neglected; household business must not be interfered with; prayers! they must give way. "I have no time to say any prayers this morning!" "No time!" No time for communion with God; for that which will make all the difference to your whole day! But then, it is a spiritual privilege! 3. I need hardly remind you of the contempt of that greatest of all privileges, which is so sadly common, the Holy Communion. (*J. B. C. Murphy, B.A.*) *How Esau lost his birthright*.—I. JACOB'S BARGAIN. Selfish and impatient. II. ESAU'S SIN. 1. Sensuality. 2. Worldliness. 3. Recklessness. (*W. S. Smith, B.D.*) *The birthright*.—This blessing was principally spiritual and distant, having respect to the setting up of God's kingdom, to the birth of the Messiah, or, in other words, to all those great things included in the covenant with Abraham. This was well understood by the family; both Esau and Jacob must have often heard their parents converse about it. If the birthright which was bought at this time had consisted in any temporal advantages of dignity, authority, or property to be enjoyed in the lifetime of the parties, Esau would not have made so light of it as he did, calling it "this birthright," and intimating that he should soon die, and then it would be of no use to him. It is a fact, too, that Jacob had none of the ordinary advantages of the birthright during his lifetime. Instead of a double portion, he was sent out of the family with only "a staff" in his hand, leaving Esau to possess the whole of his father's substance. And when more than twenty years afterwards he returned to Canaan, he made no scruple to ascribe to his brother the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power, calling him "my lord Esau," and acknowledging himself as his "servant." The truth is, the question between them was, which should be heir to the blessings promised in the covenant with Abraham. This Jacob desired, and Esau despised, and in despising such high blessings was guilty of profaneness. (*A. Fuller.*) *Esau and Jacob*.—I. THE WEARY HUNTER. II. THE CRAFTY DESIGNER. III. THE UNFAIR ADVANTAGE. Learn:

1. Divine wisdom is better than human craft. 2. Generosity is more noble than selfishness. 3. A good object will not justify unworthy means. 4. What was our birthright, compared with what Jesus has secured for us? (*J. C. Gray.*) *Lessons*:—1. Gracious hearts take up those spiritual things which carnal men refuse. 2. Good souls may desire the best security for spiritual privileges, even in the way of having them from men. Swear to me, &c. 3. Souls spiritual are instantly desirous of spiritual things. This day. 4. The just desires of good men may be an occasion of sin to the wicked. 5. It is proper for wicked hearts to swear and sell away all the tokens of spiritual advantages. 6. God's providence orders wicked hearts in putting away from themselves mercy which was otherwise bequeathed by grace to them (*ver. 33*). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. Heavenly souls easily part with earthly for heavenly things, lentils for a birthright. 2. Carnal souls go away very well contented with sensual portions. 3. Sensual men despise and count vile the choicest of spiritual privileges. (*Ibid.*) *Lentils*:—Lentils were and are extensively and carefully grown in Egypt, Palestine, and Syria; those of Egypt were, at a later period, particularly famous; and the manner of cooking them is even immortalized on monuments. They are not only used as a pottage, but in times of scarcity, and more generally by the poor, they are baked into bread, either alone or mixed with barley. Lentils and rice, boiled in equal quantities, form still one of the favourite dishes in many parts of the East. When cooked, they are of a yellowish brown colour, approaching to red; some species, growing on a red soil, have this colour naturally; and hence Esau, in his haste, calls the dish simply the red one. The fact, that lentils were among the cheapest and most common articles of vegetable food, enhances the force and point of our narrative. The privileges which the birthright legally confers; the double portion of the father's property; the higher authority in the family; the greater social influence; all these advantages, in this instance enhanced by spiritual blessings as their most precious accompaniment, could have no value for one who regarded his existence merely as the transitory play of an hour; and who was indifferent to the esteem of others, because he had not risen to understand the dignity of mankind. If we were to expect a historical allusion in this fact also, the probable supposition offers itself, that indeed the Edomites, who were masters of the wide tracts from the Red Sea along the whole mountain of Seir, up to the very frontiers of Palestine, might, with a little exertion, have extended their dominion over the land of Canaan; that, with a little degree of ambition and self-control, they might have become a respected and mighty nation; but that their thoughtless and ferocious habits kept them in the dreary solitudes, far from the chief scenes of history and civilization. It is known that the Mohammedans long kept the memory of this transaction alive by distributing daily to poor people and to strangers lentils prepared in a kitchen near the grave at Hebron, where they believed the cession of the birthright took place. (*M. M. Kalisch, Ph.D.*) *Fondness for pottage*:—The people of the East are exceedingly fond of pottage, which they call *kool*. It is something like gruel, and is made of various kinds of grain, which are first beaten in a mortar. The red pottage is made of *kurakan*, and other grains, but is not superior to the other. For such a contemptible mess, then, did Esau sell his birthright. When a man has sold his fields or gardens for an insignificant sum, the people say, "The fellow has sold his land for pottage." Does a father give his daughter in marriage to a low-caste man, it is observed, "He has given her for pottage." Does a person by base means seek for some paltry enjoyment, it is said "For one leaf" (namely leaf-ful) "of pottage he will do nine days' work." Has a learned man who has given instruction or advice to others stooped to anything which was not expected from him, it is said "The learned one has fallen into the pottage pot." Of a man in great poverty, it is remarked, "Alas! he cannot get pottage." A beggar asks, "Sir, will you give me a little pottage?" Does a man seek to acquire great things by small means, "He is trying to procure rubies by pottage." When a person greatly flatters another, it is common to say, "He praises him only for his pottage." Does a king greatly oppress his subjects, it is said, "He only governs for the pottage." Has an individual lost much money by trade, "The speculation has broken his pottage pot." Does a rich man threaten to ruin a poor man, the latter will ask, "Will the lightning strike my pottage pot?" (*Roberts.*) *Brutishness of worldlings*:—Luther was told of a nobleman who, above all things, occupied himself with amassing money, and was so buried in darkness that he gave no heed to the word of God, and even said to one who pleaded with him, "Sir, the gospel pays no interest." "Have you no grains?" interposed Luther; then he told this

table:—"A lion making a great feast, invited all the beasts, and with them some swine. When all manner of dainties were set before the guests, the swine asked, 'Have you no grains?'" "Even so," continued Luther, "even so it is in these days with carnal men; we preachers set before them the most dainty and costly dishes, such as everlasting salvation, the remission of sins, and God's grace; but they, like swine, turn up their snouts and ask for money. Offer a cow a nutmeg and she will reject it for old hay." (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Appetite gratified and appetite held in check*:—Which brother presents the more repulsive spectacle of the two in this selling of the birthright it is hard to say. Who does not feel contempt for the great, strong man, declaring he will die if he is required to wait five minutes till his own supper is prepared; forgetting, in the craving of his appetite, every consideration of a worthy kind; oblivious of everything but his hunger and his food; crying, like a great baby, "Feed me with that red!" So it is always with the man who has fallen under the power of sensual appetite. He is always going to die if it is not immediately gratified. He must have his appetite satisfied. No consideration of consequences can be listened to or thought of; the man is helpless in the hands of his appetite—it rules and drives him on, and he is utterly without self-control; nothing but physical compulsion can restrain him. But the treacherous and self-seeking craft of the other brother is as repulsive; the cold-blooded, calculating spirit that can hold every appetite in check, that can cleave to one purpose for a life-time, and, without scruple, take advantage of a twin-brother's weakness. Jacob knows his brother thoroughly, and all his knowledge he uses to betray him. He knows he will speedily repent of his bargain, so he makes him swear he will abide by it. It is a relentless purpose he carries out—he deliberately and unhesitatingly sacrifices his brother to himself. Still, in two respects, Jacob is the superior man. He can appreciate the birthright in his father's family, and he has constancy. (M. Dods, D.D.) *Despising spiritual gifts*:—Had the birthright been something to eat, Esau would not have sold it. What an exhibition of human nature! What an exposure of our childish folly and the infatuation of appetite! For Esau has company in his fall. We are all stricken by his shame. We are conscious that if God had made provision for the flesh we should have listened to Him more readily. "But what will this birthright profit us?" We do not see the good it does: were it something to keep us from disease, to give us long unsated days of pleasure, to bring us the fruits of labour without the weariness of it, to make money for us, where is the man who would not value it—where is the man who would lightly give it up? But because it is only the favour of God that is offered, His endless love, His holiness made ours, this we will imperil or resign for every idle desire, for every lust that bids us serve it a little longer. (*Ibid.*) *Three bad bargains*:—A Sunday-school teacher remarked that he who buys the truth makes a good bargain. I inquired if any scholar recollected an instance in Scripture of a bad bargain. "I do," replied a boy, "Esau sold his birthright for a mess of pottage." A second said, "Judas made a bad bargain when he sold his Lord for thirty pieces of silver." A third boy observed, "Our Lord tells us that he makes a bad bargain who to gain the whole world loses his own soul." (*Old Testament Anecdotes.*)

CHAPTER XXVI.

VER. 1. *There was a famine in the land.*—*The famine*:—1. Here the first thing that suggests itself is the apparent contradiction of the promise given to Abraham, for instead of the land of abundance and rest Isaac found famine and unrest. Let us endeavour to understand that, and then we shall better understand this life of ours; for our life is to us a Canaan, a land of abundant promises, and especially so in youth. But we have not been long in this land of promise before we begin to discover that it falsifies itself, and then there arises in our mind the question that must have presented itself to Isaac, Has God broken His promise? We say God's promise, because the promises of life are all permitted by Him. The expectation of happiness is God's creation; the things which minister to happiness are scattered through the world by God. But if we look deeper into it we shall perceive that God does not deceive us. True it is, that Isaac was disappointed; he got no bread, but he did get perseverance. He did want comforts, but with this want

came content—the habit of soul-communion with God. Which was best, bread or faith? Which was best, to have abundance or to have God? Tell us, then, had God broken His promise? Was He not giving a double blessing, far more than He promised? And so it is with us. Every famine of the soul has its corresponding blessing; for, in truth, our blessed hours are not those which seem so at first; and the hours of disappointment, which we are tempted to look upon as dark, are the ones in which we learn to possess our souls. If, in the worst trial earth has, there does not grow out of it an honour which could not else have been, a strength, a sanctity, an elevation; if we do not get new strength, or old strength restored, the fault is ours, not God's. In truth, the blessed spots of earth are not those which at first sight seem so. The land of olive and vine is often the land of sensuality and indolence. Wealth accumulates and engenders sloth and the evils which follow in the train of luxury. The land of clouds and fogs and unkindly soil, which will not yield its fruit unless to hard toil, is the land of perseverance, manhood, domestic virtue, and stately and pure manners. Want of food and of the necessities of life, I had well nigh said that these things are not an ill, when I see what they teach: I had well nigh said I do not pity the poor man. There are evils worse than famine. What is the real misfortune of life? Sin, or want of food? Sickness, or selfishness? And when I see Isaac gaining from his want of food the heart to bear up and bear right onward, I can understand that the land of famine may be the land of promise, and just because it is the land of famine.

2. And, secondly, we observe, respecting this famine, that the command given to Isaac differed from that given to Abraham and Jacob. Isaac evidently wished to go down to Egypt; but God forbade him (ver. 2), although He permitted Abraham and commanded Jacob to go thither. The reason for this variety is to be found in the different character and circumstances of these men. In the New Testament we find the same adaptation of command to character. The man of warm feelings who came to Jesus was told "that the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." When the man from whom the legion of devils was cast out besought Jesus that he might be with Him, he received a similar rebuff; but the man of lukewarmness, who wanted to return to bury his father and mother, was not permitted for an instant to go back. The reason of the difference is this—that the man of impetuosity and forwardness needed to be restrained, while the lingering and slow man needed some active measure to stir him forward. It is almost certain that Abraham, being a wise man and a man of faith, was permitted by God to judge for himself, and that Isaac was required to turn back that he might learn the duty of trust; and that Jacob was commanded to go forth in order to cure his love of the world, and to teach him that life is but a pilgrimage. Hence we arrive at a doctrine: duties vary according to differences of character. (*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*) *Lessons*.—1. Fruitful lands are made barren for the sins of the inhabitants. 2. Multiplied famine God sends upon multiplied abominations. 3. In common judgments on nations God's saints have special afflictions. 4. God provides a place of refreshing for His in times of straits. 5. Saints may avoid public judgments in the way which God shows them. In the day of such a public calamity they may retire from place of judgments, especially when God points them out places of safety. (*G. Hughes, B.D.*)

Vers. 2-5. **Unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father.**—*The covenant renewed to Isaac*.—I. IT WAS RENEWED TO HIM IN A TIME OF TRIAL. Divine help comes when all human efforts are exhausted. II. IT WAS RENEWED TO HIM IN THE OLD TERMS, BUT RESTING ON NEW GROUNDS. Abraham was the beginning of the Church, and therefore God, in speaking to His servant whom He had called, rested upon His own Almightyness (Gen. xvii. 1). But the Church had already commenced a history in the time of Jacob. There was a past to fall back upon. There was an example to stimulate and encourage. There was some one in whom the power of God was manifested, and who had proved the truth of His Word. Therefore to Isaac God rests His promises on the ground of his father's obedience. Thus the Lord would teach Isaac that His attributes are on the side of the saints; that they possess Him only so far as they are obedient; that he must not regard the promised blessings as a matter of course, to be given irrespective of conduct, but rather as, by their very terms, demanding obedience; and that the greatness of his people could only arise from that piety and practical trust in God of which Abraham was such an illustrious example (ver. 5). But while obedience,

as a general principle, was commended to Isaac, yet regard is had to duty as it is special and peculiar to the individual (ver. 2). (*T. H. Leale.*) *The renewed covenant*:—Two things are observable in this solemn renewal of the covenant with Isaac. 1. The good things promised. The sum of these blessings is the land of Canaan, a numerous progeny, and, what is greatest of all, the Messiah, in whom the nations should be blessed. On these precious promises Isaac is to live. God provided him with bread in the day of famine; but he “lived not on bread only, but on the words which proceeded from the mouth of God.” 2. Their being given for Abraham’s sake. We are expressly informed in what manner this patriarch was accepted of God, namely, as “believing on Him who justifieth the ungodly”; and this accounts for the acceptance of his works. The most “spiritual sacrifices” being offered by a sinful creature, can no otherwise be acceptable to God than by Jesus Christ; for, as President Edwards justly remarks, “It does not consist with the honour of the majesty of the king of heaven and earth to accept of any thing from a condemned malefactor, condemned by the justice of his own holy law, till that condemnation be removed.” But a sinner being accepted as believing in Jesus, his works also are accepted for his sake, and become rewardable. It was in this way, and not of works, that Abraham’s obedience was honoured with so great a reward. To this may be added that every degree of Divine respect to the obedience of the patriarchs was, in fact, no other than respect to the obedience of Christ, in whom they believed, and through whom their obedience, like ours, became acceptable. The light of the moon which is derived from its looking, as it were, on the face of the sun, is no other than the light of the sun itself reflected. (*A. Fuller.*) *Possession*:—Charles Dickens, in those younger days which he spent in the town of Rochester, used sometimes, in his country walks, to pass a large house standing in its own grounds, called Gad’s Hill Place. It was his boyish dream that some day he would be a rich man, and when he became so that he would buy that house and make it his home. Castles in the air of this kind are not uncommon, and my readers have doubtless indulged in many of them. But what is uncommon is their fulfilment. In Dickens’ case it actually came to pass. He not only grew rich, as many do, but he dwelt in his latter years, and at length died, at Gad’s Hill Place. I refer to this well-known incident merely to illustrate the difference between the hope of possessing something and the actual possession of it. In Dickens’ case, indeed, the feeling could scarcely be called a hope. It was but a wild dream. Now, in the Book of Genesis, we have before us the case of men whose eyes, day by day, beheld a domain which they hoped would one day be their home; who not merely beheld it, but actually dwelt in it—only not as owners, but merely as guests; and whose hopes were built, not on boyish imaginations, but on the promise of an almighty and faithful God. And yet they never came into possession! Of Abraham we are told, in Heb. xi., that he “sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country”; and of all the patriarchs, that they “died in faith”—still trusting—yet “not having received the promises.” In what way, then, were the promises fulfilled? As the progenitors of a people, the patriarchs were to obtain the fulfilment in their descendants, hundreds of years after. As individuals, they obtained it, not on earth, but in heaven. They “desired a better country, that is, an heavenly”; and they got it—something far beyond their most exalted anticipations. (*E. Stock.*)

VER. 6-11. He said, She is my sister: for he feared to say, She is my wife.—Isaac’s false expedient.—I. THE TEMPTATION COMES AFTER A TIME OF GREAT BLESSING. We are wise and happy if we can use the time of great blessing so as to gather strength for future trials. II. HE DID NOT TRUST HIMSELF IN THE WAY OF TEMPTATION. He was in the way of Providence and duty. III. HE REPEATED THE SIN OF HIS FATHER, BUT INCURRED GREATER GUILT. IV. THE TREATMENT HE RECEIVED PLACES HEATHEN VIRTUE IN A FAVOURABLE LIGHT. V. HIS DELIVERANCE SHOWS THAT GOD PROTECTS HIS SAINTS FROM THE EVILS WHICH THEY BRING UPON THEMSELVES. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Isaac’s temptation and sin.*—Isaac had generally lived in solitude; but now he is called into company, and company becomes a snare. “The men of the place asked him of his wife.” These questions excited his apprehensions, and put him upon measures for self-preservation that involved him in sin. Observe—1. He did not sin by thrusting himself into the way of temptation; for he was necessitated, and directed of God, to go to Gerar. Even the calls of necessity and duty may, if we be not on our watch, prove ensnaring; and if so, what must those situations be in which we have no call to be found?

2. The temptation of Isaac is the same as that which had overcome his father, and that in two instances. This rendered his conduct the greater sin. The falls of them that have gone before us are so many rocks on which others have split; and the recording of them is like placing buoys over them, for the security of future mariners. 3. It was a temptation that arose from the beauty of Rebekah. There is a vanity which attaches to all earthly good. Beauty has often been a snare both to those who possess it and to others. (*A. Fuller.*) *Isaac's deceit*:—Here we have—I. A sin COMMITTED. Cowardly fear led to it, and fear kept it up. There are three faults in Isaac's character exposed by it—1. Cowardliness. 2. Selfishness. 3. Want of reliance on God. II. A sin DETECTED. Every sin will be some day found out. III. A sin REPROVED. Abimelech, although reproving Isaac, does so with great forbearance, and follows up his reproof with an act of great kindness. Learn : 1. Avoid deceit—"be sure your sin will find you out." 2. Reprove sin with kindness; be merciful to those who err. (*J. H. Smith.*)

Ver. 12. *Isaac sowed . . . and the Lord blessed him.*—*The prosperity of Isaac*:—In this narrative it is Isaac the prosperous man who comes to view. Examine the sources and circumstances of his remarkable, unequalled prosperity. I. ISAAC HAD A GOOD FATHER. Happy the son whose father was chosen partner with God in a divine covenant, and twice blessed the son whose father had this testimony that he pleased God in the fulfilment of such a covenant. Not only great favour rests upon the head of such a father, but the richest blessings are pledged to his posterity. II. ISAAC HAD TRAITS OF HIS OWN TO WHICH HIS PROSPERITY WAS LARGELY INDEBTED. His very name indicates that he was "a son of laughter and joy." True to his name, his nature was of the sunny and hopeful type. The value of this disposition in the successful conduct of life is simply incalculable. It is more than capital, for capital will perish. It is more than friends, for friends die. It is more than success, for it outlives success. When everything is gone, the man who has hope has all he needs. Thus Isaac went from well to well. He was envied at Gerar, and he moved to Esek. Esek was captured by the enemy. He hopefully journeyed to Sitnah, and dug again. But Sitnah was claimed. Should he give up now? No; all these choked wells were leading him to the broader valleys of Rehoboth, where was "room"—room for his still multiplying flocks and growing wealth. III. The third secret of Isaac's prosperity was HIS EXTREME PEACEABLENESS. The spirit of the beatitudes dwelt in this man more than in any other man of his times. IV. But there remains a fourth and final element to be noticed in the prosperity of Isaac. I have said that he had a good father behind him, a brave heart within him, a good will to men about him; but he put the crown upon his success by owning and seeking THE FAVOUR OF GOD ABOVE HIM. (*J. B. Clark.*) *The prosperity of Isaac*:—I. HIS PROSPERITY WAS EVIDENTLY DUE TO THE DIVINE BLESSING. His prosperity was wonderful. "Thirty, sixty, and a hundred fold," is the range of fertility in that land. Thus the yield of Isaac's land reaches the highest degree of productiveness. 1. Such was the position of the sacred historian. He who relates this story, after describing the prosperity of this man, adds, "And the Lord blessed him" (ver. 12). 2. It was evident to Isaac himself. His prosperity, the rest he enjoyed from his enemies, and room to enlarge in, he ascribed all to God (ver. 22). 3. It was evident to his enemies. They were constrained to acknowledge that God was with him. II. HIS PROSPERITY MADE HIM A MARK FOR ENVY. We are told that "the Philistines envied him." His prosperity was not without alloy. Every blessing of this world is accompanied by some disadvantage or evil. We have to pay a price for every earthly good. III. HIS PROSPERITY SERVED TO DEVELOP THE VIRTUES OF HIS CHARACTER. Bacon has said that "Prosperity doth best discover vice, but adversity doth best discover virtue." And human experience shows that such are the usual effects of these conditions. But in the case of Isaac there were virtues that shined out in his prosperity. 1. The virtue of patience. The Philistines carried their envy into action. They stopped up the wells which he had inherited from his father (ver. 15). But he met all this envy by patience. When persecuted in one place he fled to another. He removed from well to well (vers. 18-22). (1) His patience was victorious. It won upon his enemies. The Philistines were at length wearied out. They came round, and asked for a treaty (vers. 28-30). (2) His patience won the Divine approval. The Lord appeared to him and renewed the old promises. He was assured of perpetual protection and guidance. 2. The virtue of forgiveness. He had suffered a grievous wrong, but he forgave it on the entreaty of Abimelech. This was not the easy virtue of a

man who has no strong feelings and who is soon won over. It was principle, and not a weak feeling, that made him forgive. 3. The virtue of reverence. He set up an altar for the worship of God, and pitched his tent there as if he would dwell in the Lord's house (ver. 25). He bears a public testimony to the obligation of religion. Many a man forgets God with increasing prosperity, but it was not so with Isaac. With him it served to deepen the feeling of reverence and to strengthen every duty of piety. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Isaac's prosperity*:—I. ISAAC IN HIS BUSINESS RELATIONS. 1. He was active and enterprising (vers. 12, 13). 2. His industry and enterprise under the blessing of God resulted in immense wealth. II. ISAAC IN SOCIETY. 1. As tried by society (vers. 14, 16, 19-21). 2. His bearing under these trials. (1) He bore envy and strife and hatred with perfect patience. (2) He separated himself from those around him rather than contend with them. (3) He recognized God's hand in all (ver. 22). (4) This example of Isaac, both in business and in society, is worthy of all commendation and imitation. III. ISAAC IN HIS RELIGIOUS LIFE. 1. He was honoured with personal communications from God (ver. 24). (1) This proves that his conduct was approved by God. (2) This approval signified God's encouragement to him in view of future trials. 2. Isaac evinced his appreciation of these Divine promises and privileges by a renewed consecration of himself to God (ver. 25). Lessons: 1. Prosperity is as real a test of faith as adversity. 2. The test of prosperity is more severe than that of adversity. 3. Peace has ever been the choice of true believers. 4. Such a choice has ever met with the Divine approval. 5. Let Isaac's example be ours—in business, industrious and enterprising; in society, peace-loving and yielding; in religion, ever prepared for communion with God, and ever yielding ourselves in consecration to God. (*D. C. Hughes, M.A.*) *Isaac's wanderings*:—I. ISAAC'S PATIENCE. An example of those who endure, instead of murmuring, rebelling, or despairing. II. ISAAC'S PROTECTOR. 1. God directed Isaac. 2. God exhorted Isaac. 3. God encouraged Isaac. III. ISAAC'S PROSPERITY. 1. "The man waxed great." He grew very prosperous, and his prosperity was continuous. 2. "The Lord blessed him." God's blessing makes rich, whether it be in temporal or in spiritual things. 3. The Lord made room for him (ver. 22). 4. The Lord made his enemies to be at peace with him. (*W. S. Smith, B.D.*)

Vers. 14-16. *The Philistines envied him.*—*The prosperous are subject to envy*:—1. Great estates subject the best of men to envy. 2. Philistine spirits envy all increase of good to the Church of God (ver. 14). 3. Men fearless of God make no scruple of doing the greatest injuries to His servants. 4. All the saints right, persuades not the wicked from doing wrong. 5. A malicious spirit destroyeth that which itself needeth, only to mischief the righteous man. 6. Water-mercies are very great, therefore would the wicked take them from the just (ver. 15). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. Powers as well as peasants join together to afflict the saints. 2. Worldly men in power would not suffer the godly to prosper by them. 3. Exilement is the best which wicked powers allow to saints. 4. God's greatening of His saints causeth the powers of the world to diminish them (ver. 16). (*Ibid.*) *No worldly blessing is unalloyed*:—Isaac's prosperity was not unalloyed. He suffered from envy. Be sure of this, that for every blessing man pays a price. If the world has gained in medical skill, it has lost that simple life which made it unnecessary. If we heap possessions round us we lose quiet, we get anxiety. Every man pays a price for his advantages, for talents, for property, for high station; he bids adieu to rest, being public property. It was so with Isaac. He had great possessions, "and the Philistines envied him." We are told that he met the envy with patience, and removed from well to well. At last the Philistines desisted. Thus patience wears the world out. Endurance, meekness, the gospel spirit, this is the only true weapon against the world. Hence, Christianity can have no addition. It is final. There is nothing beyond this—"Love your enemies." Isaac like Christ had conquered by meekness; and then it was that there was shed abroad in his heart that deep peace which is most profound in the midst of storm, "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." (*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*)

Vers. 17-33. *Isaac digged again the wells of water.*—*Isaac's wells*:—These four names are the names (vers. 20, 21, 22, 33) of four wells of springing water, dug in a valley, to feed families and flocks. "Esek" means Strife; "Sitnah," Hatred; "Rehoboth," Room; "Shebah," Oath. Have you not been at them all? I. When you began life you found people trying to put you down by saying that the well was

theirs, and that you were crowding yourself upon their ground. If they did not try to put you down, you tried to put them down. The well is there in life—strife, contention, debate—you must find it in your life somewhere. II. If you drive people off the ground they may strive with you no more. They will hate you; your name will be the signal for abuse. First you are opposed, then you are hated; so you call it *Sitnah*, Hatred—the second well. III. Then you come to the third stage, if you are not killed. You are hated, but you keep digging away, and at last room is made for you—*Rehoboth*. You are recognized, looked for, and missed if you do not come. IV. If you have got to *Rehoboth* is there anything to hinder you from going on? The next step is easy: confidence—rest. Be not discouraged: move on honestly, laboriously, religiously. Go on: that is your duty in two words. Life is full of difficulty. It is through tribulation that you get into any kingdom worth anything. In Christ we are called to strife. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Generations united by common labour and joy:—I. THE EXISTING GENERATIONS SUCCEED TO THE LABOURS OF THOSE WHO ARE GONE. Divine benevolence is to be seen in this arrangement. 1. It serves to weld all generations in a common interest. 2. It serves as a guarantee of progress in the quality of human productions. II. THE EXISTING GENERATIONS ENTER ON THE ENJOYMENTS OF THOSE THAT ARE GONE. 1. The well of sensuous enjoyment. 2. The well of intellectual enjoyment. 3. The well of social enjoyment. 4. The well of religious enjoyment. (*Homilist.*)

Contrasts in character:—What a detestable man Isaac is when he tells lies to the king of the Philistines! Then he goes out well-hunting, as if he deserved to find water in the earth; and, secondly, calls the wells after the names which his father Abraham had given them. What contradictions we are!—telling lies to a living king, and sentimentally honouring a dead father. Mean man! has Isaac left any posterity upon the earth? Do we look upon him as an ancient character, or as a modern instance? We are doing the same thing ourselves in some form or way. What if in the very middle of our life there be just one great black lie, and lying outside two or three beautiful touches of sentiment—quite a skill in the drawing up of epitaphs, and quite a tearful and watery way of talking about old fathers and old associations? All these speeches make the lie the worse; when we see how little good we might be and might do, it aggravates the central evil of the life into overpowering and intolerable proportions. We never know how profane is the blasphemy until we catch ourselves in prayer. To think that the tongue blackened by that profanity could have also uttered that same prayer! Why, in the contrast is a new accusation and a fresh reproach. But let us follow Isaac in his well-digging. Man must have wells; man must go out of himself and pray to God in digging, if he will not pray in liturgy and uttered hymn and psalm in words. God lays His hand upon us at unexpected places: if we will not fall down upon our knees, we must still bend the proud back and dig in His earth in quest of water. At best we are dependants, seekers, always in quest of something which another hand alone can give us. Oh that men were wise! that in these true and inevitable providences we might see the beginning of inward and spiritual revelations, and that, knowing the goodness of God in the gift of water and of bread, we might proceed to know that ineffable goodness which expressed itself in sacrificial and propitiatory blood. From the lower to the higher, I charge thee to go, or else thy reasoning is a base sophism and the beginning of an awful crime. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Lessons:—Justice warrants the saints to recover their just possessions left them from their fathers. 2. Malice and treachery of wicked men would put out the name and possessions of saints after decease. 3. Providence sometimes orders a restitution of outward comforts to the Church, which have been spoiled by wicked men (ver. 18). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*)

Lessons:—1. Wicked servants prosecute the quarrel of wicked masters against the Church. 2. Persecuting enemies, if in their power, would not spare a little water to the saints. 3. The wicked double their strife to destroy the life of the saints. 4. Saints give way to the malice of adversaries, but leave a brand of their hateful carriages (ver. 21) in what they yield to them. *Sitnah*. 5. All the envy and malice of the wicked will stand up as a monument against them, when God shall call them to account (ver. 21). (*Ibid.*)

Lessons:—1. God sojourners voluntarily translate themselves from such places where enemies under Providence do afflict them. 2. Wherever saints come as sojourners, they must labour under Providence to get necessary supports. 3. Where some wells of comfort are denied by enemies, saints may seek to find out others. 4. Wells of strife and hatred among men may be turned into wells of enlargement and ease by God to His people. 5. God's mercies are fit to be named, published,

and recorded among His saints. (*Ibid.*) *Old wells dug out*:—In Oriental lands a well of water is a fortune. If a king dug one, he became as famous as though he had built a pyramid or conquered a province. Great battles were fought for the conquest or defence of wells of water; castles and towers were erected to secure permanent possession of them. The traveller to-day finds the well of Jacob dug one hundred feet through a solid rock of limestone. These ancient wells of water were surrounded by walls of rock. This wall of rock was covered up with a great slab. In the centre of the slab there was a hole, through which the leathern bottle or earthen jar was let down. This opening was covered by a stone. It was considered one of the greatest calamities that could happen to a nation when these wells of water were stopped. Isaac, you see, in the text, found out that the wells of water that had been dug out by his father Abraham, at great expense and care, had been filled up by the spiteful Philistines. Immediately Isaac orders them all opened again. He was very careful to call all the wells by the same names which his father had called them by; and if this well was called "The Well in the Valley," or "The Well by the Rock," or "The Well of Bubbles," Isaac baptized it with the same nomenclature. You have noticed, friends, that many of the old Gospel wells that our fathers dug have been dug up by the modern Philistine. They have thrown in their scepticisms and their philosophies, until the well is almost filled up, and it is nigh impossible to get one drop of the clear water. You will not think it strange, then, if the Isaac who speaks to you this morning tries to dig open some of the old wells made by Abraham, his father, nor will you be surprised if he call them by the same old names. 1. Bring your shovel and pickaxe, and crowbar, and the first well we will open is the glorious well of the Atonement. It is nearly filled up with the chips and *débris* of old philosophies that were worn out in the time of Confucius and Zeno, but which smart men in our day unwrap from their mummy-bandages, and try to make us believe are original with themselves. I plunge the shovel to the very bottom of the well, and I find the clear water starting. Glorious well of the Atonement. Perhaps there are people here who do not know what "atonement" means, it is so long since you have heard the definition. The word itself, if you give it a peculiar pronunciation, will show the meaning—at-one-ment. Man is a sinner and deserves to die. Jesus comes in and bears His punishments and weeps His griefs. I was lost once, but now I am found. Cowper, overborne with his sin, threw himself into a chair by the window, picked up a New Testament, and his eye lighted upon this: "Whom God hath set forth as a propitiation through faith in His blood"; and instantly he was free. Unless Christ pays our debts, we go to eternal jail. Unless our Joseph opens the King's corn-crib, we die of famine. One sacrifice for all. A heathen got worried about his sins, and came to a priest and asked how he might be cured. The priest said: "If you will drive spikes into your shoes and walk five hundred miles, you will get over it." So he drove spikes in his shoes and began the pilgrimage, trembling, tottering, agonizing on the way, until he came about twenty miles, and sat down under a tree, exhausted. Near by, a missionary was preaching Christ, the Saviour of all men. When the heathen heard it, he pulled off his sandals, threw them as far as he could, and cried: "That's what I want: give me Jesus! give me Jesus!" O ye who have been convicted and worn of sin, trudging on all your days to reap eternal woe, will you not, this morning, at the announcement of a full and glorious Atonement, throw your torturing transgressions to the winds? "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin"; that was the very passage that came to the tent of Hedley Vicars, the brave English soldier, and changed him into a hero for the Lord. 2. Now, bring your shovels and your pickaxes, and we will try to open another well. I call it the well of Christian comfort. You have noticed that there are a good many new ways of comforting. Your father dies. Your neighbour comes in and he says: "It is only a natural law that your father should die. The machinery is merely worn out"; and before he leaves you, he makes some other excellent remarks about the coagulation of blood, and the difference between respiratory and nitrogenized food. Your child dies, and your philosophic neighbour comes, and for your soothing tells you that it was impossible the child should live with such a state of mucous membrane! Out with your chemistry and physiology when I have trouble, and give me a plain new Testament! I would rather have an illiterate man from the backwoods, who knows Christ, talk with me when I am in trouble than the profoundest worldling who does not know Him. The Gospel, without telling you anything about mucous membrane, or gastric juice, or hydrochloric acid, comes and says:

"All things together work for good to those who love God," and that if your child is gone, it is only because Jesus has folded it in His arms, and that the judgment-day will explain things that are now inexplicable. Oh! let us dig out this Gospel well of comfort. 3. Now, bring your shovels and pickaxes, and we will dig out another well—a well opened by our father Abraham, but which the Philistines have filled up. It is the well of Gospel invitation. Do you know why more men do not come to Christ? It is because men are not invited that they do not come. You get a general invitation from your friend: "Come around some time to my house and dine with me." You do not go. But he says: "Come around to-day at four o'clock and bring your family, and we'll dine together." And you say: "I don't know that I have any engagement: I will come." "I expect you at four o'clock." And you go. The world feels it is a general invitation to come around some time and sit at the Gospel feast, and men do not come because they are not specially invited. It is because you do not take hold of them and say: "My brother, come to Christ; come now, come now!" (*Dr. Talmage.*) *Malice overcome by zeal*:—The conflict still continues between good and evil. Every town, every village, every congregation, every heart, feels this conflict being carried on. Often we go a long way to see the site of some famous battle-field. We stand and muse over the spot. Here, we say, was the standard fixed; down yonder slope the charge of the cavalry madly rushed. Yet we seldom stop to reflect on the fight that goes on within our souls, on the result of which hang eternal consequences. To this scene, to this struggle so close at hand, let us turn our eyes. If religion is not practical it is worthless—if it is always seeking distant spheres of operation, it is mistaken, for its first mission is at home. Yet how cold is our interest in our religious progress! How half-hearted our feelings on the subject! How ready we are to place the easy cushions of self-satisfaction under our conscience, and to allow only a very little of our time, and still less of our thoughts, to be devoted to religious matters. A quaint writer offers the prescription, "To produce spiritual indifference, add to five minutes only of prayer fourteen hours of worldliness, and nearly ten of torpor." Since then the cares of this world have, like the Philistines, filled up and choked those cool and pleasant wells which Abraham dug in the old time. Perhaps much of this arises from a dangerous habit of always letting the things of religion take a second place. But it would have been useless for Isaac and his servants to stand idly grieving over the choked-up wells and the want of water. There was nothing to be done but to labour diligently at the work and "dig the wells again." So if we would strive to renew the withered and damaged plants of spiritual life—if we would be hearty, active, sincere Christians, we must rouse ourselves to prayer, watchfulness and activity! (*W. Hardman, LL.D.*) *The permanence of the helpful*:—The old Hebrew wells are flowing to-day. The monuments men build to their own pride and prowess—Pyramids, Bisen, Nimroud, Palaces, &c.—are triturated by the passing centuries; the forces of nature preserve, and in some instances enlarge, the wells. Mahomet when asked, "What monument shall I build to my friend?" replied, "Dig a well." *Isaac's peace-loving nature*:—Few things are more pleasing than the picture of this gentle patriarch, yielding everything and finding everything; as if his history was an antique pictorial illustration of the very words, "Give, and it shall be given unto you." He yields his life on the altar on Moriah, and he finds it. In the strife he always gives up. A lamb among wolves, he conquers the wolves. By patience he is successful. And so "the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great," illustrating, so far back, the Hebrew saying, that to the good man "the very stones of the field shall be at peace." Ah! that our striving, grieved hearts, standing on our points of pride or interest, would cry, "Sitnah" (hate), and go away, though we lose the precious well, forgiving the worst injustice by remembering the love and pity of God our Saviour towards us! (*A. G. Mercer, D.D.*) *Old and new wells to be dug*:—Many of our enjoyments, both civil and religious, are the sweeter for being the fruits of the labour of our fathers; and if they have been corrupted by adversaries since their days, we must restore them to their former purity. Isaac's servants also digged new wells, and which occasioned new strife. While we avail ourselves of the labours of our forefathers, we ought not to rest in them, without making further progress, even though it expose us to many unpleasant disputes. Envy and strife may be expected to follow those whose researches are really beneficial, provided they go a step beyond their forefathers. But let them not be discouraged: the wells of salvation are worth striving for; and after a few conflicts, they may enjoy the fruits of their labours in peace. Isaac's servants dug

two wells, which, from the bitter strife they occasioned, were called Esau and Sitnah. contention and hatred; but peaceably removing from these scenes of wrangle, he at length digged a well for which "they strove not." This he called Rehoboth, saying, "Now the Lord hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land." (*A. Fuller.*)

Vers. 23-25. Fear not, for I am with thee.—*Lessons*:—1. The return from exilement to their own, God giveth to His sojourners as He pleaseth. 2. Beer-sheba is more desirable to Isaac than Gerar. The place by covenant allotted, than the place envied by others (ver. 23). 3. God's gracious appearance unto souls is usually in the time of their hardships, and where He calls them. 4. God's special care of His in times of persecution from men, is to keep them from fear. 5. God's relation to Abraham is a good ground to secure Abraham's seed from fears. 6. God's gracious presence, revealed and believed, is security against fear of men. 7. God's blessing of the faithful may justly set them above all afflictments from men. 8. God's multiplying His Church is sufficient security against the fear of the world's diminishing it (ver. 24). 9. God's appearance to troubled souls requireth speedy and true worship from them to Him again. 10. Gracious souls are careful to give unto God right worship by right means. 11. Saints desire to have God dwell with them that they may dwell with God. 12. Where God dwelleth with His servants, they serve His providence in all honest labour for subsistence (ver. 25). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*)

Ver. 29. Thou art now the blessed of the Lord.—*The favoured one*:—I. THE BEING WHO BLESSED ISAAC. 1. It was "the Lord," the omniscient and omnipresent Jehovah. 2. "The Lord" who blessed Isaac is omnipotent. 3. Isaac's God is infinite in wisdom. 4. The Being who blessed Isaac is a God of unspeakable goodness and mercy. 5. The God who blessed Isaac is immutable. II. THE PERSON BLESSED. ISAAC. 1. One excellent and early trait in his character was youthful piety. 2. He was an obedient son. 3. He possessed a tranquil and contemplative mind, and lived in the spirit of meditation and prayer. III. CONSIDER SOME OF THE BLESSINGS OF WHICH ISAAC WAS THE RECIPIENT. 1. Peace. (1) With God. (2) With conscience. (3) With his passions. (4) With all men. 2. Worldly prosperity. 3. The special presence and protection of God. 4. He was blessed in his death. (*Benson Bailey.*) *Lessons*:—1. God maketh evident to the wicked sometimes His presence with His saints, that they confess it. 2. The sight of God's presence with His people maketh enemies to seek to them. 3. Oaths and covenants are sacred bonds even in the account of natural men without the Church (ver. 28). 4. God makes aliens sometimes desire confederacy with His Church. 5. Enemies sometimes fear evil and desire good from the Church of God whom they have wronged. 6. Saints are the blessed of Jehovah in the confession of the wicked; therefore they seek after them (ver. 29). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. It is not unbecoming saints, in the day of peace and good events, to feast and rejoice. 2. Mutual rejoicing among parties reconciled and confederate is but equal and rational (ver. 30). 3. It becometh saints to yield all readiness unto a just peace with their enemies. 4. Swearing matters of peace between the Church and its enemies is warrantable. 5. Oaths are prudently and distinctly to be taken on just occasions from man to man. 6. It is but just to send away in peace those who come to seek it (ver. 31). (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 34, 35. And Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite: which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah. *Esau's wives*:—I. Esau was forty years old when he married. A sin is aggravated sometimes by the age of the sinner. Some men learn nothing by age: they are forty years old on the books of the registrar; they are no age at all in the books of wisdom. II. Esau's wives were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah. Sin has consequences. Actions are not solitary and uninfluential; they have relations to other actions and to influences simply innumerable and incalculable. III. A sin does not confine itself to one line of punishment. Esau went against the law of his country and his people in marrying Canaanitish women. What was the punishment? Endless, ubiquitous, complete—(1) Esau was alienated from his family; (2) he was a rebel against the laws of organised society; (3) he forfeited his hereditary rights. The law of the land was: To marry a Canaanitish woman is to lose your primogeniture.

Esau supplanted himself. Find out the roots and beginnings of things, and you will always discover that a man is his own supplanter, his own enemy. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Esau's marriage*.—I. IT WAS IN ACCORDANCE WITH HIS CHARACTER. Prodigal, and careless of consequences. II. IT WAS IRRELIGIOUS. 1. Against the interests of the Church of God. 2. A transgression of duty towards his parents. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Lessons*.—1. Wicked children usually increase sin with their age. 2. Reprobate spirits take all the wage of sin, to put away blessing and bring on the curse. 3. Idolatrous wives and multiplicity of them hasten ruin to them who take them. Lust loves idolatrous yoke-fellows. 4. Bigamy and unholy matches prove greatest griefs to gracious parents. (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Esau supplants himself*.—To marry thus was to drop out of the entail, to forfeit position, and to commit hereditary suicide. It was then that Esau sold his birthright. How we have felt for him as an injured man! How often we have sentimentally said we prefer Esau to Jacob, the child of the mountains to the plain man dwelling in tents, the rough shaggy hunter to the hairless man who stayed at home! It was too bad of Jacob to treat his brother so. Find out the roots and beginnings of things, and you will always discover that a man is his own supplanter: his own enemy. You will find far back—ten years ago, twenty, and more, yea, a quarter of a century—that a man did something which has been following him all the time. When the crises come that the public can look at, they pity him within the four corners of the visible crisis itself: they do not know how judgment has been tracking the man, watching him with pitiless, critical eye, waiting for its turn to come. We read over such little verses as these as though they were related to an ancient anecdote, and have really no immediate concern to the public of our own century. We come upon a second line, and say, "Poor Esau! that was too bad!" Let us be just! No man can injure you so much as you can injure yourself. If you have not injured yourself you may defy the world; the world will come round you in due time. Keep substantially right—that is, right in purpose, right in motive, right in the centre of the mind; and slips and misadventures notwithstanding, God will have regard to the uppermost meaning of your life, and if you have been true to Him in the intent of your heart, the world cannot take your birthright, cannot break your spiritual primogeniture. An awful thing is this searching into the past. Long ago, in some unsuspected way, we sold our birthright. When we omitted, in the first instance, our religious duty, the whole battle was lost; when we shortened the prayer by two minutes, the birthright was gone; when we haggled with the enemy, instead of smiting him in the face with the lightning of God, our birthright passed from us; when we first lost standing in our mother's heart we slipped away from the hand of God. Verily, in such instances, the mother and the God are very close to one another. When the mother lets us go for moral reasons, I do not see how God can help us. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XXVII.

VERS. 1-2. *Isaac was old and his eyes were dim.—Isaac in the near prospect of death*.—I. HE HAS WARNINGS OF HIS APPROACHING END. 1. His advanced age. 2. Signs of weakness and decay. II. HE SETS IN ORDER HIS WORLDLY AFFAIRS. 1. Duties prompted by the social affections. 2. Duties regarding the settlement of inheritance and property. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Isaac's preparation for death*.—1. His longing for the performance of Esau's filial kindness as for a last time. (1) Esau was his favourite son; not on account of any similarity between them, but just because they were dissimilar; the repose and contemplativeness and inactivity of Isaac found a contrast in which it reposed in the energy and even the restlessness of his firstborn. (2) It was natural to yearn for the feast of his son's affection for the last time, for there is something peculiarly impressive in whatever is done for the last time. 2. Isaac prepared for death by making his last testamentary dispositions. They were made, though apparently premature—(1) Partly because of the frailty of life and the uncertainty whether there may be any to-morrow for that which is put off to-day; (2) Partly perhaps because he desired to have all earthly thoughts done with and put away. When he came to die there would be no anxieties about the disposition of property, to harass him. For it is good to have all

such things done with before that hour comes. Is there not something incongruous in the presence of a lawyer in the death room, agitating the last hours? The first portion of our lives is spent in learning the use of our senses and faculties, ascertaining where we are, and what. The second in using those powers, and acting in the given sphere, the motto being, "Work, the night cometh." A third portion, between active life and the grave, like the twilight between day and night (not light enough for working, nor yet quite dark), nature seems to accord for unworldliness and meditation. It is striking, doubtless, to see an old man, hale and vigorous to the last, dying at his work, like a warrior in armour. But natural feeling makes us wish perhaps that an interval might be given; a season for the statesman, such as that which Samuel had on laying aside the cares of office in the schools of the prophets, such as Simeon and Anna had for a life of devotion in the temple, such as the labourer has when, his long day's work done, he finds an asylum in the almshouse, such as our Church desires when she prays against sudden death; a season of interval in which to watch, and meditate, and wait. (*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*)

The blind father:—Isaac. 1. Now very aged. One hundred and thirty-six years old. Feeble. Ought to have been specially revered, both as a father and because so aged. Reverence due to old age. What more beautiful than old age (*Prov. xv. 31*)? See the Word of God concerning old age (*Lev. xix. 32*; *2 Chron. xxxvi. 17*; *Prov. xx. 29*). 2. Helpless. Forced to sit in the house while his sons were actively employed. Dependent on the kind offices of others. 3. Blind. And therefore should have been specially revered, and treated with most respectful tenderness. 4. Felt his end approaching (*ver. 4*). Should therefore have been treated with the greater consideration. 5. About to impart the covenant blessing. A most solemn act. To be given, and received, in the fear of God. 6. Would signalize it with a feast. The last he might have; and his own beloved Esau should prepare it. (*J. C. Gray*.)

The day of death unknown:—I have read a parable of a man shut up in a fortress under sentence of perpetual imprisonment, and obliged to draw water from a reservoir which he may not see, but into which no fresh stream is ever to be poured. How much it contains he cannot tell. He knows that the quantity is not great; it may be extremely small. He has already drawn out a considerable supply during his long imprisonment. The diminution increases daily, and how, it is asked, would he feel each time of drawing water and each time of drinking it? Not as if he had a perennial stream to go to—"I have a reservoir; I may be at ease." No: "I had water yesterday, I have it to-day; but my having it yesterday and my having it to-day is the very cause that I shall not have it on some day that is approaching." Life is a fortress; man is the prisoner within the gates. He draws his supply from a fountain fed by invisible pipes, but the reservoir is being exhausted. We had life yesterday, we have it to-day, the probability—the certainty—is that we shall not have it on some day that is to come. (*R. A. Wilmot*.)

Isaac, the organ of Divine blessing:—It is a strange and, in some respects, perplexing spectacle that is here presented to us—the organ of the Divine blessing represented by a blind old man, laid on a "couch of skins," stimulated by meat and wine, and trying to cheat God by bestowing the family blessing on the son of his own choice to the exclusion of the Divinely-appointed heir. Out of such beginnings had God to educate a people worthy of Himself, and through such hazards had He to guide the spiritual blessing He designed to convey to us all. Isaac laid a net for his own feet. By his unrighteous and timorous haste he secured the defeat of his own long-cherished scheme. It was his hasting to bless Esau which drove Rebekah to checkmate him by winning the blessing for her favourite. The shock which Isaac felt when Esau came in and the fraud was discovered is easily understood. The mortification of the old man must have been extreme when he found that he had so completely taken himself in. He was reclining in the satisfied reflection that for once he had overreached his astute Rebekah and her astute son, and in the comfortable feeling that, at last, he had accomplished his one remaining desire, when he learns from the exceeding bitter cry of Esau that he has himself been duped. It was enough to rouse the anger of the mildest and godliest of men, but Isaac does not storm and protest—"he trembles exceedingly." He recognises, by a spiritual insight quite unknown to Esau, that this is God's hand, and deliberately confirms, with his eyes open, what he had done in blindness: "I have blessed him: Yea, and he shall be blessed." Had he wished to deny the validity of the blessing, he had ground enough for doing so. He had not really given it; it had been stolen from him. An act must be judged by its intention, and he had been far from intending to bless Jacob. Was he to consider

himself bound by what he had done under a misapprehension? He had given a blessing to one person under the impression that he was a different person; must not the blessing go to him for whom it was designed? But Isaac unhesitatingly yielded. This clear recognition of God's hand in the matter, and quick submission to Him, reveals a habit of reflection, and a spiritual thoughtfulness, which are the good qualities in Isaac's otherwise unsatisfactory character. Before he finished his answer to Esau, he felt he was a poor feeble creature in the hand of a true and just God, who had used even his infirmity and sin to forward righteous and gracious ends. It was his sudden recognition of the frightful way in which he had been tampering with God's will, and of the grace with which God had prevented him from accomplishing a wrong destination of the inheritance, that made Isaac tremble very exceedingly. In this humble acceptance of the disappointment of his life's love and hope, Isaac shows us the manner in which we ought to bear the consequences of our wrong-doing. The punishment of our sin often comes through the persons with whom we have to do, unintentionally on their part, and yet we are tempted to hate them because they pain and punish us, father, mother, wife, child, or whoever else. Isaac and Esau were alike disappointed. Esau only saw the supplanter, and vowed to be revenged. Isaac saw God in the matter, and trembled. So when Shimei cursed David, and his loyal retainers would have cut off his head for so doing, David said: "Let him alone, and let him curse; it may be that the Lord hath bidden him." We can bear the pain inflicted on us by men when we see that they are merely the instruments of a Divine chastisement. The persons who thwart us and make our life bitter, the persons who stand between us and our dearest hopes, the persons whom we are most disposed to speak angrily and bitterly to, are often thorns planted in our path by God to keep us on the right way. (*M. Dods, D.D.*)

Vers. 6-10. **Go now to the flock, and fetch me from thence two good kids of the goats; and I will make them savoury meat for thy father, such as he loveth—Rebekah's cunning plot in favour of Jacob:—**I. THE HUMAN ELEMENT IN IT. 1. The partiality of a fond mother. 2. Ambition. II. THE RELIGIOUS ELEMENT IN IT. 1. It seemed as if the oracle of God was likely to become void. 2. The crisis was urgent. (*2^d H. Leale.*) **Crooked measures to obtain a worthy object:—**This is a mysterious affair. It was just that Esau should lose the blessing, for by selling his birthright he had despised it. It was God's design, too, that Jacob should have it. Rebekah also knowing of this design, from it having been revealed to her that "the elder should serve the younger," appears to have acted from a good motive. But the scheme which she formed to correct the error of her husband was far from being justifiable. It was one of those crooked measures which have too often been adopted to accomplish the Divine promises; as if the end would justify, or at least excuse the means. Thus Sarah acted in giving Hagar to Abraham; and thus many others have acted under the idea of being useful in promoting the cause of Christ. The answer to all such things is that which God addressed to Abraham: "I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be thou perfect." The deception practised on Isaac was cruel. If he be in the wrong, endeavour to convince him; or commit it to God, who could turn his mind, as he afterwards did that of Jacob when blessing Ephraim and Manasseh; but do not avail yourself of his loss of sight to deceive him. Such would have been the counsel of wisdom and rectitude; but Rebekah follows her own. (*A. Fuller.*) **Use of unscrupulous means by religious persons:—**To this day the method of Rebekah and Jacob is largely adopted by religious persons. It is notorious that persons whose ends are good frequently become thoroughly unscrupulous about the means they use to accomplish them. They dare not say in so many words that they may do evil that good may come, nor do they think it a tenable position in morals that the end sanctifies the means; and yet their consciousness of a justifiable and desirable end undoubtedly does blunt their sensitiveness regarding the legitimacy of the means they employ. For example, Protestant controversialists, persuaded that vehement opposition to Popery is good, and filled with the idea of accomplishing its downfall, are often guilty of gross misrepresentation, because they do not sufficiently inform themselves of the actual tenets and practices of the Church of Rome. In all controversy, religious and political, it is the same. It is always dishonest to circulate reports that you have no means of authenticating; yet how freely are such reports circulated to blacken the character of an opponent, and to prove his opinions to be dangerous. It is always dishonest to condemn opinions we have not inquired into, merely because of some fancied consequence

which these opinions carry in them; yet how freely are opinions condemned by men who have never been at the trouble carefully to inquire into their truth. They do not feel the dishonesty of their position, because they have a general consciousness that they are on the side of religion, and of what has generally passed for truth. All keeping back of facts which are supposed to have an unsettling effect is but a repetition of this sin. There is no sin more hateful. Under the appearance of serving God, and maintaining His cause in the world, it insults Him by assuming that, if the whole bare, undisguised truth were spoken, His cause would suffer. The fate of all such attempts to manage God's matters by keeping things dark, and misrepresenting fact, is written for all who care to understand in the results of this scheme of Rebekah's and Jacob's. They gained nothing, and they lost a great deal, by their wicked interference. They gained nothing; for God had promised that the birthright would be Jacob's, and would have given it him in some way redounding to his credit and not to his shame. And they lost a great deal. The mother lost her son; Jacob had to flee for his life, and, for all we know, Rebekah never saw him more. And Jacob lost all the comforts of home, and all those possessions his father had accumulated. He had to flee with nothing but his staff, an outcast to begin the world for himself. From this first false step onwards to his death, he was pursued by misfortune, until his own verdict on his life was, "Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life." (*M. Dods, D.D.*)

Ahead of Providence:—Luther was very importunate at the throne of grace to know the mind of God in a certain matter; and it seemed to him as if he heard God speak to his heart thus: "I am not to be traced." One adds, "If He is not to be traced, He may be trusted; and that religion is of little value which will not enable a man to trust God where he can neither trace nor see Him. But there is a time for everything beneath the sun; and the Almighty has His 'times and seasons.' It has been frequently with my hopes and desires, in regard to Providence, as with my watch and the sun. My watch has often been ahead of true time; I have gone faster than Providence, and have been forced to stand still and wait, or I have been set back painfully. Flavel says, 'Some providences, like Hebrew letters, must be read backwards.'" (*J. G. Wilson.*)

God will not have His kingdom maintained by carnal policy:—We must walk in simplicity, *sine plicis*, for though the serpent can shrink up into his folds, and appear what he is not, yet it doth not become the saint to shuffle either with God or men. Jacob got the blessing by a wile, but he might have got it cheaper by plain dealing. (*W. Gurnall.*)

A lie not permitted to man:—The minister of the seminary at Clermont, France, having been seized at Autun by the populace, the mayor, who wished to save him, advised him not to take the oath, but to allow him to tell the people that he had taken it. "I would myself make known your falsehood to the people," replied the clergyman; "it is not permitted me to ransom my life by a lie. The God who prohibits my taking the oath will not allow me to make it believed that I have taken it." The mayor was silent, and the minister was martyred.

Ver. 13. Upon me be thy curse, my son.—*Rebekah's imposition on Isaac considered*:—This language plainly shows that she thought her conduct justifiable, and thus we have a melancholy instance of the way in which good people sometimes deceive themselves, and suffer their judgments to be misled by carnal reasonings, and the counsels of the natural heart. I. The object which she had in view. She wished the blessing to go, not to Esau the first-born, but to Jacob, her younger son. And what, may we ask, was the reason of this preference? Did she love Jacob best? It is probable that she did. But Rebekah might have another motive for wishing that the blessing should be given to Jacob. She knew that he was fittest for receiving it. She knew that he highly valued it, not merely for the sake of any worldly benefit annexed to it, but on account of the spiritual promises contained in it. Esau, on the contrary, had repeatedly shown the greatest contempt for the blessing and its promises. But even this reason, however sufficient it might have been, was not, we may conjecture, the chief motive by which Rebekah's mind was influenced. She had a still stronger reason for wishing to defeat her husband's purpose. She felt assured that in this design he was opposing the will and purpose of the Almighty. Her desire, then, was good, and her attempt praiseworthy. The end which she proposed to herself was to prevent her husband from acting contrary to the Divine will, and to assist in turning the blessing where God intended it should go. So far, then, as the object which she had in view was concerned, far from finding any thing to blame, we see much to

commend. It sprang from her faith and piety, and showed her zeal for the glory of God. Let us consider. II. The MEANS which she used for attaining this object. Here we are forced to withhold our commendation; nay, we must go farther, we must positively condemn her conduct, and declare it to have been utterly without excuse. We say nothing of the probability which there was of a discovery, and of the dangerous consequences which might have followed. Admitting that a discovery was very unlikely to take place; admitting that her plan was most wisely laid, with every prospect of success; yet of what kind was her wisdom? Was it that wisdom "which is from above, and which is first pure, and then peaceable, full of good fruits, and without hypocrisy"? Or rather, was it not that wisdom "which descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish"? (James iii. 15, 17.) Was it that wisdom which our Lord prescribes when he says, "Be ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves"? Or rather, was it not the crooked policy of the old Serpent, who is a liar and the father of lies? Rebekah, indeed, could not but know that to impose on her husband by means of his infirmity, and to tempt her son to the commission of falsehood and deception, were acts which in themselves were highly sinful. What may we suppose, then, were the arguments by which she would probably defend and even justify her conduct? She would say to herself, "I am placed in very extraordinary circumstances. Here is Isaac about to act in direct opposition to the Divine Will. Here is the blessing, which God has designed for Jacob, on the point of being given to Esau. Is it not my duty to prevent the purposes of the Almighty from being defeated? Though the means to which I may have recourse are such as on a common occasion might not be lawfully used, yet does not the necessity of the present case allow and even require me to use them?" But how vain and false would such reasoning be! What permission had Rebekah received "to do evil, that good might come"? Her duty was to be learned, not from the purposes, but from the precepts of the Almighty. Did she suppose that God could not complete His designs without her committing sin in order to fulfil them? Or, did she think that sin would not be sin, because she dressed it in this specious covering? In all cases the Law of God is to be our rule. In no case can we claim the privilege of setting it aside. Rebekah's sin, however she might excuse it to herself, was sufficient to have ruined her soul; and unquestionably, unless through God's grace she had afterwards repented and obtained forgiveness, it would have ruined her soul. Such is the case with every sin. Whatever good may come of the evil which we do, that good will not excuse the evil, nor make it less. But it may be further said, "Rebekah's plan succeeded. Jacob, by his deception, obtained the blessing; and thus God, by making the means successful, showed that He approved them." It is true that God permitted Rebekah's plan to be successful; but it does not therefore follow that He approved it. Indeed, it is utterly impossible that He could approve falsehood in any shape or in any case. He permitted it to be practised, and He overruled it for the fulfilling of His own purposes; but this is a very different thing from approving it. Nay, if we attentively examine the whole matter, in all its effects and consequences, we shall discover clear marks of God's displeasure against both her and Jacob for their parts in this transaction. Sin ever brings along with it shame and sorrow, and those who permit themselves to do evil that good may come will surely in the end deplore their worldly wisdom and presumptuous conduct. It may yet, however, be further asked, "What ought Rebekah to have done? Was she, knowingly, to have let her husband act contrary to the Divine intentions, without endeavouring to prevent him? Was she to have taken no steps in order to have procured the blessing for Jacob?" I answer, there were means which she might lawfully have used for the attainment of her end; and to these she ought to have confined herself. She should have reasoned the matter with Isaac. She should meekly have pointed out to him the mistake which he was on the point of committing. She should have reminded him of the revelation which God had given of His will in this affair; and thus, by persuasion and argument, she should have endeavoured to turn him from his purpose. There is reason to think that such a conduct would probably have succeeded. Isaac, when he afterwards discovered what had been done, appears to have suddenly recollected himself; and, shuddering at the danger from which he had escaped, in a very striking manner, confirmed the blessing to Jacob: "Yea and he shall be blessed." It is, therefore, likely that he would before have yielded to a mild remonstrance, affectionately urged. At any rate, Rebekah should have added also to it strong faith and fervent prayer. These are the weapons of our warfare. (E. Cooper, M.A.) *Influence of woman*:—Samuel Morley's mother was

a woman of rare piety. He was wont to say concerning her, "I am much what my mother has made me." *Lessons*.—1. Faith pursueth God's oracle through the worst of difficulties and fears. 2. Fleshly passion may mix with faith in its strongest operations. 3. Affection may make mothers adventure to bear a curse for their sons. 4. Natural affection may be instant to have things done irregularly upon a ground of faith. (*G. Hughes, B.D.*)

Vers. 14-24. *And he went, and fetched, and brought them to his mother.—Rebekah's cunning plot accepted and carried out by Jacob*.—I. REVEALS SOME QUALITIES OF JACOB'S CHARACTER. 1. He was a weak and pliable man. 2. He lacked the power of self-determination. 3. He was fearful of consequences. 4. He could long indulge the thought of that which was forbidden. II. REVEALS THE GRADUAL DEBASEMENT OF JACOB'S CHARACTER. 1. He overcomes difficulties in the way of sin. 2. He learns to act a falsehood. 3. He proceeds to the direct falsehood. 4. He allows himself to be led into sin under the idea that he is carrying out the purpose of God. (*T. H. Leale*.) *The stolen blessing*.—I. THE TEMPTATION ORIGINATED IN A SENSUOUS REQUEST OF ISAAC. II. THIS TEMPTATION WAS PRESENTED TO JACOB THROUGH THE UNSCRUPULOUS LOVE OF REBEKAH. We cannot but admire her love. But it was not based upon principle. III. THIS TEMPTATION WAS GREEDILY RESPONDED TO BY THE WEAK AND CRAFTY NATURE OF JACOB. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Sharp practice*.—I. JACOB'S CONDUCT UNFOLDS THE STRENGTH OF EARLY PREFERENCES. II. JACOB'S CONDUCT SHOWS PROGRESS IN A WRONG DIRECTION. III. JACOB'S CONDUCT LETS US SEE SOME OF THE INFLUENCES WHICH IMPEL MEN TO GREATER EVIL. 1. One is that of relationship. 2. Another influence worked in the man himself. Jacob had a vehement craving for the blessing. IV. JACOB'S CONDUCT PROVES THAT THERE MAY BE MORE RELIGION ON THE LIPS THAN IN THE LIFE (ver. 20). (*D. G. Watt, M.A.*) *The supplanter*.—I. THE POWER OF PARENTAL INFLUENCE AND THE DANGER OF PARENTAL PARTIALITY. II. THE PROGRESS OF MORAL DETERIORATION. This is seen—1. In Isaac. 2. In Rebekah. 3. In Esau. 4. Especially in Jacob. *Lessons*: 1. That mere fondness is not affection. 2. To beware of encouraging or countenancing the appearance of untruth. 3. That no righteous purpose can justify an unrighteous act. 4. To avoid the beginning, "the very appearance of evil." 5. To beware what thoughts we cherish. 6. Success does not avert the moral consequences of wrong-doing. (*A. F. Joscelyne, B.A.*) *The blessing fraudulently obtained*.—I. THE SPIRIT OF DOUBT AND MISTRUST LEADS MEN TO PRACTICE DECEIT. 1. It was deceiving a relative. 2. Deceiving an infirm relative. 3. Deceiving an infirm relative in spiritual matters. II. IT DEADENS MEN'S MORAL SENSIBILITIES. 1. It creates indifference to man's moral culture. 2. It renders one insensible to the greatest danger. III. IT INVOLVES PAIN. 1. Loss of peace. 2. Instability. 3. Humiliation. (*Homilist*.) *The blessing obtained by fraud*.—1. Many of the most serious evils in life must be traced to parental mismanagement. 2. No end, however good, will sanction bad ways of accomplishing it. 3. Our history illustrates the prolific nature of sin. The commission of one crime makes another necessary, in order to supply what is lacking in the first. 4. The sins of youth have often a long and lasting influence. (*A. McClelland, D.D.*) *Duplicity*.—I. THE CONSPIRACY. 1. Its nature. 2. Its cause. (1) Precariousness of Isaac's life. (2) Rebekah's fear that patriarchal blessing would be bestowed on Esau, though God had declared that it should be given to Jacob. (3) The nature and importance of the patriarchal blessing. II. THE DISCOVERY. 1. Its suddenness. 2. Its effect. Practical lessons: 1. That sad consequences ever follow the practice of duplicity, whether in the family or elsewhere. 2. That a mother should teach a son to deceive his father is full of warning. 3. That such wrong should be perpetrated in the name and for the promotion of religion suggests the importance of scrutinizing our motives. 4. That the consciences of pious persons should allow them to justify themselves in such conduct suggests the blinding power of unbelief that God will fulfil what He has promised. (*D. C. Hughes, M.A.*) *The sin of Isaac and his family*.—I. LOOK AT ISAAC. 1. His sin lay in aiming at a wrong object—he wanted to set aside the will of God. 2. Mark the punishment of Isaac. It was two-fold. First, his object was defeated—Esau lost the blessing. And man will always be defeated when man struggles with his Maker. He vindicates His authority in an unexpected moment and by unexpected means, and then where and what are we? Our schemes, and efforts, and hopes, are all laid low; and worse than this—they are all turned against ourselves. And so was it here; for notice another part of Isaac's punishment—not only was his object defeated, but in

aiming at it, he brought much sin on his family and much anguish on himself. II. We may turn now to REBEKAH. 1. Her sin was altogether different in its character from Isaac's. It consisted in aiming at a right object by sinful means. 2. The punishment of Rebekah may appear slight, and yet to a fond mother like her, it must have been deeply painful. The curse was indeed on her, and it came in a form she little anticipated—she lost the son for whom she had plotted and sinned. Her example speaks plainly and solemnly also to all who are parents amongst us. It tells us that children are easily led into sin. Deceit and falsehood are bound up in the heart of every child that breathes, and it is as easy to call them into action as to get their tongues to speak or their feet to move. It is easy also to find motives that seem good, for prompting the lie, or sanctioning the lie, or concealing the lie; but as surely as there is a God living in heaven, the evil we prompt or encourage or tolerate in our children will come down in the end on our own heads. The curse of it will be on us. The blow may at first strike others, but in the end it will recoil on ourselves. Our poor children may themselves sting us to the quick; or if not so, the hand of God may be on them. We may see in their undoing at once our own punishment and our own sin. III. Let us turn now to Jacob. The instant we look at him, we are struck with this fact, that the nearer a man is to God, the more God is displeased with any iniquity He sees in him, and the more openly and severely He punishes it. Of all this family, Jacob was the most beloved by Him, but yet, as far as regards this world, he appears to have suffered from this transaction the most bitterly. 1. His sin was of a complicated character. To a hasty observer, it might appear light. Certainly much might be said in palliation of it. He was not first in the transgression. The idea of it did not originate with him. His feelings revolted at it when it was proposed to him. He remonstrated against it. Besides, it was a parent who urged him on, a fond and tender mother. And we must remember, too, that all those motives which led Rebekah to form this plot would operate also in Jacob's mind to lead him to execute it. It was furthering the will of God, it was saving a father from sin. Let young persons see here what a single deviation from truth can do. In one short hour it made the pious Jacob appear and act like one of the worst of men. 2. As for the punishment of Jacob's sin, we must read the history of his life to see the extent of it. It followed him almost to his dying hour. He was successful in his treachery; it obtained from his deceived father the desired birthright; but what fruit had he from his success? We might say none at all, or rather he sowed the wind and he reaped the whirlwind. His fears were realized; he did bring a curse on him and not a blessing. IV. We come now to the case of Esau. Alive to the present and reckless of the future, he preferred to it the momentary gratification of a sensual appetite. (*C. Bradley, M.A.*) *How Jacob stole his blessing* :—I. ISAAC'S OBSTINATE PARTIALITY. II. REBEKAH'S CRAFTINESS, AND JACOB'S FRAUD. III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE FRAUD. Isaac's vain regret. Esau's murderous malice. Rebekah's fear for her favourite son. Jacob's hasty banishment. Conclusion: What may we especially learn for ourselves? 1. Not to resist God's will, like Isaac. We may sometimes think we know what is best; yet, if we listened to God's word, we should not do the very thing we perhaps most like to do. 2. Not to forfeit God's favour and blessing, like Esau. It was Esau's own recklessness and worldliness that led to his being rejected, and to "the blessing" being withheld from him. He had shown himself to be incapable of deeper thoughts and religious faith. 3. Not to do wrong that good may come, like Rebekah and Jacob. God's promises will be fulfilled in due time. But we must neither murmur, nor be hasty (comp. Hab. ii. 3). (*W. S. Smith, B.D.*) *The wily supplanter* :—Jacob, whose nature was at this time true to his name. 1. Receives a hint from his mother. Sad that her maternal love should have prompted such an act. Esau, as much her son as Jacob. She was equally bound by natural obligations to care for one as the other. No apologies seem to be a sufficient vindication of conduct that was in its very essence wrong. 2. Closes with his mother's recommendation. He ought to have resented it; to have expostulated, and over-ruled it. He rather suggests difficulties (ver. 11) to prompt her ingenuity. 3. Adopts the disguise she prepared, and followed her directions. Deception; and self-deception the worst of all. Perhaps thought it well, even by such means, to gain the blessing. 4. Repeated falsehoods. Again and again assured his father that he was Esau. 5. Obtained the blessing. Yet how could that blessing which had been so obtained? God, in His mercy, ultimately brought good out of the evil. Otherwise the father's blessing, so obtained, must have been a curse. (*J. C. Gray.*) *Appearances often deceptive* :—"The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau."

We cannot always depend upon appearances. When, at the time of the gun-powder plot, the Parliament houses were searched, only coals and fagots were found in the cellars beneath. But, on a more careful search, barrels of gunpowder were found under the coals and wood, as well as Guy Fawkes with his preparations to blow up the king and his parliament. Many a fine-looking tree is rotten at the core; some who are very healthy in appearance are secretly and fatally diseased; gilding or paint sometimes covers really worthless rubbish; so the lives of some who profess to be "the epistles of Christ" are really a forgery, for they are not what they profess to be. Many who speak in religious services, or at other times and places, with "Jacob's voice," or as saints, really have "the hands of Esau," for they are living in the practice of wickedness. (*G. Hughes, B.D.*)

The deception of Isaac:—It is often forgotten that Jacob was divinely appointed to be the inheritor of the blessing. The omission from the calculation or thought of that one fact is likely to lead not only to mental perplexity but to moral confusion. You find the proof of the assertion in Genesis xxv. 23. The Lord said unto Rebekah, in view of the birth of her children, "The one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger." The mystery, therefore, is Divine. Jacob was a destined man; Jacob was destined before he was born; what, then, was his error? Not in feeling, how mysteriously soever, the pressure of his destiny, but in prematurely taking it into his own hands. We must not force Providence. Is there not an appointed time to man upon the earth, in a much wider sense than in the sense of marking out the day of his death? Is there not a time for the rising of the sun and the going down of the same? Is there not a seed time in the year, as well as a harvest day? We are tempted to force Providence, thus to do the right thing in the wrong way, and at the wrong time. Right is not a question of a mere point; it gathers up into its mystery all the points of the case, so that it is not enough to be going in the right road; we must have come into that road through the right door, at the right hour, and by direct intervention and sanction of God. It is tempting to natures like ours to help ourselves by trickery. We do like to meddle with God. Granted that the mother saw the religious aspect of this whole case, and knew the destiny of the boys, she had no right to force Divine Providence. Was Rebekah moved by the consciousness of destiny, or was she excited by the spirit of revenge? It is easy for us to mistake our revenge for religion. Some men pray out of spite; some men preach Christ out of envy; it is possible to build a church upon the devil's foundation, and to light an altar with the devil's fire. Jacob was pre-eminently a destined child, a man with a special mark upon him: how he will come out of this we shall see; but God will be King and Master, and right shall be done. What, then, is to be our attitude under the consciousness of destiny, and under the suggestion of tempting events? Our attitude is to be one of perfect resignation. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

The temptation of destiny:—Although the prediction of the fact did not entitle her or her son to bring about its fulfilment, yet it makes some slight difference in the case. For we see even now that when a nation or a man once feels that it is "manifest destiny" to do a certain thing—predetermined—he feels free to do that thing, no matter how unjust it is. We see the same delusion in a thousand other cases. Shakespeare recognizes it in the great drama of "Macbeth." The prediction, "Thou shalt be king hereafter," did not justify the murder, but it seemed to give to it a certain supernatural countenance, marshalling the murderer the way that he was going. If this can be the case when the supernatural soliciting comes from below, how much more strong when it was felt to come from above—from God Himself! Then remember, besides, that there was something not altogether evil in Jacob's passionate coveting of the birthright. For it was a sacred good, and eagerly to appreciate it as he did was itself a sign of some fitness for it; while to despise it as Esau did marked the man as unworthy of it. (*A. G. Mercer.*)

The selection of Jacob:—But now hear me for a moment in defence of that Divine Providence which allowed the substitution of this particular man, Jacob, in the place of this particular man, Esau, as the third of the patriarchs. The importance of a right choice here is not easily over-rated. For several reasons the character of the patriarchs was to influence and mould the character of the Hebrew race more than could be done by any of the whole line of law-givers, princes, prophets, and warriors—Moses, perhaps, excepted. To have the right man, then, was indeed important. But was Jacob he? or, at least, was he more fit than Esau? He was. What was Jacob? Let us see. A man may be described by three things—whether he has ends—what they are—and how he reaches them. 1. Whether he has ends. Esau had not. He was one of a class of characters who live without any distant

ends to reach—who live very much from day to day, working perhaps energetically for their little daily plans, or floating from interest to interest. Jacob was, above all things else, a man of purpose. 2. The next question about a man is, What are his ends? Two traits in a man's ends lift up the man—the remoteness and the generosity of his ends. If very remote—that is, if a man takes into his vision the whole scope of his life, and with a masterly power brings under his whole existence to that far-off end—that man, even though his ends are selfish, is a superior person. Now Jacob was certainly that man. Show me such a man anywhere, and I will show you his equal here. Seven years of the hardest service he served for Rachel, and counted them but as seven days—and then seven more. He wore through twenty years of the hardest life, carrying on his design that he should be the successor and heir of Isaac, and though he was of a timid nature, never yielding that purpose, even when he stood in the presence of the avenger Esau himself. Never was there a more patient, tenacious soul. This was singular, for remember that primitive men may be persistent in passions, but not in purposes, save in that one passion and purpose—revenge. But Jacob had all the calmness and tenacity of an advanced age. His end, however, may have been a selfish one. Self-advancement? Yes. But, considering the age and place, self-advancement was one of the higher forms of virtue, especially when we know that the end Jacob sought had a certain sacredness about it—the hope, namely, that he should be in the line of God's special favours—should take eminent place as His servant. 3. The third test of a man is the means he uses to reach his ends. Jacob's were bad enough. Remember, however, that the rule, the end does not justify the means, was unknown to Jacob—is, in fact, a great and modern discovery in morals, not fully known even yet. And remember, besides, that whatever his means were, they were always effective, and never gratuitously wicked. On the whole, then, here was a mixed character as to its excellence, but a high character as to its ability. Nay, besides—this very mixture, the very defects of character, made Jacob a fit instrument of the Divine purposes. He was, even in his weakest points, far better fitted to lay the foundations of a family and kingdom than the impulsive and purposeless Esau. Had he been a more purely excellent man, he would have been less fitted. A style of character purely excellent cannot lay a permanent grasp upon the men of early ages, or men of any age not high enough to receive it. The powerful great man is the one who is at once above and yet along-side of his fellows. Hence we see, as a matter of fact, that among the patriarchs, though Abraham is most revered, Jacob has been the truly influential man with the Jewish masses. He has moulded the mass of the Jewish people into his own image. I regard this as specially providential. Thus the purer and higher were led to God and held to God through the high spirit that was in Abraham; the body were held to God and their religion through the lower soul of Jacob. They could be inferior Jacobs when they could not be properly children of Abraham. So, through lower and higher instruments, the purposes of God are worked out. 1. Among the thoughts suggested by the subject, notice first the effect of success in the judgment of character. Esau, once gone under, holds no place. 2. Notice, again, how poorly we judge of mixed characters. The same Jacob who over-reached his father, his brother, and I might say destiny itself, the supplanter, the robber, who “from a shelf the precious diadem stole, and put it in his pocket,” was yet the same who wrestled all night with God. Truly we are all of different natures, marvellously mixed—a worm, a god! This should teach me at least some things, such as humility to myself. I know by this that the statues of the demi-gods stand on clay feet—that my best moments, my best feelings, are but a part of me—that I have a whole world of things to repent of, and to be ashamed of, before God. That, and nothing of soul growth, was especially the fact with Jacob. His character was unlike that of the other patriarchs in this: Abraham and Isaac, such as we see them at first, are very much such as we see them at last. But Jacob only becomes his real, that is, his higher self at the last. At the bottom of his young and eager ambition and selfishness there was at the very first, as I have said, something good, the root of a great tree of right—namely, the real sense that God's blessing and favour were above all value—and so in his blind, but most earnest way, he went to work to grasp them. 3. There is one test every man should solemnly try himself by, one test of what our ultimate selves and our ultimate destiny will be—Does the good part of our characters grow? (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 25–29. God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth,

and plenty of corn and wine.—*Isaac blessing Jacob*:—I. WITH TEMPORAL BLESSINGS. 1. A fertile soil. 2. Abundance of provision. 3. Political pre-eminence. II. WITH SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS. 1. The channel of spiritual blessing to mankind. 2. A test of character. (T. H. Leale.) *Isaac's blessing—the parent's warning*:—I. First, we shall consider WHEREIN ISAAC'S BLESSING CONSISTED. 1. Plenty, heaven and earth combining to enrich the happy possessor. 2. Power, almost unlimited, especially over his own brethren. 3. And last, though not the least, a mighty influence with God and a great interest in the courts of heaven. "Cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee." Or, in other words, "Let God be an enemy to all thy enemies, and a friend to all thy friends." 4. Now these, doubtless, were very desirable mercies, and they belonged, by right, to the first-born; though God was pleased sometimes to revoke that law, and to transfer these blessings from the elder to the younger, as instanced in the case before us, and also in that of Cain and of Reuben. These, I say, were very desirable mercies, and, when accompanied with the Divine sanction, of untold value. But still, after all, they were but temporary. They lasted only for this life; and Jacob, I doubt not, might have managed very well without any one of them. The blessing of Isaac, therefore, must have comprised something more than what we have here recorded; otherwise we may be well assured that Jacob would never have risked so much to obtain it, nor would his mother ever have placed him in so hazardous and perilous a situation. But the fact is, these temporal blessings were but the "shadows of better things to come." They were, to use an apostolic phrase, "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." They included all those good things which were more particularly specified to Abraham when God entered into covenant with him. They intimated, for instance, in the first place, that from him should descend the Messiah—He who was to be the "Prince of the kings of the earth . . . before whom all nations should come and worship . . . and who was to rule them with a rod of iron, and to break them to shivers as a potter's vessel." And, in the second place, that from him also should come the church that was to be specially owned and blessed by God; and consequently we find Isaac, when afterwards confirming the blessing to Jacob, calling it the "blessing of Abraham." II. What were THE MEANS THAT REBEKAH ADOPTED to secure the blessing for her favourite son Jacob. They were little else than a tissue of lies and deceit. III. Let us now see what LESSONS we may gather up from a contemplation of the whole subject. 1. In the first place, then, it reads a very solemn and affecting warning to parents. It teaches the folly and danger of making invidious distinctions between the different members of your families—of showing an undue partiality for one child more than another. It is a withering curse. It introduces discord and dissension into every family wherever it finds a footing, and it is the fruitful source of all evil, social and moral. Whenever, therefore, you feel its chilling influence beginning to steal over you, oh, remember Rebekah, and in the name and strength of your God shake it from you. Give it no encouragement; or, if you must, keep it to yourself. Let no one else ever see or feel it. 2. In the second place, learn from this subject the way in which our Heavenly Father will have us to seek for His blessing. We must come to Him for it in and through our Elder Brother. We must come clothed in His "goodly raiment," even that pure and spotless robe which He wrought for us on Calvary. There is no other way under heaven whereby we can be saved. And if you ask me by what means we are to get this goodly raiment—this pure and spotless righteousness, I answer, simply by asking for it. "Ask," says your God and Saviour, "and you shall have." And although it cost Him a great price—even His own precious blood—yet He offers it to you without money and without price. Oh, go to Him, then, and ask Him for this precious gift; for "the gift of God is eternal life." (E. Harper, B.A.) *Isaac blessing Jacob*:—1. That parents ought to bless their children; too many do curse, and not bless them. 2. Children ought to fear the causal curses of their parents. The better son feared the curse of his father (ver. 12). 3. Parents ought rather to gather a stock of Divine promises, that they may bless their children more out of faith than out of form, praying for them out of a promise, as Isaac did then for his son Jacob, praying that the blessing of Abraham might come upon him (Gen. xxviii. 4). 4. A wishing our children's weal customarily without a praying for them believingly, is neither enough for parents, nor is it all (or at all) that is warranted by Isaac's blessing Jacob here. There is much difference between a formal wish and a faithful prayer for their good. 5. Spiritual blessings must be sought and sued for in their proper season. Here Esau came too late for the bless-

ing, which was bestowed before he lost the right season (which is a part of time above all other parts, even the shine and lustre of time), so could not obtain it, no, not with tears (Heb. xii. 16-17). (*C. Ness.*)

Vers. 33-40. And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father.—*Esau's cry*:—No one can read this chapter without feeling some pity for Esau. All his hopes were disappointed in a moment. He had built much upon this blessing; for in his youth he had sold his birthright, and he thought that in his father's blessing he would get back his birthright, or what would stand in its place. He had parted with it easily, and he expected to regain it easily. He thought to regain God's blessing, not by fasting and prayer, but by savoury meat, by feasting and making merry. I. Esau's cry is the cry of one who has rejected God, and who in turn has been rejected by Him. He was (1) profane, and (2) presumptuous. He was profane in selling his birthright, presumptuous in claiming the blessing. Such as Esau was, such are too many Christians now. They neglect religion in their best days; they give up their birthright in exchange for what is sure to perish and make them perish with it. They are profane persons, for they despise the great gift of God; they are presumptuous, for they claim a blessing as a matter of course. II. The prodigal son is an example of a true penitent. He came to God with deep confession—self-abasement. He said, "Father, I have sinned." Esau came for a son's privileges; the prodigal son came for a servant's drudgery. The one killed and dressed his venison with his own hand, and enjoyed it not; for the other the fatted calf was prepared, and the ring for his hand and shoes for his feet, and the best robe, and there was music and dancing. (*J. H. Newman, D.D.*) *Esau's late repentance*:—I. The character of Esau has unquestionably a fair side. Esau was by no means a man of unqualified wickedness or baseness; judged according to the standard of many men, he would pass for a very worthy, estimable person. The whole history of his treatment of Jacob puts his character in a very favourably light; it represents him as an open-hearted, generous person, who, though he might be rough in his manners, fond of a wild life, perhaps as rude and unpolished in mind as he was in body, had yet a noble soul, which was able to do what little minds sometimes cannot do—namely, forgive freely a cruel wrong done to him. II. Nevertheless, it is not without reason that the apostle styles Esau a profane person. The defect in his character may be described as a want of religious seriousness; there was nothing spiritual in him—no reverence for holy things, no indications of a soul which could find no sufficient joy in this world, but which aspired to those joys which are at God's right hand for evermore. By the title of profane the apostle means to describe the carnal, unspiritual man—the man who takes his stand upon this world as the end of his thoughts and the scene of all his activity, who considers the land as a great hunting-field, and makes the satisfaction of his bodily wants and tastes the whole end of living. III. Esau's repentance was consistent with his character; it was manifestly of the wrong kind. Sorrow of this world; grief for the loss of the corn and wine. (*Bishop Harvey Goodwin.*) *Esau disappointed of his blessing*:—I. HE IS OVERWHELMED BY A HEART-RENDING SORROW. II. HE REFERS HIS WRONGS TO THEIR TRUE AUTHOR. III. HE PLEADS PATHETICALLY WITH HIS FATHER. IV. HE IS CONTENTED WITH AN INFERIOR BLESSING. God's blessings without God. Nothing of heaven enters into it. (*T. H. Leale.*) *The deceived father and the defrauded son and brother*:—I. ISAAC'S CONDUCT. 1. Remark, first, the double blessing—Jacob's containing temporal abundance, temporal rule, and spiritual blessing, the main points plainly being the rights of primogeniture; Esau's, in the first part identical with his brother's, but different afterwards by the want of spiritual blessing: God's gifts without God, the fruit of the earth and the plunder of the sword; but no connection with the covenant of God. Of course the destinies of Israel and Edom are prefigured in this, rather than the personal history of Jacob and Esau. For the predicted liberty of Edom, the breaking the yoke of the neck, did not take place till the reign of Jehoram, long after Esau's death (2 Kings viii. 22). So that when it is written, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated," the selection of nations to outward privileges is meant, not the irrespective election of individuals to eternal life. Now in these blessings we have the principle of prophecy. We cannot suppose that the Jacob here spoken of as blessed was unmixedly good, nor the Esau unmixedly evil. Nor can we imagine that idolatrous Israel was that in which all the promises of God found their end, or that Edom

was the nation on whom the curse of God fell unmixed with any blessing. Prophecy takes individuals and nations as representations for the time being of principles which they only partially represent. They are the basis or substratum of an idea. For instance, Jacob, or Israel, represents the principle of good, the Church of God, the triumphant and blessed principle. To that, the typical Israel, the promises are made; to the literal Jacob or Israel, only as the type of this, and so far as the nation actually was what it stood for. Esau is the worldly man, representing for the time the world. To that the rejection belongs; to the literal Esau, only so far as he is that. 2. Next observe Isaac's adherence to his promise. If anything can excuse a departure from a promise, Isaac might have been excused in this case; for in truth he did not promise to Jacob, though Jacob stood before him. He honestly thought that he was speaking to his first-born; and yet, perhaps partly taught to be punctiliously scrupulous by the rebuke he had received in early life from Abimelech, partly feeling that he had been but an instrument in God's hands, he felt that a mysterious and irrevocable sacredness belonged to his word once past, and said, "Yea, and he shall be blessed." Jesuitism amongst us has begun to tamper with the sacredness of a promise. Men change their creed, and fancy themselves absolved from past promises; the member of the Church of Rome is no longer bound to do what the member of the Church of England stipulated. Just as well might the king refuse to perform the promises or pay the debts of the prince whom he once was. Therefore, let us ponder over such texts as these. Be careful and cautious of pledging yourself to anything; but the money you have once promised, the offer you have once made, is irrevocable—it is no longer yours; it is passed from you as much as if it had been given. II. ESAU'S CONDUCT. 1. Remark his contentment with a second-rate blessing: "Hast thou not another blessing?" &c. These words, taken by themselves, without reference to the character of him who spoke them, are neither good nor evil. Had Esau meant only this: God has many blessings, of various kinds; and looking round the circle of my resources, I perceive a principle of compensation, so that what I lose in one department I gain in some other; I will be content to take a second blessing when I cannot have the first. Esau would have said nothing which was not praiseworthy and religious; he would have only expressed what the Syro-Phœnician woman did, who observed that though in this world some have the advantages of children, whereas others are as little favoured as dogs, yet that the dogs have the compensatory crumbs. But it was not in this spirit at all that Esau spoke. His was the complaining spirit of the man who repines because others are more favoured than he; the spirit of the elder son in the parable, "thou never gavest me a kid." This character transformed outward disadvantages into a real curse. For, again I say, disadvantages are in themselves only a means to more lustrous excellence. But if to inferior talents we add sloth, and to poverty envy and discontent, and to weakened health querulousness, then we have indeed ourselves converted non-election into reprobation; and we are doubly cursed—cursed by inward as well as outward inferiority. 2. Remark Esau's malice (ver 41). "The days of mourning for my father are at hand, then will I slay my brother Jacob." Distinguish this from the resentment of righteous indignation. Resentment is an attribute of humanity in its original, primal state. He who cannot feel indignant at some kinds of wrong has not the mind of Christ. Remember the words with which he blighted pharisaism—words not spoken for effect, but syllables of downright, genuine anger; such expressions as peculiarly belong to the prophetic character, in which indignation blazes into a flame; the prophetic writings are full of it. Very different from this was Esau's resentment. Anger in him had passed into malice; private wrong had been brooded on till it had become revenge, deliberate and planned vindictiveness. (F. W. Robertson, M.A.) *Esau and the blessing*:—I. This narrative suggests a WARNING AGAINST THE UNDER-VALUING OF PRIVILEGE. II. This narrative suggests THAT GOD IS ABLE TO BLESS EVERY DESIRING SOUL. Eternal life for all. See the inexhaustible nature of the Divine riches exemplified in—1. The vast numbers who have been made partakers of it already passed from mortal sight. 2. The multitudes on their way at this moment to the same heavenly kingdom who have "obtained like precious faith." III. This narrative REMINDS US THAT ONE MAY SEEK THE BLESSING TOO LATE. Though Esau obtained at last a blessing, he did not realize the blessing. (F. Goodall, B.A.) *The cry of one man representing the wail of many*:—I. There is here THE SENSE OF AN IMMENSE LOSS. A holy character is the highest birthright. We have all to lament the loss of this. II. THE SENSE OF A GREAT INJURY. Victimized by his own brother. Far worse to bear than an

injury from an enemy. III. THE SENSE OF REMORSE. IV. THE SENSE OF APPROACHING HOPELESSNESS. Conclusion: 1. What we have all lost. Our birthright—the image of God. 2. What we should all chiefly struggle for. The restoration of the Divine image. Our loss is not, like Esau's, irremediable. We can, by faith in Christ, regain it. (*Homilist.*) *The repentance of Esau*:—I. CERTAINLY WE ARE NOT TO GATHER HENCE THAT ANY TRUE PENITENT CAN TURN TO GOD AND BE REJECTED OF HIM. Esau's rejection was no such contradiction of God's love as the rejection of any one weeping penitent upon earth would surely be. For, first, there is about Esau's very cry itself, loud and bitter as it was, no sign of true penitence; and, next, when he uttered it, so far as that which he had then lost is concerned, his day of probation was already over, his time of trial closed, his hour of judgment come. There is doubtless, as we shall see hereafter, a true counterpart of this before every impenitent man, with horrors aggravated above any which waited upon Esau's sentence, as far as time is exceeded by eternity, and temporal disadvantage by the death of the enduring soul. But there is not one word in it to make any one who, in this his day of grace, turns to the Lord, and cries to him for cleansing and for pardon, doubt the full certainty of a most gracious acceptance by Him who suffered the woman that was a sinner to wash His blessed feet with her tears, and to wipe them with the hair of her head. II. This, then, certainly is not the lesson which is taught us here; but just as certainly it is THAT WE, TOO, MAY CAST AWAY GOD'S MERCY TO US; that we, the true children of promise, bred in the family of One greater than Isaac—that we, the inheritors of a birthright greater far than Jacob sought for or Esau despised—that we, the children of God's grace, may reject His grace, and cast profanely from us our more blessed birthright. Such awful cases the experience of every parish priest has, I suppose, brought before him. I have seen them and have trembled. I have seen the fearful paroxysms of a loud and violent despair. I have seen what is more awful still, the obstinate sinner, calmly, deliberately, determinately put from himself the hope of salvation, and declare that in a few hours he shall be in hell. And so indeed it must be. For if this were not so, what could the warning mean, "Look diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of Christ." Surely it must mean that the time of hopeless lamentation will come to every obstinate despiser of God's grace; that His Spirit does not always strive with any man—that there is a limit to the trial of every man. Can we not, as we gaze with awe upon the fearful picture, see in some measure why this doom is irreversible? For must it not of necessity happen that the very perfection of this miserable wickedness sets the seal of hopeless continuance upon such spiritual wretchedness? For such a spiritual being with such a nature must hate the good; must, above all, hate supremely God, the All-Good; must see in Him the highest and most absolute conceivable contradiction of itself, and so must recoil infinitely from Him, and in recoiling from Him must choose the evil with an ever-renewed iteration and ever-increasing intensity of choice. Nor does the perfection of the misery which such a soul endures at all incline it to any breath of penitence; it only deepens the blackness and the malignity of its despair. There is nothing in itself purifying in suffering. III. But if we would learn one true lesson from this portion of God's Word, we must not only note the general warning of looking diligently lest we fall from God's grace, but we must see further AGAINST WHAT SPECIAL FORMS OF EVIL THIS WARNING IS PECULIARLY DIRECTED. And indeed, for many here, as everywhere, this is a lesson needing very signally to be learned. For remember what were Esau's circumstances and Esau's trial. Born to the inheritance of a certain birthright, exercising, as to his first title to it, no volition regarding it; having centred in his own person the mysterious privileges which ordinarily belonged to the first-born son of the heir of promise—he cast these away; not from special or marked depravity of character, but from yielding to the temptations of appetite. This one special attribute of sensuality is clearly shadowed forth in this example; we see its direct tendency to lead to delaying repentance until true repentance is impossible. For its gratifications fill for a season, and occupy the degraded soul. Thus the first drawings of the blessed Spirit are resisted, His first tender motions on the soul are quenched; and it is in yielding to these, instead of resisting them, that there is the only possibility of any true repentance. So it was with Esau, when, under the overmastering impulse of a sensual temptation, he was led to cast all good away—for "thus Esau despised his birthright." Surely the application is too explicit to be missed. Is not the warning plain against exactly that whole class of sins of the real guilt of which the world takes least account? Is it not as much as saying that indulged sensuality does build up

barriers against true repentance, which are all but impassable? Does it not meet the man possessed, by natural endowment, of high spirits, of frankness, of cheerfulness, of all that makes him a popular companion—with strong passions, with great powers of enjoyment—who flings himself freely into life, is the leader of a set, and, from there being a certain look of generosity about his vices, is lauded perhaps for his unselfishness; who has naturally a far more attractive character than the less courageous, less spirited, less frank, more self-conscious, more self-watchful man beside him? does it not meet this man in his hours of sensual temptations, and say, Thou hast a birthright, beware of despising it, beware of bartering it? Does it not say to him, "Thou, too, art a son of Abraham"? yea, and more, "Thou art a son of Christ"; without thy choice, before thy knowledge, of God's mere love and mercy, that blessed privilege was made thine. His love yearned over thine infancy, His Spirit has striven with thy youth, His care is watching over thee now, and thou, too, art tempted to barter these inestimable blessings for the mess of pottage. In thee, too, appetite craves for indulgence; before thine eyes a sensuous fancy paints her glowing pictures of the mad delight of gratified desire, of the feast, of the revel, of the impure orgy, of the satisfied sense. All these she sets before thee, and thy spirit, faint often and weary in this struggle, whispers to thee, Lo! I die in this abstinence; and what good shall this birthright do me? Oh, then beware—for then is the tempter nearest, closest, most dangerous. Then, under the form of what he whispers to thee is a common practice, a slight evil, the yielding to an irresistible temptation; then is he tempting thee, too, after this example of the old profaneness of Esau, to despise thy birthright. Nor can you tell that in any one of these allowed instances of sensual indulgence you may not actually sell your birthright. It is the very secret of the power of the temptation, that in each separate instance it looks so inconsiderable in its future consequence, compared with the pressing urgency of the present desire. It is the gusty impulsiveness of your nature which exposes you so certainly to the danger. You become profane without knowing it; you meant but to gratify appetite, and lo! for appetite you have bartered your soul. Here, then, is God's warning to you. He sets, from the beginning, the end before you. He shows you what such conduct really is, and whither it must lead you. He lets you hear the loud and bitter cry. (*Bp. S. Wilberforce.*) *Lessons*:—I. To respect and reverence old age, and commiserate its infirmities. II. To cultivate a spirit of truth, honesty, and honour in our dealings. III. To shun every occasion of household strife. IV. To seek the blessing of our heavenly Father, in the full confidence that all He has given to others has not so impoverished Him that there is not a blessing left for us. (*J. C. Gray.*) *The blessing*:—An accurate view of individual history—the history of real life—is always interesting. I. THE FACTS HERE STATED. 1. Notice the individuals concerned; these are, Isaac and Rebekah, and their twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Isaac was the child of promise, given to Abraham in his old age, through whom the blessing pronounced on Abraham was to descend to an innumerable multitude. He married Rebekah, his cousin, the grand-child of Abraham's brother; and the offspring of their union were these twin children, Esau and Jacob. All that is recorded of the parents impresses us with the conviction of their piety. In the short notices of their life, we observe that, with sufficient evidence of their partaking of human infirmity, we have abundant testimony to their devotional habits, their submission to the dispensations of Providence, their peaceable and liberal disposition, and their prosperity under the blessing of the Lord. Esau and Jacob, their children, were characters widely differing from each other. 2. The blessing that Jacob obtained. It was a blessing which was inherent in the posterity of Abraham, and which one of the sons of Isaac was consequently to inherit. 3. The means which were used for the obtaining of this blessing. Isaac was on the point of conferring the blessing of the first-born upon Esau, contrary to the Divine intimation, contrary to the warrantable expectations of Rebekah, and contrary to those predilections which she seems to have cherished for the younger son, and which his regular and domestic habits appear to have strengthened. Acting under the influence of unbelief, she immediately suggested to Jacob the plan of supplanting his brother by fraud. Jacob's objections appear to have been those of prudence rather than of principle; they yielded to a mother's earnest entreaties; and the result shows him to be no inapt scholar in the ways of deception. There is something very humiliating in the whole of Jacob's interview with his father. Every succeeding step is marked with grosser hypocrisy and deeper guilt; and though, in the mysterious providence of God, the promised blessing was permitted to rest on

his head, yet the guilt of that scene must afterwards have been like a barbed arrow in his conscience, and given increased severity to many of his subsequent sufferings. The promise was given to Isaac with. this recognition of Abraham's character, "Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws." Isaac did the same. He entered into the spirit of the covenant, and lived a life of obedience. On what reasonable ground, therefore, could Esau, knowing this, expect the blessing? He was a "profane person, a fornicator," a mere sensualist. It is in this light, therefore, that we should regard him, and by these things that we must measure his tears. II. The circumstances that have come before us suggest SOME VERY IMPORTANT AND USEFUL PRACTICAL REMARKS. We notice—1. The evil of parental partialities. The selection of one child for favouritism is altogether inconsistent with the sacredness of parental duty, and with the strict justice which is essential to parental discipline. In the present instance, the fondness of Isaac for his first-born, and of Rebekah for her younger child, led both themselves and their children into sin. 2. The fearful results of one deviation from rectitude. One vice entails another. One instance of error or untruth frequently places a man in circumstances in which he is led to commit many to bring him off without suspicion; and he who tells one lie will not scruple much, in a very short time, blasphemously to call the name of God to witness it. "And he said, Because the Lord thy God brought it to me." Let every one, then, beware how he approaches the first appearances of evil, or oversteps in the least degree the line of propriety. We cannot hope to be preserved when we have placed ourselves in questionable circumstances; and we have not strength to keep ourselves. 3. The character of the over-ruing providence of God. It was said of Jacob and Esau, "the elder shall serve the younger." But the ways of God are very mysterious. The same result is brought about by a series of natural events, on which we could not have calculated; events, however, which are in no respect the results of an absolute fatalism, but which are seen to arise fairly out of the elements of character and habits of the parties concerned. We see each character developed in its peculiarities by the course which it is permitted to pursue; and to each, in the sovereignty of Divine Providence, a moral discipline is applied, calculated to forward the best interests of the soul. 4. The melancholy character of the sorrow of the world. While, therefore, the afflictions of Jacob, though they were the consequences of his sins, led him to draw near to God in his solitude, the grief of Esau was merely the regret consequent on worldly disappointment. The privation of the blessing of the first-born was only lamented by him as the ruin of his best earthly hopes. It was the downfall of his ambition. It was a limit prescribed to his indulgences. It was merely that sorrow which often seizes on ungodly men in the course of Providence, and in which they know not where to turn for consolation, because they will not turn to God. 5. Observe the immeasurable extent of the Divine compassion. It is only on the mercy of God that Jacob or Esau, or any character similar to either, can rest a sure and certain hope of deliverance at last. (*E. Craig.*) *Godly and worldly sorrow*:—I suppose that when we read the account of Esau's grief, of his affecting appeal to his father and of its ill success, we begin to think it an instance of the fruitlessness of repentance. Those who have thrown away God's gifts of grace, who have despised them in former days, and sold them for some mess of pottage, who are now wishing to have them back and to return to God, are apt to be disheartened and dismayed by such a passage in God's Word. The fear springs up lest they also should find no answer to their prayers, lest theirs should be fruitless tears, lest the cry should be made by them in vain, "Bless me also, O my Father." But however natural such thoughts from the first impression of the scene, a closer study of the passage may serve to drive away the clouds. We may learn to see that there was something wrong and faulty in Esau's sorrow, great as it was, something in the nature of his distress of mind not altogether satisfactory or right. If we examine his conduct at the time, we fail to see any religious element in it at all. It was a worldly sorrow, a burst of natural but worldly grief; there was no confession of his former sin, no acknowledgment that the blessing had been justly lost, no word of self-condemnation, no avowal like the penitent thief upon the cross, that he, indeed, was justly suffering for past misdeeds, and was reaping as he had sown; no allusion to his faithlessness, to his contempt of the promise of God in selling his birthright for the mess of pottage, no turning to God, no mention of God at all, or of God's just anger for his past offence. And hence we may conclude that he took a mere worldly view of his loss, that he felt mere worldly sorrow—

sorrow for the loss of some temporal advantages to himself and his descendants, and perhaps mingled with this keen sense of worldly disappointment—sorrow at having missed a father's benediction, especially as he believed it, in his case, to carry with it some unusual power. If this is a right view of Esau's state of mind, we see at once that he is not to be regarded as a true penitent, that he is not presented to us as such, and that therefore no feelings of true penitence are to be chilled or checked in their growth by the treatment which he received. The great truth still stands out as clearly as ever, quite unclouded by any instance in Scripture to the contrary, that God does receive back the penitent; that godly sorrow, if it lead on to the after acts and fuller development of repentance, never rends our hearts in vain; not in vain does any wandering child of God draw near, and kneeling down at the foot of the cross exclaim, "Bless me also, O my Father." Whenever the sorrow of the heart is true godly sorrow, and the conscience-stricken bow themselves in genuine compunction at the mercy-seat of God, mercy comes forth from the throne of God, and the penitent is blessed. But all sorrow—and it is this which the history of Esau impressively proclaims—is not godly sorrow, and has not its blessed fruit. Men may grieve over losses, disasters, reverses brought on them through sin, without grieving altogether for the sin, without being grieved and angry with themselves for sinning. And what harder burden to bear than this worldly sorrow, when the heart is dry and dead to the influence of grace, when the soul has no light in its dark place, when God is not confessed in time of trial, when chastisements for sin fail to create the sense of sin, or to break the will of the disobedient child, when there is no mark of the Cross of Christ, but when it is the fruitless cross of the world, which cannot heal? If we are in any suffering, under any trial through transgressions, whether lately or long since done, we can find blessings springing up amid the thorns, should we own the hand of God and sorrow after a godly sort; but if we steel our hearts, and go through trial without taking it as from our Saviour's hands, without owning and lamenting the sins and errors and neglects, the worldliness and the foolishness from which the trial grew, then indeed it is a heavy weight to bear, and there is a still heavier burden to be laid upon us hereafter. (*Bp. Armstrong.*) *Esau, the man of nature*:—While in Jacob's conduct the high and noble aims which he pursued were in most discordant contrast with the ungenerous means which he employed, Esau was fluctuating and contradictory within himself; though the general tone of his mind was indifference to spiritual boons, his sentiments were spontaneous and profound whenever the voice of nature spoke; he despised the birthright (xxv. 34), but regarded himself always as the first-born son (ver. 32); he slighted the prophecy of God (xxv. 23), but coveted most anxiously the blessing of his father; he attributed to the latter a greater force than to the former; he hoped to neutralize the effect of the one by the weight of the other; he could not comprehend or feel the invisible, but he was keenly susceptible of the visible; his mind was not sublime, but his heart was full of pure and strong emotions; he saw in his father only the earthly progenitor, not the representative of the Deity—he was, indeed, the man of nature. As such he is described in the affecting scene of our text; he is designedly placed in marked contradistinction to his brother Jacob: nature, simplicity, deep and genuine affection on the one side; shrewdness, ambition, and indefinite, soaring, but unsatisfied intellectual craving on the other. This contrast not only implies the kernel and spirit of this narrative, but forms the centre of all Biblical notions. Hence Esau's vehement disappointment will receive its proper light; he deeply repented that he had sold his birthright, but only because he believed that he was for that reason justly deprived of the father's blessing due to the eldest son (ver. 36); he heard without envy or animosity, that Jacob's descendants had been declared the future lords of his own progeny; leaving that prerogative uncomplainingly to his brother, he exclaimed: "Hast thou but one blessing, my father?" and bursts forth into another flood of tears. (*M. M. Kalisch, Ph.D.*) *Esau's irreligious envy of Jacob*:—It was not that he desired to be a servant of the Lord, or that his posterity should be His people, according to the tenor of Abraham's covenant: but as he that should be possessed of these distinctions would in other respects be superior to his brother, it became an object of emulation. Thus we have often seen religion set at naught, while yet the advantages which accompany it have been earnestly desired; and where grace has in a manner crossed hands by favouring a younger or inferior branch of a family, envy and its train of malignant passions have frequently blazed on the other side. It was not as the father of the holy nation, but as being "lord over his brethren," that Jacob was the object of Esau's envy. And

this may further account for the blessing of Isaac on the former dwelling principally upon temporal advantages, as designed of God to cut off the vain hopes of the latter, of enjoying the power attached to the blessing, while he despised the blessing itself. When Esau perceived that Jacob must be blessed, he entreated to be blessed also: "Bless me, even me also, oh my father!" One sees in this language just that partial conviction of there being something in religion, mixed with a large portion of ignorance, which it is common to see in persons who have been brought up in a religious family, and yet are strangers to the God of their fathers. If this earnest request had extended only to what was consistent with Jacob's having the pre-eminence, there was another blessing for him, and he had it: but though he had no desire after the best part of Jacob's portion, yet he was very earnest to have had that clause of it reversed, "be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee." If this could have been granted him, he had been satisfied; for "the fatness of the earth" was all he cared for. But this was an object concerning which, as the apostle observes, "he found no place of repentance" (that is, in the mind of his father), "though he sought it carefully with tears." Such will be the case with fornicators and all profane persons, who, like Esau, for a few momentary gratifications in the present life, make light of Christ and the blessings of the gospel. They will cry with a great and exceeding bitter cry, saying, "Lord, Lord, open unto us!" But they will find no place of repentance in the mind of the Judge, who will answer them, "I know you not whence ye are: depart from Me ye workers of iniquity!" Esau's reflections on his brother for having twice supplanted him, were not altogether without ground; yet his statement is exaggerated. He lost his birthright because he himself, despising it, sold it to Jacob. (*A. Fuller.*) *Late and false tears*:—Why did he not rather weep to his brother for the pottage than to Isaac for a blessing? If he had not then sold, he had not needed now to buy. It is just with God to deny us those favours which we were careless in keeping, and which we undervalued in enjoying. How happy a thing is it to know the seasons of grace, and not to neglect them! How desperate to have known and neglected them! These tears are both late and false. (*Bp. Hall.*)

Vers. 41-45. Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing.—*Esau's resentment*:—I. IT WAS CARNAL. II. IT WAS OVER-ruLED FOR GOOD. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Lessons*:—1. Esau's wicked hypocrites hate always bitterly those whom God loves dearly. 2. God's blessing on His own is the cause why the wicked do so much hate and curse them. 3. The hearts of the wicked are meditating mischief, and their tongues belching it out against the righteous. 4. Pretended mourning for the dead is the hypocrite's cloak for the death of the living. 5. Mischievous hypocrites in the Church, stick not to hasten the death of parents when they hinder from their ends. 6. Resolutions of the wicked are for the slaughter of the righteous and blessed, were it in their hands. (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. Providence ordereth the counsels of the wicked to be revealed that they may be prevented. 2. God maketh sometimes the instruments of their straits to be instruments of deliverance to His. So Rebekah was to Jacob. 3. It is but meet that such who bring into danger should be solicitous to prevent it. 4. Timely advice for safety should be taken with greatest heed, as given with greatest care. 5. The murder of the innocent is the comfort of the cruel and wicked man. Revenge comforts the hypocrite, when no harm is done to him (ver. 22). 6. The mother's voice must be heard when it tends to the good of children. 7. Flight from danger into exile is many times the lot of persecuted saints. 8. God can make the wicked's habitations sometimes shelters to His people (ver. 43.). 9. Gracious parents and children would part but for a little time if it might be. 10. Time wears out anger and memory of all pretended injuries in the wicked (ver. 44). 11. Tender mothers long to preserve the lives of children, evil and good. 12. To be childless, or bereft of all, is an evil deprecated by the saints (ver. 45; Jer. xxxi. 15). (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 46. I am weary of my life.—Throughout the whole of man's marvellous pilgrimage on earth, or at least from the time that he became truly intelligent, the same haunting mysteries hover around him; the same unappeasable hunger, the same quenohless thirst, and the same abiding restlessness characterize all human life. One blood circulates throughout the whole family of man. And so, in these words of our text, Rebekah speaks for us all. She anticipates the inquiry of Mr. Mallock, "Is life worth living?" She discloses a difficulty which we still feel, a difficulty which all the mighty discoveries of modern science are powerless to remove,

or even to alleviate. We are still as far as Rebekah was from finding on earth any real and abiding object for our lives. Illusion spreads itself over our whole life. Our present is for ever discrediting our past, to be itself also discredited in its turn. Our different moods of mind have not the smallest faith in each other. Youth finds out the illusions of childhood; manhood finds out those of youth; and old age finds them both out, and too often sheds all further belief or hope, as trees shed their leaves in autumn. It often seems as if nature took a kind of pleasure in deceiving us, or sporting with us. In the realm of nature nothing is, but all things are becoming. Nature is a sort of embodied illusion. She tempts us to take refuge in utter scepticism. We no sooner get accustomed to some of her ways, than forthwith she proceeds to alter them. As soon as we find out one of her illusions, she immediately presents us with another. She makes us laugh and cry almost in the same moment. Nature mocks at the staid seriousness of the human soul. But not in nature is our chief or strongest hope of finding a settled home for our spirits. Man is far dearer to us than nature can ever be. "A man" would indeed be to us a "hiding-place," if only we could find a real and genuine man. Rebekah is not much troubled by the spiteful duplicity of nature, so long as she has the heart of Jacob her son entirely for her own. Sublime and full of prophetic glory are the grand illusions of the human heart. What tender, fervent soul has not at some time thoroughly believed in them? Every deep human affection has its strange mystic transfiguration on the high mountains of exalted nobleness. Earth appears the very vestibule of heaven; and we gratefully exclaim with St. Peter, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." Here we seek to make tabernacles, in which to entertain for ever the celestial visitants. But by and by the vision vanishes. The voice of the prophets is heard no more. The sterile bleakness of the mountain discloses itself; and affection such as we had dreamed of appears a romantic impossibility. Down we come from our mountain of transfiguration, to tread with perplexity and weariness the old dusty road that seems to lead to no particular goal. "Our silver is become dross, our wine mixed with water." Our sacramental elements are common bread and common wine. Jacob is sent away from his mother; and the very soul of Rebekah becomes inert and objectless. And so we learn how essentially solitary the human soul is here on earth. We learn that no one human being is adequate to the complete and permanent satisfaction of any other human being. We learn that Rebekah was not wise to seek the true centre of her life in the unstable heart of Jacob her son. We learn that souls, like atoms, never really meet or coalesce, that every human spirit is in truth an island surrounded by the dark waters of innavigable seas. It is only on certain rare, sacred days that divine miraculous ships of the Lord affords a means of communication to these lonely islands. We pilgrims must learn to live on such divine mana of human affection as God may send us from day to day. We may not store it up in great strong barns of our own devising; for it will not keep. Earthly friendships are only "brooks in the way," of which we may drink freely now and then during our long dusty pilgrimage, and so "lift up our heads," and walk with freshened energy towards the far-off land of changeless realities. The friendships of earth are but transient foregleams of deep, unchanging, mystic glories in the world to come. Failing, then, to find an anchor for the soul, or a real centre in the hearts of our brethren, can we find it in work, in some great aim which shall occupy all our energies, and lift us up above the fret and worry and the vain longings of life? Without religion I think that we cannot; and even with this aid we can only do so to a certain extent. The pilgrim must still remain a pilgrim. The simple fact that we ourselves are always changing, always growing, never "continuing in one stay," obviously renders it impossible for us to find permanent satisfaction in any one pursuit. Of each successive object of man's devotion and attachment we may truly say, in the sad language of the Psalmist, "In the morning it is green, and groweth up; but in the evening it is cut down, dried up, and withered." An ever-tantalizing, ever baffling limitation mars and spoils all human objects of pursuit. We need God's dew from heaven to revive and water even our fading and languishing ideals. (*A. Craufurd, M.A.*)

Lessons:—1. Good wives are ready in straits to unbosom themselves to good husbands. 2. Good mothers are in great trouble for the good and safety of their children. 3. Gracious women are burdened with the impieties of rebellious and wicked allies in their families. 4. Wicked matches are burdens to the very life of gracious parents. 5. God sometimes makes gracious mothers more solicitous to stir up fathers for right disposing of their children (ver. 46). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*)

CHAPTER XXVIII.

VERS. 1-5. And Isaac sent away Jacob: and he went to Padan-aram.—*The beginning of Jacob's pilgrimage*:—I. THE CAUSES WHICH LED HIM TO UNDERTAKE HIS PILGRIMAGE. 1. His brother's anger. 2. His mother's counsel. II. THE DIVINE PROVISIONS FOR HIS PILGRIMAGE. 1. The peculiar blessing of the chosen seed. 2. The ministry of man in conveying this blessing. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Lessons*:—1. Good fathers disdain not the wise and gracious advice of mothers for their children's good. 2. Good men may change their minds upon God's convictions for disposal of blessing. 3. Blessing and command go together from God, by His instruments unto His covenant ones. 4. Matches of the true seed with the idolaters are expressly forbidden by God (ver. 1). 5. Fathers have their due power to dispose of children in marriage. 6. It is good for fathers herein to follow the dictates and guidance of God, to dispose children, where the knowledge of God is (ver. 2.) (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. God's blessing needs to be repeated and confirmed unto souls, to answer temptations, and to prevent unbelief. 2. Obedience yielded to the charge of God foregoing, the blessing shall follow after. 3. God Almighty and All-sufficient is the only fountain of blessing. 4. The issues of good from God Almighty, upon poor creatures, they are blessings indeed. 5. God's All-sufficiency gives fruitfulness for the increase of His Church (ver. 3). 6. Abraham's blessing from the Almighty is that which passeth from generation to generation upon the Church. 7. The rest typical as well as spiritual and eternal, is made the inheritance of God's Israel from His Almightyness. 8. God's gift to Abraham is the just title of all the seed of promise to that inheritance eternal, typed out in Canaan (ver. 4). (*Ibid.*) *Lessons*:—1. Providence makes parents willing to part with dearest children in order to accomplish His will. 2. Providence ordereth children's hearts in readiness to obey the father's charge to execute God's purpose. 3. Providence sometimes sends out creatures naked and helpless the more to glorify Himself (ver. 5). He keeps them while they believe on His promises. (*Ibid.*)

VERS. 6-9. Then went Esau unto Ishmael.—*Esau, the type of worldliness and hypocrisy*:—I. HIS CONDUCT WAS MERCENARY. II. HIS CONDUCT WAS ONE-SIDED. III. HIS CONDUCT WAS FRAMED BY THE PRINCIPLE OF IMITATION. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Lessons*:—1. Hypocrites hearing of blessing upon others, pretend to make it as well as any. 2. Hypocrites hearing God's charge to accompany His blessing, would seem to observe it (ver. 6). 3. Hypocrites seeing the obedience of saints, would seem to imitate it (ver. 7). 4. Hypocrites perceiving what is displeasing to God and His servants, would seem to avoid it (ver. 8). 5. Hypocrites in all their pretences for God, take their own ways without His counsel. 6. Hypocrites in all their pretended imitations of the saints do but add sin to sin (ver. 9). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Mistaken imitation*:—See what awkward work is made when men go about to please others, and promote their worldly interests, by imitating that in which they have no delight. Ignorance and error mark every step they take. Esau was in no need of a wife. His parents would not be gratified by his connection with the apostate family of Ishmael. In short, he is out in all his calculations; nor can he discover the principles which influence those who fear the Lord. Thus have we often seen men try to imitate religious people for the sake of gaining esteem, or some way promoting their selfish ends; but instead of succeeding they have commonly made bad worse. That which to a right mind is as plain as the most public highway, to a mind perverted shall appear full of difficulties. "The labour of the foolish weareth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city" (*Eccles. x. 15.*) (*A. Fuller.*)

VERS. 10-15. And he dreamed, and behold, a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven.—*Jacob at Bethel*:—I. THE WANDERER. It had been a desolate day, and there was only desolation at night. In his weariness he slept, and as he slept, he dreamed. If dreams reflect the thoughts of the day, a new life must have begun within him. It was not Esau, or the plotting mother, or the aged father, upon whom he looked. The old tent was not over him, nor did he long for the pillows of home. It was a new experience, and the story of his vision has been told all down the centuries for more than three and a half thousand years. What does it mean? II. THE MEETING-PLACE. It was upon the barren mountain-side. Tier on tier of rocks reaching to the mountain-summit were the stairs of

nature's cathedral. The winds of the mountains roused him not. The audience of that night was asleep. If the beasts came forth from their retreats, they did not disturb him. His own sin had driven him into solitude. Voice of friend or foe, there was none. He was alone; but God was there even when he knew it not. What meetings there have been alone with God! What night-scenes of grandeur and awe! Amid sufferings from sin, in deepest trials and in roughest places, many a soul has exclaimed with the waking Jacob, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. . . . This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." III. THE VISION AND THE DIVINE COVENANT. Two thoughts are suggested at the outset by this vision: the reaching up of earth to heaven, and the reaching down of heaven to earth. IV. THE PILLAR OF REMEMBRANCE. Gratitude should be the very first fruit of religion. What less has God reason to expect? What else can man prefer to give? (*D. O. Mears, D.D.*) *Jacob at Bethel*:—I. THE DREAMER. 1. A lonely faith. 2. An exile from home. 3. A fugitive from his brother. II. THE DREAM. 1. The ladder. Heaven not closed to man. 2. Angels of God ascending and descending. Ministry. 3. God at the summit of the ladder. III. THE IMPRESSION OF HIS DREAM. 1. An overpowering sense of the presence of God. 2. His sin rose before him. (*G. R. Leavitt.*) *Jacob's vision*:—I. IT WAS VOUCHSAFED TO HIM IN A TIME OF INWARD AND OUTWARD TROUBLE. II. IT SATISFIED ALL HIS SPIRITUAL NECESSITIES. 1. It assured him that heaven and earth were not separated by an impassable gulf. 2. It assured him that there was a way of reconciliation between God and man. 3. It assured him that the love of God was above all the darkness of human sin and evil. 4. It imparted to him the blessings of a revelation from God. III. IT REVEALED THE AWFUL SOLEMNITY OF HUMAN LIFE. IV. IT RESULTED IN JACOB'S CONVERSION. 1. He erected a memorial of the event. 2. He resolved to make God supreme in all his thoughts and actions. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Jacob's vision*:—I. CONSIDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES under which the vision was granted. II. LOOK AT THE NATURE OF THE VISION. 1. The angels are interested in the well-being of God's people. 2. Heaven is a place of activity. 3. There is a way of communication open between heaven and earth. This way represents the mediation of Christ. III. LOOK AT THE PROMISES which on this occasion were made to Jacob. 1. God promised to be with Jacob. 2. God promised His protection and guidance to Jacob. 3. God promised him final deliverance from all trouble. (*A. D. Davidson.*) *Jacob's dream*:—I. A way set up between earth and heaven, making a visible connection between the ground on which he slept and the sky. II. The free circulation along that way of great powers and ministering influences. III. God, the supreme directing and inspiring force, eminent over all. Lessons: 1. Every man's ladder should stand upon the ground. No man can be a Christian by separating himself from his kind. 2. Along every man's ladder should be seen God's angels. 3. High above all a man's plans and resolves, there must be a living trust in God. (*H. W. Beecher.*) *The vision at Bethel*:—I. The vision at Bethel was the first step in Jacob's Divine education—the assurance which raised him to the feelings and dignity of a man. He knew that though he was to be chief of no hunting tribe, there might yet come forth from him a blessing to the whole earth. II. Jacob's vision came to him in a dream. But that which had been revealed was a permanent reality, a fact to accompany him through all his after-existence. Now the great question we have to ask ourselves is, "Was this a fact for Jacob the Mesopotamian shepherd, and is it a phantasm for all ages to come? Or was it a truth which Jacob was to learn just as he was to learn the truth of birth, the truth of marriage, the truth of death, that it might be declared to his seed after him; and that they might be acquainted with it as he was, only in a fuller and deeper sense?" If we take the Bible for our guide we must accept the latter conclusion, and not the former. The Son of Man is the ladder between earth and heaven, between the Father above and His children on earth. (*F. D. Maurice, M.A.*) *What Jacob saw in sleep*:—Sleeping to see. One may be too wide-awake to see. There are things which are hidden from us until we lie down to sleep. Only then do the heavens open and the angels of God disclose themselves. I. It does not follow that God is not, because we cannot discern Him. Little do we dream of the veiled wonders and splendours amid which we move. To Jacob's mental fret and confusion, the wilderness where God brooded was a wilderness and nothing more. But in sleep he grew tranquil and still; he lost himself—the flurried, heated, uneasy self that he had brought with him from Beer-sheba; and while he slept the hitherto unperceived Eternal came out softly, largely, above and around him. We learn from this the secret of the Lord's nearness. II. No man is

ever completely awake; something in him always sleeps. There is a sense in which it may be said with truth that were we less wakeful, more of God and spiritual realities might be unveiled to us. We are always doing—too much so for finest being; are always striving—too much so for highest attaining. Our religion consists too much in solicitude to get; it is continually “The Lord, the Father of mercies,” rather than “The Lord, the Father of glory.” We require to sleep from ourselves before the heavens can open upon us freely and richly flow around us. (*S. A. Tipple.*) *A ladder between heaven and earth:*—I. JESUS, THE LADDER, CONNECTS EARTH WITH HEAVEN. II. THIS LADDER COMES TO SINNERS. III. GOD IS AT THE TOP, SPEAKING KIND WORDS DOWN THE LADDER. IV. ADVICE TO CLIMBERS: 1. Be sure to get the right ladder; there are plenty of shams. 2. Take firm hold; you will want both hands. 3. Don't look down, or you will be giddy. 4. Don't come down to fetch any one else up. If your friends will not follow you, leave them behind. (*T. Champness.*) *Intercourse between earth and heaven:*—I. The ancient heathens told in their fables how the gods had all left the earth one by one; how one lingered in pity, loath to desert the once happy world; how even that one at last departed. Jacob's dream showed something better, truer than this; it showed him God above him, God's angels all about him. II. The intercourse between God and man has been enlarged and made perpetual in Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son. III. When Jacob awoke he consecrated a pillar, and vowed to build a sanctuary there and give tithes. We cannot altogether commend the spirit in which he made his vow. He tried to make a good bargain with the Almighty; yet God accepted him. The place was holy to him, because he knew that God was there. (*R. Winterbotham, M.A.*) *The nearness of God to men:*—I. GOD IS NEAR MEN WHEN THEY

LITTLE THINK IT. He is near—1. When we are not aware of it. 2. When sin is fresh upon us. 3. When we are in urgent need of Him. II. GOD IS NEAR MEN TO ENGAGE IN THEIR RELIGIOUS TRAINING. 1. God assured Jacob of His abiding presence with him. 2. Jacob was taught to recognize God in all things. 3. He was taught to feel his entire dependence upon God throughout the journey of life. III. GOD IS ALWAYS NEAR MEN TO EFFECT THEIR COMPLETE SALVATION. Intercourse has been established between earth and heaven; the whole process of man's salvation is under the superintendence of God. (*D. Rhys Jenkins.*) *Jacob's conversion:*—I. JACOB'S IMPRESSIONS. First time of leaving his father's home. When night came on, and there was no tent to repose under, and no pillow but a stone on which to lay his weary head, then a feeling of loneliness came over him, then tender thoughts awoke. He felt remorse, tears came unbidden. He felt, “I shall never be in my father's house the boy I was.” In all this observe—1. A solemn conviction stealing over Jacob of what life is, a struggle which each man must make in self-dependence. 2. But beside this conviction of what life is, Jacob was impressed in another way at this time. God made a direct communication to his soul. “He lay down to sleep, and he dreamed.” We know what dreams are. They are strange combinations of our waking thoughts in fanciful forms, and we may trace in Jacob's previous journey the groundwork of his dream. He looked up all day to heaven as he trudged along, the glorious expanse of an Oriental sky was around him, a quivering trembling mass of blue; but he was alone, and, when the stars came out, melancholy sensations were his, such as youth frequently feels in autumn time. Deep questionings beset him. Time he felt was fleeting. Eternity, what was it? Life, what a mystery! And all this took form in his dream. Thus far all was natural; the supernatural in this dream was the manner in which God impressed it on his heart. Similar dreams we have often had; but the remembrance of them has faded away. Conversion is the impression made by circumstances, and that impression lasting for life; it is God the Spirit's work upon the soul. 3. Jacob felt reconciliation with God. There is a distance between man and God. It is seen in the restlessness of men, in the estrangement which they feel from Him. Well, Jacob felt all this. He had sinned, overreached his brother, deceived his father. Self-convicted he walked all day long; the sky as brass; a solemn silence around him; no opening in the heaven; no sign nor voice from God; his own heart shut up by the sense of sin, unable to rise. Then came the dream in which he felt reconciliation with God. Do not mind the form but the substance. It contains three things: (1) The ladder signifying heaven and earth joined, the gulf bridged over. (2) The angels signifying the communication which exists between earth and heaven. (3) The voice which told him of God's paternal care. (4) The last impression made on Jacob was that of the awfulness of life. II. THE RESOLUTIONS WHICH HE MADE. 1. The first of these was a resolution to set up a memorial of the impressions just made upon him. He erected a few stones, and called

them Bethel. They were a fixed point to remind him of the past. 2. Jacob determined from this time to take the Lord for his God. He would worship from henceforth not the sun, or the moon, not honour, pleasure, business, but God. With respect to this determination, observe first: that it was done with a kind of selfish feeling; there was a sort of stipulation, that if God would be with him to protect and provide for him, that then he would take Him for his God (ver. 20, 21). And this is too much the way with us; there is mostly a selfishness in our first turning to God. A kind of bargain is struck. If religion makes me happy then I will be religious. God accepted this bargain in Jacob's case; He enriched him with cattle and goods in the land whither he went (chap. xxxi. 18): "for godliness has the promise of the life that now is." Disinterested religion comes later on. Observe, secondly, what taking God for our God implies. It is not the mere repetition of so many words; for as our Lord has said, "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of God." To have God for our God is not to prostrate the knee but the heart in adoration before Him. God is truth: to persist in truth at a loss to ourselves, that is to have God for our God. God is purity: resolve to shut up evil books, turn a countenance of offended purity to the insult of licentious conversation; banish thoughts that conjure up wicked imaginations; then you have God for your God. God is love: you are offended; and the world says, resent; God says, forgive. Can you forgive? Can you love your enemy, or one whose creed is different from your own? That is to have God for your God. (*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*)

The heavenly pathway and the earthly heart:—I. CONSIDER THE VISION AND ITS ACCOMPANYING PROMISE. We are to conceive of the form of the vision as a broad stair or sloping ascent, rather than a ladder, reaching right from the sleeper's side to the far-off heaven, its pathway peopled with messengers, and its summit touching the place where a glory shone that paled even the lustrous constellations of that pure sky. Jacob had thought himself alone; the vision peoples the wilderness. He had felt himself defenceless; the vision musters armies for his safety. He had been grovelling on earth, with no thoughts beyond its fleeting goods; the vision lifts his eyes from the low level on which they had been gazing. He had been conscious of but little connection with heaven; the vision shows him a path from his very side right into its depths. He had probably thought that he was leaving the presence of his father's God when he left his father's tent; the vision burns into his astonished heart the consciousness of God as there, in the solitude and the night. The Divine promise is the best commentary on the meaning of the vision. The familiar ancestral promise is repeated to him, and the blessing and the birthright thus confirmed. In addition, special assurances, the translation of the vision into word and adapted to his then wants, are given—God's presence in his wanderings, his protection, Jacob's return to the land, and the promise of God's persistent presence, working through all paradoxes of providence and sins of his servant, and incapable of staying its operations, or satisfying God's heart, or vindicating his faithfulness, at any point short of complete accomplishment of his plighted word. Jacob's vision was meant to teach him, and is meant to teach us, the nearness of God, and the swift directness of communication, whereby His help comes to us and our desires rise to Him. These and their kindred truths were to be to him, and should be to us, the parents of much nobleness. Here is the secret of elevation of aim and thought above the mean things of sense. It is the secret of purity too. It is also the secret of peace.

II. NOTICE THE IMPERFECT RECEPTION OF THE DIVINE TEACHING. Jacob's startled exclamation on awakening from his dream indicates a very low level both of religious knowledge and feeling. Nor is there any reason for taking the words in any but their most natural sense; for it is a mistake to ascribe to him the knowledge of God due to later revelation, or, at this stage of his life, any depth of religious emotion. He is alarmed at the thought that God is near. Probably he had been accustomed to think of God's presence as in some special way associated with his father's encampment, and had not risen to the belief of His omnipresence. There seems no joyous leaping up of his heart at the thought that God is here. Dread, not unmingled with the superstitious fear that he had profaned a holy place by laying himself down in it, is his prevailing feeling, and he pleads ignorance as the excuse for his sacrilege. He does not draw the conclusion from the vision that all the earth is hallowed by a near God, but only that he has unwittingly stumbled on His house; and he does not learn that from every place there is an open door for the loving heart into the calm depths where God is throned, but only that here he stands at the gate of heaven. So he misses the very inner purpose of the vision, and rather shrinks from it than

welcomes it. Was that spasm of fear all that passed through his mind that night? Did he sleep again when the glory died out of the heaven? So the story would appear to suggest. But, in any case, we see here the effect of the sudden blazing in upon a heart not yet familiar with the Divine Friend, of the conviction that He is really near. Gracious as God's promise was, it did not dissipate the creeping awe at His presence. It is an eloquent testimony of man's consciousness of sin, that whensoever a present God becomes a reality to a man, he trembles. "This place" would not be "dreadful," but blessed, if it were not for the sense of discord between God and me. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The angel-ladder*:—I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH THIS REVELATION WAS MADE TO HIM. 1. Jacob was lonely. 2. Jacob was standing on the threshold of independence. 3. Jacob was also in fear. II. THE ELEMENTS OF WHICH THIS REVELATION CONSISTED. 1. The ladder. 2. The angels. 3. The voice of God. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Bethel: a picture and its lesson*:—I. THE PICTURE. 1. A solitary man. 2. A guilty man. Sin pierced his hand more than his staff did. 3. An injured man. "A child may have more of his mother than her blessing." 4. A fugitive man. "He had, like a maltreated animal, the fear of man habitually before his eyes." He cringes one moment, and dodges the next; deprecating the blow he invites, expects, and gets. 5. He is a weary man. There he lies. Now look at him. Mark these—the nameless spot, the shelterless couch, the comfortless pillow, the restless slumber. II. THE LESSON. 1. In this world wicked success is real failure. No security after sin save in repenting of it. 2. In this world God pays in kind, but blesses sovereignly. That is to say, retribution is often like crime, but grace is a surprise. 3. Turning over a new leaf does not always show a fresh page. It does no good to take up a journey from Beer-sheba to Padan-aram when one means to do the same thing right along. God demands a change in the heart, not in the habit; not so much in the record and show of the life as in the life itself. 4. Sometimes unhappiness is our chief felicity. Jacob has one good, valuable characteristic—he cannot sleep soundly when the angels of covenant grace are coming for him. It was a grand thing for this fugitive that he was restless while the ladder of love was unfolding over him. 5. Retribution is lifted only by redemption. God's mercy gave Jacob a chance of becoming a new man that night. It would have saved him Penuel and a forty years' wreck had he accepted it. He might have beckoned an ascending angel to his side, and sent by him a prayer up the ladder; and then an angel descending along the shining rounds would have instantly brought him a message of pardon. Surely any man can show some sign of a penitent heart. We can be sorry we do not sorrow. (*C. S. Robinson, D.D.*) *A man asleep*:—I. Jacob is the type ISRAELITE of his lineage. From this night Jacob becomes the pattern Jew. All that is good or bad in his descendants has its natural beginning in him. II. Jacob is the type MAN of his race. Far from God. Home-sick. What man wants is God. III. Jacob is the type CHRISTIAN of the Church. 1. He was chosen even before he was born. 2. He is now in the thick of the conflict between nature and grace. 3. He will eventually be saved in the kingdom of heaven. (*Ibid.*) *The ladder of doctrine*:—I. THE PROPHETIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SCENE. 1. It could not have been exclusively personal to Jacob. 2. Furthermore, the vision is not exhausted in any mere engagement of God's providential care. 3. Hence the vision must be interpreted as belonging to the kingdom of grace. 4. This vision, therefore, is discharged of its full weight of meaning only when we admit it to be a fine, high symbol of Jesus Christ. II. ITS DOCTRINAL REACH. The plan of redemption comes out in this symbol. Jesus Christ became the medium of grace and restoration. If, now, no mistake has been made in our inquiry thus far, the conclusion we have attained will be fairly corroborated from the disclosures presented of Jesus' person and work. 1. Begin with His Person. Surely no more felicitous image could have been presented. Christ's double nature is well shown. It would have been only a mockery to Jacob to disclose a ladder coming almost to this earth, yet falling short by a round or two, so as to be just out of reach. Then the angels could not have alighted, and no human foot could have risen. Nor would the case have been anywise better if he had been made to see that his ladder reached nearly to heaven, not quite. For then the angels would have had as great need as he, and an uncrossed gulf would have been beyond them in the air. 2. As to the work of Christ, furthermore, we may remark the same exquisite aptness of this figure in Jacob's vision. Examining it closely, we find that it teaches the sovereign assumption, the perfect completion, the evident display, and the free offer, of the plan of grace. (*Ibid.*) *The ladder of life*:—I. RECONCILIATION IS NOW OFFERED

IN GOOD FAITH TO EVERY INDIVIDUAL OF THE HUMAN RACE. II. THE NECESSITY OF AN INSTANT AND DETERMINATE DECISION IN OUR DEALING WITH THE OFFERS OF GRACE. III. HOW ESSENTIAL IT IS FOR EVERY SOUL THUS ADDRESSED BY THE GOSPEL OFFER TO MEASURE ALTERNATIVES. IV. WHAT FELICITOUS DISPOSAL THIS VISION MAKES OF THE VEXED QUESTION CONCERNING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN FAITH AND WORKS. V. GROWTH IN GRACE IS ALSO GROWTH IN EXPERIENCE. VI. RESPONSIBILITY BEGINS THE MOMENT THE FIRST STEP OF DUTY IS DISCLOSED TO AN INTELLIGENT MAN. VII. PERSONAL ACCEPTANCE OF JESUS CHRIST AS OUR SAVIOUR AND SURETY. (*Ibid.*)

The vision of God:—I. ANALYSIS. 1. It is evident that God Himself was the sum and substance, the centre and glory, of that entire vision. The Almighty was disclosed in presence and purpose, in prediction and promise, as standing up over the ladder of grace for a fallen world. 2. See the effect of this discovery upon Jacob. (1) The first thing it did was to frighten him. (2) The next effect seems to have been some sort of sense of guilt. He vaguely feels the need of propitiation. II. LESSONS. The truest way to produce conviction of sin is to make a disclosure of Divine holiness. 2. The uselessness of mere religious emotion without establishment of principle. 3. God really offers a chance of salvation to every man who will enter upon the new life. (*Ibid.*)

A turn in the tide:—I. THAT ERRING MEN NEED DIVINE HELP. II. THAT THIS SPECIAL HELP WAS GRANTED TO JACOB IN VIEW OF THE FUTURE. LESSONS: 1. The presence of God comes closer than we often think. 2. The earthly may be in unison with the heavenly. 3. Avoid bargain-making with God. Do not say, "I could believe I am saved if only I felt happy!" Say, "He calls me to come; and as He will in no wise cast me out, I must be accepted by Him. What more dare I ask for?" Do not say, "If only I had more time, if I were not so pressed with poverty, if I had but some friend to direct me, I would serve God!" What! You do not need God because you are moneyless, friendless! What! You would walk with God in a calm, but not when a storm was yelling and dashing! Oh, foolish people and unwise! Away with all reserves! God is for us: Christ is with us. Receive what He proffers. Do as far as you know of His will, and leave all consequences with Him, sure that He will secure everlasting blessings. (*D. G. Watt, M.A.*)

Jacob at Bethel:—I. THE VISION GRANTED TO JACOB. 1. This dream taught Jacob that there is a close connection between this world and the next. 2. It taught him that God rules over all. 3. It taught him the solemnity of life. II. THE PROMISES MADE TO JACOB. 1. That he should be greatly blessed. 2. That he should be a blessing. 3. That God would watch over him. III. THE RESOLUTIONS FORMED BY HIM. 1. He resolved to make a memorial of the night vision and the promises. 2. He resolved to accept the Lord as his God. 3. He also resolved to give back to God a tenth. (*W. J. Evans.*)

Divine providence:—I. THERE IS A DIVINE PROVIDENCE. II. THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT IS VEILED AND SILENT IN ITS OPERATION. III. THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT IS ACCOMPLISHED BY MANY AGENTS. IV. THE DIVINE PURPOSE IS ACCOMPLISHED AMID MUCH APPARENT CONFUSION. V. THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT IS CONTINUED WITHOUT INTERUPTION OR HINDRANCE. VI. THE GRAND DESIGN OF THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT IS MORAL AND SAVING. (*W. L. Watkinson.*)

Bethel:—I. THE PILGRIM. "The way of transgressors is hard." He is without a guide, friendless, defenceless. II. THE PILGRIM'S VISION. "In Me is thy help." "Lo, I am with you alway." III. THE PILGRIM'S VOW. (*T. S. Dickson.*)

The dreamer:—I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS VISION. 1. The close connection between earth and heaven; between things unseen and things seen. 2. The ministry of heaven to earth; the communication between things unseen and things seen. 3. The assurance of Divine love and care. II. WHAT THIS VISION AND REVELATION OF GOD TAUGHT JACOB. 1. The universal presence of God. 2. The sacredness of common things. III. WHAT THIS VISION AND REVELATION LED JACOB TO DO. 1. To set up a memorial of that night. 2. To consecrate himself to God. (*A. F. Joscelyne, B.A.*)

Bethel; or, the true vision of life:—I. IN THE TRUE VISION OF LIFE THERE IS A RECOGNITION OF OUR CONNECTION WITH OTHER WORLDS. II. IN THE TRUE VISION OF LIFE THERE IS A RECOGNITION OF GOD'S RELATION TO ALL. 1. As the Sovereign of all. 2. As the Friend of man. Two things show this. (1) Man's continuation as a sinner in such a world as this. (2) The special means introduced for his moral restoration. III. IN THE TRUE VISION OF LIFE THERE IS THE RECOGNITION OF A DIVINE PROVIDENCE OVER INDIVIDUALS. 1. This Biblical doctrine agrees with reason. 2. It agrees with consciousness. IV. IN THE TRUE VISION OF LIFE THERE IS THE RECOGNITION OF THE SOLEMNITY OF OUR EARTHLY POSITION. "How dreadful is this place!" 1. Jacob's discovery introduced a new epoch into his history. 2. Jacob's discovery introduced a memorable

epoch in his life. (*Homilist.*) *Man's spiritual capacity*:—I. THE EXISTENCE OF A SPIRITUAL CAPACITY IN MAN. 1. Jacob saw angels, and God Himself. 2. He heard the voice of the Infinite. 3. He felt emotions which mere animal existence could not experience. II. THE AWAKENING OF THIS SPIRITUAL CAPACITY IN MAN. 1. It is sometimes unexpected. 2. It is always Divine. 3. It is ever glorious. 4. It is ever memorable. (*Ibid.*) *Jacob's vision*:—I. TAKE NOTE OF THE SURROUNDINGS OF THE VISION. 1. The ambitious schemings of Jacob and his mother to supplant his brother Esau. 2. Jacob is an illustration of a man in whose soul faith struggles with ambition. II. EMPHASIZE THE REVELATION WHICH THE VISION CONTAINS. 1. God as the God of providence. 2. The intimate union of the seen and unseen. III. NOTICE ITS EFFECT UPON THE MIND OF HIM TO WHOM IT WAS GIVEN. 1. A sense of the universal presence of God. 2. A sense of awe which possesses the sinning soul at the revelation of God's presence. 3. A sense of penitence at the revelation of God's goodness. (*R. Thomas, M.A.*) *Jacob's dream*:—I. THAT THE MORAL DISTANCE BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH IS GREAT. 1. Heaven is distant from the thoughts of the ungodly. 2. The conceptions of man prove the same thing. 3. The conduct of sinners seems to confirm this statement. II. THAT THERE IS A SPIRITUAL COMMUNICATION BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH. 1. This confers dignity upon our globe. 2. This imparts honour to man. 3. This communication is of Divine origin. 4. Heavenly communications are not dependent on the outward circumstances of man. III. THAT THROUGH THIS COMMUNICATION ALONE MAN CAN HAVE A TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. 1. Because the human and divine are united. 2. Because through it a covenant relationship is formed between us and God. 3. It secures to us the protection of God. 4. It provides for the consummation of our highest conceptions of felicity. IV. THAT TRUE COMMUNION WITH GOD PRODUCES REVERENTIAL FEAR IN THE HEART. (*Homilist.*) *The spirit world*:—I. THIS VISION SUGGESTS THE IDEA OF A SPIRIT WORLD. 1. We think of a spirit—(1) As a self-modifying agent or being. (2) As a religious being. (3) As a reflecting being. (4) As a self-conscious being. (5) As a self-complete being. (6) As a personally responsible being. 2. That a world of such beings exists may be argued from—(1) The structure of the visible universe. (2) The concurrent impressions of mankind. (3) Our own individual consciousness. (4) The Word of God. II. THIS VISION SUGGESTS THAT MAN IS CONNECTED WITH THE SPIRIT WORLD. 1. He is a member of it. 2. He is amenable to its laws. 3. He is now forming a character that will determine his position in it. III. THIS VISION SUGGESTS THAT THERE IS ONE MASTER. (*Ibid.*) *The solitary one and his visitation*:—I. THE SITUATION AND CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH JACOB WAS PLACED when he received this visitation from heaven. 1. He was solitary. 2. He had a weary body. 3. He had an anxious mind. 4. He was asleep. The Almighty can visit and bless at a time and in a manner which we little expect. II. THE GRACIOUS VISITATION WHICH JACOB HAD FROM GOD. 1. It was in a dream. 2. It was an encouraging visit. 3. It was a glorious visit. 4. It was a gracious visit. III. THE EFFECTS PRODUCED ON JACOB'S MIND AND THE LINE OF CONDUCT WHICH HE WAS INDUCED TO PURSUE. 1. He was afraid. 2. He set up a pillar. 3. He changed the name of the place. 4. He entered into a solemn covenant with God. IV. APPLICATION. 1. In our journey through life we may sometimes be solitary, dejected, and perplexed; but we often have gracious visits from the Lord. 2. The vows of God are upon us, viz., those of baptism and good resolution. 3. Do we offer unto God thanksgiving and pay our vows unto the Most High? (*Benson Bailey.*) *Jacob's vision*:—I. WHAT JACOB SAW ON THIS OCCASION. 1. A ladder. 2. Its position. 3. Its base. 4. The top of it. 5. Above it. 6. Upon it. II. WHAT JACOB HEARD. 1. Jehovah proclaimed Himself the God of his fathers. 2. Jehovah promised him the possession of the country where he then was. 3. He promised him a numerous progeny; and that of him should come the illustrious Messiah, in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed. 4. He promised him His Divine presence and protection. III. WHAT JACOB FELT. 1. He felt the influence of the Divine presence. 2. He felt a sacred and solemn fear. 3. He felt himself on the precincts of the heavenly world. IV. WHAT JACOB DID. 1. He expressed his solemn sense of the Divine presence (vers. 16, 17). 2. He erected and consecrated a memorial of the events of that eventful night. 3. He vowed obedience to the Lord. 4. He went on his way in peace and safety. Application: 1. The privileges of piety. Divine manifestations, promises. 2. The duties of piety. 3. The delights of public worship. God's house is indeed the gate of heaven. 4. How glorious a place is heaven! (*J. Burns, D.D.*) *The dream of Jacob*: I. Here is, first of all, LARGER SPACE. Jacob saw heaven.

Enlargement of space has a wonderful influence upon mind and spirit of every degree and quality. Go abroad; climb the hill, and leave your sorrow there. Take in the great revelation of space, and know that God's government is no local incident or trifle which the human hand can take up and manage and dispose of. We perish in many an intellectual difficulty for want of room. Things are only big because they are near; in themselves they are little if set up with the firmament domed above them, and numbered along with other things, which give proportion to all the elements which make up the circle of their influence. Go into the field, pass over the waves of the seas, pray when the stars are all ablaze like altars that cannot be counted, and at which an infinite universe is offering its evening oblation; take in more space, and many a difficulty which hampers and frets the mind will be thrown off, and manhood will take a bound forwards and upwards. Space is not emptiness: space is a possible Church. II. Enlarging space never goes alone; it brings with it ENLARGING LIFE. Jacob not only beheld heaven: he saw the angels coming down, going up—stirred by an urgent business. It is one thing to talk about the angels: it is another to see them. III. Enlarging space brings enlarging life; enlarging life brings AN ENLARGING ALTAR. Jacob said, "Surely the Lord is in this place." We cannot enter into Jacob's meaning of that exclamation. He had been reared in the faith that God was to be worshipped in definite and specified localities. There were places at which Jacob would have been surprised if he had not seen manifestations of God. The point is, at the place where he did not expect anything he saw heaven; he saw some form or revelation of God. See how the greater truth dawns upon his opening mind, "Surely the Lord is in this place," and that is the very end of our spiritual education; to find God everywhere; never to open a rose-bud without finding God; never to see the days whitening the eastern sky without seeing the coming of the King's brightness; to feel that every place is praying ground; to renounce the idea of partial and official consecration, and stand in a universe every particle of which is blessed and consecrated by the presence of the infinite Creator. IV. Immediately following these larger conceptions of things, we find a marvellous and instructive instance of THE ABSORBING POWER OF THE RELIGIOUS IDEA. In Jacob's dream there was but one thought. When we see God all other sights are extinguished. This is the beginning of conversion; this is essential to the reality of a new life. For a time the eye must be filled with a heavenly image; for a time the eye must be filled with a celestial message; a complete forgetfulness of everything past, a new seizure and apprehension of the whole solemn future. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Christ typified by Jacob's ladder*:—A beautiful emblem of the Saviour. It may typify—1. The person of the Saviour. 2. The mediatorial work of Christ. 3. Christ as the only way to the Father. 4. The accessibility of Christ to the perishing sinner. 5. The connection of angels with the work and Kingdom of Christ. 6. The heavenly state to which Christ will exalt His people. (*J. Burns, D.D.*) *Jacob at Bethel*:—1. The office of sorrow—even of remorse, the sorrow of sin—is to drive us from the visible to the invisible, from earth to heaven, from ourselves to God. 2. There is a ladder between earth and heaven on which angel messengers carry up our prayers to God and bring His answers down. Nay! this is but the hope of our dreams; the reality transcends it; for God is here, and needs neither ladder nor angel to communicate with us or open to us communication with Him: here in our hours of sorest need, of bitterest loneliness, of self-inflicted sorrow, of well-deserved penalty, of more poignant remorse; here as He was in the burning bush to Moses, and in the mysterious visitor to Gideon, and in the still, small voice to Elijah, and in the child wrapped in the swaddling clothes to the stable guests; and still by most of us unseen and to most of us unknown. 3. But when the veil is taken from our faces and we see Him, then the ground becomes consecrated ground, the stable a sacred place, the lowing of the cattle an anthem, Horeb a sanctuary, the land of Midian a holy land, our pile of stones a Bethel. 4. Yea! more than this; not places only but persons are transformed by this vision of the invisible, by this awakening to the truth, Lo, God is here. It here changes Abram, Chaldean worshipper, into Abraham, Friend of God; Jacob, the supplanter, into Israel, Prince of God; Moses, the impetuous murderer of the Egyptian, into the meekest man of sacred history; David, the sensual king, into the sweet singer of spiritual experiences; Jeremiah, the prophet of lamentation, into the hope and courage of Israel; Saul, the persecuting Pharisee, into Paul, the self-sacrificing Apostle; John, the son of thunder, into John the beloved disciple. 5. Finally, the poorest consecration—the gift of ourselves with even Jacob's "if"—is accepted by God as a beginning. Whosoever

cometh unto Him He will in no wise cast out. (*Lyman Abbott, D.D.*) *Jacob at Bethel*:—I. THE SEVERITY OF GOD. The pitiable condition of Jacob when he arrived at Bethel illustrates this. A homeless, helpless, despondent wanderer. II. THE GOODNESS OF GOD. 1. In its suggestive symbol (ver. 12). 2. In its encouraging revelation of the Divine presence (ver. 13). 3. In its encouraging promises (vers. 13-15). Inheritance, guidance, protection, companionship. III. THE EFFECT UPON JACOB. 1. It awoke him of his sleep. 2. It filled him with an awe-inspiring sense of the Divine presence. 3. It filled him with a spirit of worship. 4. It led him to a consecration of himself to God. Lessons: 1. Self-seeking even leads to failure. 2. God will never leave nor forsake His child. 3. Let us beware of a partial consecration. (*D. C. Hughes, M.A.*) *The Christ ladder*:—1. The great truth, therefore, that ariseth from hence is, that Christ is our Ladder of Life and Love, by which we have communion with God upon earth, while we live, and admission unto God in heaven, when we die. This ladder hath seven excellent properties. It is—1. A living ladder, therefore it is called a ladder of life; a ladder that hath life in it, both intrinsically and objectively. 2. A loving ladder, that will not, cannot easily let go its hold of any such as sincerely come to it, to climb upon it, and do therein take hold of it, and thereby embrace it. 3. It is a lively ladder also that will so lovingly embrace us, and so lively both take hold and keep hold of us, and not let us go until He has brought us up to the top of the ladder, and from thence into mansions of glory. 4. It is a lovely ladder. (1) In its nature. (2) In its posture. The posture and end of its erection is for saving from hell, and sending to heaven. 5. The fifth excellent property is, it is a large ladder; there is room enough both for saints and angels upon this ladder. It is so large, that it enlargeth and stretcheth out itself into all lands, as do the great luminaries of heaven. This ladder is—(1) Extensive, as it is found everywhere, Asia, Africa, or America; whether it be in the city or in the country; whether it be in public, or in private, whether in family worship, or closet retirements; in all those places believers do find this large ladder of love let down to them, and there doth Christ give them his loves (Cant. vii. 11, 12). Upon which account the apostle saith, "I will that men pray everywhere," &c. (1 Tim. ii. 8), whether in the fields, or in the villages, or in the vineyards, or under the secret places of the stairs (Cant. ii. 14). Any place, yea a chimney corner may make a good Oratory upon this ladder, whereon Christ accounteth our voices sweet, and our countenances comely. And this ladder, Christ. (2) It is comprehensive to all persons; there is room enough upon this ladder for all the saints in all the nations of the world. 6. The sixth excellent property—it is a long and lofty ladder, so long as to reach from earth to heaven. 7. The seventh excellent property of this ladder is, it is a lasting, yea, an everlasting ladder. (*C. Ness.*) *Jacob's dream: the solution of a mystery*:—I. THE DUALITY OF EXISTENCE. Let us pause for a moment and contemplate our own existence; for each one of us is a little universe, a miniature representation of the great universe of which we form a part. Now, we carry within ourselves a kind of double consciousness. We have a higher nature and a lower nature, a spiritual side and a material side, an immortal element and a mortal element. It is this double consciousness that has suggested to heathen nations the existence of another world. Men of thought and reflection among them have discovered in themselves powers that can never be developed in the present life, desires that can never be satisfied by any material objects, and hence they have speculated and discoursed concerning a higher, a nobler, a more permanent state of existence. But Jacob was not left to grope after this knowledge by the light of his own reason. In this magnificent vision of the night, the truth is made known to him in all its imposing details, is revealed to him with marvellous clearness and emphatic precision. This truth is taught unto you, not by the uncertain voice of your constitution, as it was to ancient sages; not by supernatural visions, as it was to Jacob; but by the explicit and authoritative teaching of God's word. It was a part of Christ's mission, when He assumed our nature, to teach us this truth; for He brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. He came to elevate us, by setting us free from the tyranny of sense, and directing our thoughts to things invisible. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you." II. THE UNITY OF EXISTENCE. We know that we possess both a material and a spiritual nature, but the point at which they come in contact it is impossible to ascertain. You have a definite reply in the text. Heaven above and earth below are connected by one great ladder. They are, therefore, not two, but one.

"And, behold, the Lord stood above it." The Lord of heaven is also the Lord of earth; heaven and earth are therefore united into one realm. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland contains different countries; all separate, yet all united; owing allegiance to the same sovereign. The universe is a vast united kingdom, embracing different provinces, different principalities, different powers; but all alike subject to the central government. "And, behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it." The spirit-world is very near to us, we are but one step removed from it, were our eyes opened we should perceive that it stands round about us. Indeed, we are sometimes inclined to believe that material forms are but symbolical representations of spiritual realities, that the things which are seen are but outward manifestations of the things which are not seen. Through its agony and atoning death, the way which sin had shut up has been reopened. God can have mercy upon us, can hold communion with us, can send His angels down to comfort us in our troubles, to strengthen us in our conflicts, and at last to bear our ransomed souls to glory. The unity of existence! It is a wonderful, and yet a solemn fact. All being is but one vast territory, broken up into innumerable separate parts, but all united under one sceptre. Dream not, then, that when you quit this world, you will become the subject of a different government, or become amenable to different laws. (D. Rowlands, B.A.)

A ladder of escape:—A company of shipwrecked sailors cast on the coast of Scotland at the bottom of a great precipice, where the water would have broken up their vessel and drowned them, found a ladder hanging down the precipice, which they reached from their ship's mast, and escaped thereby. So Christ is to us a ladder of salvation, and if we believe on Him we shall be saved from all evil, and we may rise to be holy, happy, and useful. (*Ibid.*)

The God of Bethel:—I. CONSIDER WHAT JACOB SAW. II. CONSIDER WHAT HE HEARD. 1. "I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac." It is well to have a known God, a tried God, a family God, and a father's God; it is well to be able to say, as the Church does in the twenty-second Psalm, "Our fathers trusted in Thee: they trusted, and Thou didst deliver them." It is well for you, when God looks down and sees you walking in the same path that your fathers did who are gone to heaven before you, "followers of those who through faith and patience are now inheriting the promises." 2. "The land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed." God had already given it by promise to Abraham, but at present he had no inheritance, not so much as to set his foot on. But as God had given it to him and his seed by promise, it was as sure as if in actual possession. Yet several hundred years were previously to elapse, and they must suffer much in Egypt, and must wander forty years in the wilderness. But what of this? It was the land of promise; God had given them it, and nothing could hinder their possession of it. 3. "And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south." And so it was. You know in a few years they became an innumerable people, and what millions since have descended from this one patriarch. 4. "And in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." This refers to the Messiah. To them as concerning the flesh He came, God having raised up His Son, even Jesus, who "delivered us from the wrath to come." In His name we are blessed with all spiritual blessings. This promise has as yet received only a partial accomplishment. Few as yet are blessed with faithful Abraham. But we read of a nation being "born in a day"; that all nations of the earth shall be blessed in Him; that all shall know the Lord from the least even to the greatest. 5. "And, behold, I am with thee." So He is with all His people. His essential presence fills heaven and earth. 6. "And will bring thee again into this land." This would be glad some tidings to Jacob, for who is he that could not rejoice at such tidings concerning a country where he was born and bred, the residence of his most impressive years? 7. "For I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." But would He leave him then? Oh no; his anxieties therefore were entirely unnecessary. Thus it is with Christians: they have exceeding great and precious promises, "All ye and amen in Christ Jesus," and all of them must be fulfilled before God leaves His people. Will He leave you then? No, He will never leave you, nor forsake you, to all eternity. As your day is, so shall your strength be while here; hereafter all tears shall be wiped from your eyes.

III. OBSERVE WHAT HE DID. 1. He discovered and acknowledged what he was ignorant of before he went to sleep. 2. He confessed a privilege. 3. He reared a memorial. 4. He vowed a vow. (*W. Jay.*)

The vision:—I. THE SITUATION OF JACOB AT THIS PRESENT TIME. 1. And, that we may understand this more accurately, let us notice his character. Accord-

ing to the chronology of sacred Scripture, Jacob was now more than seventy years of age; so that his character was not then to be formed. He had lived sufficiently long to develop all its reigning tendencies; and though some might be disposed to conclude, from the impropriety of his conduct on this occasion, that he was yet a stranger to God, and to the renewing influence of Divine grace, yet an accurate knowledge of human nature, and an extensive acquaintance with the errors of men of sincere piety, would hardly sanction so harsh a conclusion. 2. His affliction. A short time previously Jacob had no enemy. Behind him were the terrors of a murderous revenge, and before him the uninteresting waste of an untried world. To this must be added the sorrows of separation from all that he had learned to love. These things could not but press upon him as he went out from Beer-sheba to Haran; and the distress of his heart would be in a still greater degree aggravated by the consciousness of guilt. He had defrauded his brother—he had deceived his father—he had lied unto God. The peace of conscience which he once enjoyed must have been disturbed. He could not look up with cheerful confidence towards the God of truth. Sin against God has ever had the same character and effects. It drove the angels out of heaven, and our first parents out of paradise. 3. His submission. Not a word of murmuring appears on the record—nothing of the spirit of resistance—no high rebellious contending against the providence of God; but silently he obeys the injunctions of parental authority; and with nothing but his staff, he steals unobtrusively from under his father's roof, and enters alone upon the pilgrimage, which his misconduct had rendered necessary. There would be, however, some comfort even in the spirit of pious submission. 4. His afflicted mind would, in the midst of trial, be in some measure cheered by the expectation which he had been warranted to encourage. He was yet, as a matter of grace, encouraged to look upon himself as one "whom the Lord had blessed"; and it appears, that in the sorrowful hour of his departure from home, his father, fearing lest, in his exile, he should "be swallowed up of overmuch sorrow," gave him even additional encouragement. He confirmed the blessing to him in language still more distinct—"God Almighty bless thee, and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee." We see, then, Jacob fallen and afflicted, but submissive, penitent, and borne up by hope in the promise of God, taking his journey through the wilderness, till the shadows of evening lengthen round him—till the setting sun finds him in a solitary spot, remote from the dwellings of man; where the turf must be his bed—the circle of heaven his canopy—and one of the stones of the place his pillow; and where, if he finds comfort, it must be from a source beyond the range of human calculation. We must not attach to such a scene, in a warm climate, all the desolateness of a houseless wanderer among ourselves; but still, such a combination of circumstances wears the strong character of chastening; and we may write upon it that interesting passage of Holy Writ: "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." Jacob strove to hasten an event which he should have looked for in the regular course of God's providence—the result is that he delays it. He aimed at the pre-eminence in his father's house, and, in a few hours he is resting his houseless head upon a stony pillow in the wilderness. Such dispensations are highly calculated for the advancement of the spiritual character. God only can make the storm a fertilizing, rather than a desolating shower. II. But we come to consider THE CONSOLATION WHICH WAS MERCIFULLY VOUCHSAFED TO JACOB IN HIS SOLITUDE. In the failure of all sources of earthly comfort, God generally appears most especially for the support of those who trust in Him. 1. The obscure intimation of a gracious reconciliation with God through a mediator. 2. The second lesson inculcated in this vision was the providential protection of God. It was shown to him, that He who through a sufficient mediation was a reconciled God, would also be a father, a protector, a guide. It is scarcely possible to conceive a more kind and encouraging address, to one in the circumstances of Jacob. It is calculated to give a very exalted idea of the mercy of God, who not only blesses beyond what we ask or think; but even when we think not, meets his erring and disconsolate children with the assurances of a love that cannot be averted, and a fatherly protection that will never fail. How blessed are they who have the Lord for their God! In the midst of outward affliction and inward trial, Jacob was crowned with blessings that empire could not command, and that wealth could not buy. Let not then the pilgrim of the cross be discouraged. A rich provision is made for you—a throne of grace is open to you; a willing helper only waits, and scarcely waits, for the petition of faith, that he may give you aid. How deeply is their lot to be regretted who have never sought the Redeemer, the

guardian, the guide, the comforter of Jacob!—how much is the mere man of this present world to be pitied! (*E. Craig.*) *Life as a ladder*.—It was a good while ago that a young man, sleeping one night in the open air, had a wonderful vision of a ladder that reached up all the way into heaven. Whatever else it meant, it was at least a vision of what his life might be, of what every life may be, of what every true and noble life must be. Its foot rested on the earth; and we must all start very low down. He who would ascend a ladder, puts his foot first on the lowest round. We cannot start in life at the top, but must begin at the bottom and climb up. We cannot begin as angels, nor as holy saints, nor even as moderately advanced Christians. We must begin in the most rudimentary way, with the simplest duties, just as the wisest men once sat with primer and spelling-book in hand. But this ladder was not lying all along on the earth; its foot was on the ground, but its top was up above the stars, amid the glory of God's presence. A true life rises heavenward. It is a poor, an unworthy, life-plan that is all on the earth, that lifts no eye or thought upward, that does not take heaven into its purpose. The true life must press upward until it reaches glory. Its aim is the perfection of character. Its constant aspirations are for holiness and righteousness—Christlikeness. Its goal is heaven itself. A ladder is climbed step by step; no one leaps to the top. And no one rises to sainthood at a bound. No one gets the victory once for all over his sins and faults. It is a struggle of long years; and every day must have its own victories, if we are ever to be crowned. It may give some people considerable comfort to think of life's course as a ladder, which one must climb slowly, step by step. A ladder is not easy to ascend. It is toilsome work to go up its rounds. It is not easy to rise Christward; it is hard, costly, painful. Railroad tracks suggest speed, but a ladder suggests slow progress. We rise upward in spiritual life, not at railway speed, nor even at the racer's rate of progress, but as men go up a ladder. Then there is another side to this truth. Men do not fly up ladders; yet they go up step by step. We ought always to be making at least some progress in Christian life, as the years go on. Each day should show some slight advance in holiness, some new conquest over the evil that is in us, some besetting sin or wrong habit gotten a little more under our feet. Every fault we overcome lifts us a little higher. Every low desire, every bad habit, all longings for ignoble things, that we trample down, become ladder-rounds on which we climb upward out of grovelling and sinfulness into nobler being. There really is no other way by which we can rise upward. If we are not living victoriously these little common days, we are not making any progress. Only those who climb are getting toward the stars. Heaven is for those who overcome. Not that the struggle is to be made in our own strength, or that the victories are to be won by our own hands; there is a mighty Helper with us always on the ladder. He does not carry us up, always we must do the climbing; but He helps and cheers, putting ever new strength into the heart, and so aiding every one who truly strives in His name to do his best. The ladder did not come to an end half-way up to heaven; it reached to the very steps of God's throne. A true life is persistent and persevering, and ends not short of glory. It is ladder, too, all the way; it does not become a plain, easy, flower-lined path after a time. A really earnest and faithful Christian life never gets easy. The easy way does not lead upward; it leads always downward. Nothing worth living for can be had without pain and cost and struggle. Every step up the way to heaven is up-hill, and steep besides. Heaven always keeps above us, no matter how far we climb up toward it. However long we have been climbing, and whatever height we have reached, there are always other victories to win, other heights to gain. We shall never get to the top of the ladder until our feet are on heaven's threshold. This wonderful vision-ladder was radiant with angels. We are not alone in our toilsome climbing. We have the companionship and ministry of strong friends we have never seen. Besides, the going up and coming down of these celestial messengers told of communication never interrupted between God and those who are climbing up the ladder. There is never a moment, nor any experience, in the life of a true Christian, from which a message may not instantly be sent up to God, and back to which help may not instantly come. God is not off in heaven merely, at the top of the long, steep life-ladder, looking down upon us as we struggle upward in pain and tears. As we listen, we hear Him speak to the sad, weary man who lies there at the foot of the stairway, and He says: "Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest; I will not leave thee." Not angel championship alone, precious as it is, is promised, but Divine companionship also, every step of the toilsome way, until we get home. It is never impossible, therefore, for any

one to mount the ladder to the very summit; with God's strong, loving help the weakest need never faint nor fail. (*J. R. Miller, D.D.*) *Jacob at Bethel*:—

I. JACOB'S DREAM. 1. When he dreamed it. 2. What the dream was. 3. What it meant. **II. JACOB'S WAKING THOUGHTS.** 1. Humble surprise. 2. Reverential awe. 3. A joyful discovery. **III. JACOB'S VOW.** 1. The preparation. 2. The vow itself. Jacob dedicates (1) himself, (2) his substance, to God. (*J. Hambleton, M.A.*)

Right principles:—There comes a time when every young man or maiden must start out upon life. The seed that ripens upon the stalk must be shaken off, and be planted, and grown upon its own root. The scion is cut away from the parent branch and grafted upon another stalk. It is at the starting out in life that every one needs an inspiration, and will have it, either good or bad. It is just at this point that every one needs, in some way suited to his genius, his circumstances and condition, that there should happen to him substantially that which happened to Jacob; that in his vision (which may be upon his bed, or may be one of those waking visions which men have) there should be a ladder, which, touching the earth, connects it with heaven; and a vision of God's angels passing between the Father and His earthly child. Let me, then, not so much preach as talk with you of your visions; and I address myself mainly to the young—to those that are just entering upon life. Shall your ladder, standing on the earth, reach to heaven? or is your ladder, in its whole length, flat along the ground? Stop one moment, and think, you who have started out, or are about starting. By ladder I mean your plans in life. Are they, all of them, lying upon the ground, or, though they begin there, do they really go up, and consciously take hold of the future and of the spiritual? Man must not avoid the world. Every ladder should stand upon the ground. The ground is a very good place to start from, but a very poor place to stop on. No man can be a Christian by separating himself from his kind. No man can be a Christian by avoiding business; and if you transact business, it must be transacted in the accustomed ways. Activity in earthly things is not inconsistent with true piety. A right industry, a right enterprise, and right ambitions in these, do not stand in the way of true religion. They not only perfectly harmonize with it, but they are indispensable to it. I can scarcely conceive of a lazy man being a Christian. Even the chronicles of those that have sought by retiring to caves, and thus separating themselves from human life, to live a Christian life, show that while they escaped from men, they did not escape from the temptations which sprang up through the passions of human nature. A human life, in its ordinary condition in Christian communities, is favourable (if one be wise enough to employ it) to the production of morality, of virtue, and of true piety. A man's ladder, then, should stand on the ground. A man that is going to be a Christian should be a man among men—joined in interest with them, sympathising in their pursuits, active in daily duties; not above the enterprise, the thoughtfulness, and the proper amount of care that belong to the worldly vocations. This is a part of the Divine economy; and those that have the romantic notion of piety, that it is something that lifts them out of the way of and away from actual worldly cares, misconceive totally the methods of Divine grace. But while man's plans in this world should be secular, and adapted to the great laws of that physical condition in which he was born, they must not end where they begin. Woe be to him that uses the earth for the earth, or whose plans are wholly material, beginning and ending in secularity and materiality; who means by fortune—riches, and nothing else; who means by power—carnal, temporal power, and nothing else; whose pleasure consists in that which addresses itself to the senses, and in nothing else. Woe be to him who lays out a plan which has nothing in it but this world. At the very time when you plant your ladder on the ground, you must see to it that it is long enough to reach, and that it does reach, and rests its top in heaven. This world and the other must be consciously connected in every true man's life. This world is shallow. Our atmosphere is smotheringly near to us. There is no manhood possible that does not recognize an existence beyond our horizon, and that does not stretch itself up into the proportions, at least ideal, which belong to it as a creature of the Infinite. And even if one were to look only upon natural results and economic courses, he is best prepared for this life who considers this life to be made up of this life and of that which is to come. In every outstarting in life it is not enough that you propose to yourself to do well in this world—your "this world" must reach to the other. Along every man's ladder should be seen God's good angels. You are not at liberty to execute a good plan with bad instruments. When you lay the course of your

life out before you, and say to yourself that you propose to achieve in your mortal life such and such things, it is not a matter of indifference to you how you achieve them. God's angels must ascend and descend on your ladder, otherwise other and worse angels will. When youth first opens, if it has been Christianity instructed, I think the impulses generally are noble, and even romantic. Youth characteristically aspires to do things that are right, and to do them in a right manner. One of the earliest experiences is that of surprise and even horror at the world's ignoble ways, and the temporary withdrawal of the young soul from its first contacts with life. Its first comprehension of actual life, and of what must be done in the world, if one would succeed, violates its romantic notion of manly truthfulness, of straightforwardness, of honourable dealings. Almost all young men come up to that period of life at which they are to break away from home, and go out into the world, with the most generous purposes. They seem inspired by truth, honesty, fidelity, enterprise, generosity, honour and even heroism. These all belong to youthful aspirations. They mean never to forsake these things. They mean to carry these qualities into their lives, and to live by them. Now these are God's good angels to you; not that there are none better; but it may be well said that these nobler incitements, and motives, and aspirations stand along the line of a young man's plans in life as so many angelic messengers by which he purposes to work out his ideal in life. Let every one who begins life, then, have a plan along which are clearly seen noble sentiments and convictions. No plan is fit for achievement which you cannot achieve by open, honest, clean, upright Christian motives. You cannot afford to succeed by any other course. Your ladder, though standing on the ground, should rest its top in heaven; and there should be angels constantly passing between the top and the bottom. It is bad enough to have a plan that begins on earth and stays on earth; but for a man having a good plan to consent to execute it from base sentiments or by base influences, is unpardonable. Your life will task and prove you. Do not, however, let it drive away from you those influences which overhang your childhood. Have they not already gone from some of you? Has not an enamel already formed over some of your tender feelings? Have not some of you boasted of forgetfulness? Have you not boasted that you no longer remembered or were influenced by those tender impulses? and that you have strengthened yourself against them? that you have devastated, to some extent, purity, delicacy, refinement, truth, honour, justice, and rectitude? Are you not already working down toward the animal conditions of life? Do not, however, trust alone to those generous sentiments. Morality is not piety. In the vision of Jacob there was not alone the ladder between the earth and heaven, and the angels ascending and descending, but brightest, and best, and grandest, and behind all the angels, stood God, saying to him, "I am thy father's God." Now high above all a man's plans, high above all his heroic moral resolves, there is to be a living trust in God; and there is to be a soul-connection between ourselves or our business, and our God. All our life long we must not be far from Him. Piety must quicken morality; then life will be safe, and will be successful. Here, then, is a general schedule of a right life; something to do that is right; a plan by which you shall execute a right life by right instruments; and over all, the benign, genial, stimulating influence of the heavenly Father. Business, morality, piety—these three should be coupled together. They are the trinity of influences from which every one should act, and it is transcendently important that young men should find this out before they find out anything else. Blessed be that man who, going from his father's house, and lying down to sleep, though it be upon the ground, and though the stones be under his head, sees a ladder between heaven and earth, typifying his future life, and on that ladder angels ascending and descending, and hears God saying to him, "I am thy God." That is an inspiration on life's threshold, worth any man's aspirations. (*H. W. Beecher*). *The comfortable vision*:—Four points present themselves for consideration in the spiritual meaning of this vision. I. The perfect Manhood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The ladder "was set up on the earth." II. The eternal Godhead of our Lord Jesus Christ. "The top of it reached to heaven." III. The mediatorial character of our Lord Jesus Christ, resulting from this union of two natures in one Person. He is here represented as a ladder between earth and heaven. IV. The communications carried on through the Mediator between earth and heaven. The angels of God were seen "ascending and descending on" the ladder. Prayer, grace, mercy, peace, praise—these are the messages, with which the several angels are charged respectively. (*Dean Goulburn*). *Jacob's ladder*:—I. The appearance is a ladder; and, now, the dullest of com-

prehesion must at once feel that one mournful truth is here taught. We are plainly reminded of this emblem that the natural normal communication between God and man has been destroyed; and that, by the fall, this planet has been placed in a state of isolation and non-intercourse with heaven. II. Having considered the first truth taught by this vision, let us now pass to the second, let us examine the medium which God provides to renew this intercourse, to re-establish this alliance between earth and heaven. We have spoken of a disruption, of a chasm such as no thunder ever rifted, and over this abyss angel thoughts must have often hovered in grief and dismay. And, now, can this breach never be healed? is this yawning gulf for ever impassable? Can no skill construct, no virtue, no prayers, win a path of return for a single soul? Must all hope for man be for ever buried in despair? To these questions human reason could not have given but one answer. Human reason, did I say? Cherub and seraph must have shuddered as they gazed at the rent sin had made; and, recalling a frightful tragedy among the celestial hierarchies, they must have felt that for man all was "lost"—not in danger of being lost—but lost, the soul lost, heaven lost, hope lost, all lost, and lost for ever. But blessed be God, hosannah to His grace; everlasting praises to Him who came "to seek and to save that which was lost," these questions have been answered, and so answered that angels are lost in pondering such mercy. Eternal wisdom and power and love have solved the problem, and solved it by consecrating for us "a new and living way." In the first place, observe that God, not man, is the architect of this ladder. Jacob did nothing—could do nothing—towards its construction. And so, if we "have boldness to enter into the holiest," it is "not by works of righteousness which we have done," but "by the blood of Jesus." Mark, in the next place, the form and position of this ladder; its foot is planted on the earth, and its top reaches to heaven. A third truth taught by this remarkable vision is the freeness of salvation by Jesus. What conditions are here interposed? What fitness? What works? Between God and man there is one mediator, Jesus Christ; but between that mediator and man there is, there can be none. III. We have thus seen that the ladder on which Jacob gazed was a type of Christ, of the mysterious interference by which heaven and earth are reconciled. It is not, however, only in this district of God's moral dominion that so wonderful an interposition is the subject of intense and adoring interest. On this ladder the patriarch saw an order of beings far superior to man. From top to bottom it swarmed with radiant cherubim and seraphim, "the angels of God ascending and descending." "Ascending and descending"; exulting that this new avenue has been opened; and, at once, in eager bands, pouring down to earth as "ministering spirits to minister to them who are heirs of salvation." "Descending"; coming down to encamp about the righteous, whether they sleep or wake, and deliver them—as it is written, "He shall give His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways; they shall bear thee up in their hands lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." And "ascending"; now to bear the news of a sinner's repentance and send a tide of rapture and gratulation along the habitations of heaven; and now to escort the soul of some Lazarus—to guard it from the "prince of the power of the air," who watches like a wolf scared from his prey—to guide it on its course, some as strong-winged *avant couriers*, and some as convoys wafting it up to realms of peace and purity and love, to the bosom of its God. (R. Fuller.) *The vision in the wilderness*:—I. THE WEARY WANDERER. 1. Homeless. 2. Regretful. 3. Apprehensive. 4. Disappointed. II. THE WONDROUS VISION. III. THE WILLING VOW. Rather a response to God than a bargain with Him. Lessons: Note how Jacob, in this journey, may represent three stages in spiritual experience. 1. The penitent; feeling the burden of sin. 2. The believer; rejoicing, with trembling, in God's revelation of mercy. 3. The worshipper; consecrating his whole life to the service of his God and Saviour. (W. S. Smith, B.D.) *Jacob's night at Bethel*:—This sacred story of Jacob's night at Bethel may serve to teach us that in our darkest and most desolate moments God may be using our trouble and despondency as a means of drawing our hearts to Him. We may find Him nearest when we thought Him farthest off. What the world would call the greatest misfortune may be found to have been sent in the greatest mercy. There is no such word as chance or accident in the inspired vocabulary of faith. Nobody but a sceptic or a misanthrope would say of himself—

"I am as a weed,
Flung from the rock on ocean's foam to sail
Where'er the surge may sweep, the tempest's breath prevail."

All places are safe, all losses are profitable, all things work together for good to them that love God. Every experience of the unsatisfactory nature of earthly things should direct us to the stronghold of hope. Every pang caused by an uneasy conscience should awaken within us a more intense longing for the peace which passeth all understanding. Out in mid-ocean there is a ship tossing on the waves. The night is dark, the winds are high. The angry elements rage and howl as if determined to tear the shattered vessel in pieces or sink it in the deep. A sailor-boy has just climbed down from the swinging mast and crept into his narrow locker, wet and cold, to get a little rest. He sleeps unconscious of the howl of the storm and the roll of the groaning ship. His heart is far away in that quiet home which he left for a roving life on the seas. He hears again the voice of evening prayer offered from the parental lips, and one fervent, tender petition bears his own name to the throne of the infinite mercy. The Sabbath bell calls, and he goes in the light of memory, with his youthful companions, along the green walks and beneath the shade of ancient trees to the village church. He hears the blessed words of Christ, "Come unto Me." God is speaking to that wanderer upon the seas as He spoke to Jacob at Bethel in the dreams of the night. And that vision of home and voice of prayer is sent to that sailor-boy to make the tossing ship to him the house of God and gate of heaven. When he wakes from that brief and troubled sleep, he has only to answer the call of Heaven, as Jacob did, with the gift of his heart, and that night of tossing on the lonely seas shall be to him also the beginning of a new and a better life. Far away, among the mountains of Nevada, where of old God's creative hand locked up veins of gold in the fissures of the rock, the weary miner lies down in his cheerless cabin to sleep. It is the evening of the blessed Sabbath, and yet to him it has not been a day of rest. Work, work, work, with hammer and spade and drill, from morn to eve, through all the week, has been his life for months and years. His calloused hands, and stiffened frame, and weary step, tell of hardships such as few can bear and live. And he has borne them all—with heat and cold, and rain and drought, and famine and fever—that he might fill his hands with gold. And now, in this wakeful and lonely hour, something impels him to ask himself what all the treasures of the mountains would be worth to him if he had not found rest for his soul. To that tired, Sabbathless worker in his solitude comes a gentle influence, as if it were an angel's whisper, to tell him of riches that never perish, and of a home where the weary are at rest. Thus, all round the earth—on the sea and the land, in the city and the wilderness, by night and by day—God is calling wanderers home. (*D. March, D.D.*)

The angels of God ascending and descending on it.—*Ascending and descending angels*:—I. The first white-winged angel whom I ask you to look in the face is **ADVANCEMENT**. From our earliest to our latest years personal advancement is a keen and noble satisfaction. It is the antagonism which we have to overcome which makes our effort interesting and meritorious. When we strive to go up, the force of gravitation pulls us back. The inertia of our own bodies must be overcome; the lungs, heart, and brain must be subjected to a greater pressure. And it is just so in our moral life. Therefore the saint says, "It was good for me that I was afflicted." Therefore we teach that discontent is a good thing, that languorous situations are to be avoided, and that a repletion of any sort is dangerous to the soul. Just as soon as a man feels that there is no need for further effort, his angel descends. Perhaps one reason why the angels of little children always behold the face of their Father who is in heaven is because children grow so fast and hunger so after knowledge, and ask questions so far-reaching that they puzzle their too often motionless elders. Biology teaches that, in the life below our own, the life of the animals, when some function which has been long and sorely striven for, perhaps through countless generations, gets fixed in the order of life, its action becomes automatic, and is no longer a factor in the mental outreaching of the individual. It is so also with man. You may be advanced beyond your neighbours in generosity of belief, in the strictness of your veracity, in the extent of your benevolence; but if you are simply carrying out the spiritual functions which your ancestors organized in you by toil and tears, if your faith, truthfulness, charity, cost you no effort, no upward strain, it is not accounted to you for righteousness. And then we learn from science that everything which can become merely mechanical has its day and ceases to be. Only that which is subject to perpetual change can survive. II. The next angel is **MORALITY**. Even morality in us is not always ascending. It proceeds or recedes. How many times in the world's history all rights have been determined and all moralities squared! To-day nothing is more alarming to most people than the

notion that right has been a variable thing with the growing ages. Conscience is the voice of God in the soul of man; but how has that soul of man echoed and contorted the voice! The sense of the right is growing, as it long has grown in the race. Except it is growing in you, as an individual, so that you feel its birth-pangs, and struggle with them, it is not an ascending angel for you. Morality is an angel anywhere—in African jungles, where it keeps a man from killing the members of his household unless they are old or sick, and in the best neighbour you can call to mind, who is too honourable to take an unfair advantage of another. Cicero was moral; and we are told that Brutus was an honourable man. But the stride which morality took from these Roman heroes to Abraham Lincoln is a very marked one, known and read of all men. Thirty years since it was immoral in America not to respect the physical rights of white men. To-day it is immoral not to maintain the rights of men, whatever their colour. After a little it will be accounted simply moral to give woman her rights, the custody of her own child, the control of her own earnings and clothes, the right to express an opinion as to how much she shall be taxed, how much of her property the public may appropriate, the right to as much civil consideration as the ignorant Irishman receives who cracks stone on the road. Some time we shall so enlarge the boundaries of morality that men will be forbidden to enslave the minds of their fellows, that they may appropriate their property through the larceny of their brains. Some time it will be thought as dastardly a deed to slowly unnerve and stamp out men by whiskey as it was to poison them with wines, perfumes, roses, and fans in the soft days of luxurious Rome. Some time a man who simply does so much right as custom exacts, who clamours for the letter, as Shylock for the word of the bond, shall be a byword and a hissing; for the only claim you can lay upon the future springs from your individual advance upon the sense of morality you have inherited. III. The third angel is INSPIRATION. Of what avail is the evolution of our life below, and the growth of conduct into better and best, if the Holy Spirit does not occasionally hold us as the pledge of eternal possession? For, of course, by inspiration here I mean the filling of your soul and mine with the sweetest assurance. The inspiration which made our sacred volume, which long since scented and winged a poet soul in Persia, so that its orisons flew to our day and clime, which made great India like a sandal-wood chest out of which come to-day poems and teachings, fragrantly preserved, is only as a faded nosegay which your aged mother shows as a souvenir of her young days, only as a pathetic glove which a century since cased a young hand which soon was dust. But to you there may come an exhilaration before which clover-scented mornings are but a passing dream. The descending angel of inspiration is going down now to trouble the waters of ancient Siloam, hovering with a ghost's dead hands over interpretations of Scripture long since palsied through disuse, raising again the widow's son by the gate of Nain. The ascending angel is wreathing with an electric flush the human pillar of integrity; it is steadying man's moral nerve to translate correctly all that observers see in nature and life; it is lifting from the dead past capacities which have lapsed in us, in our forward march, and restoring to man an equable health of body and soul, a confidence in an all-round Providence, which will make us patient and calm, and a power of knowing much which is unseen, as animals know, and even inanimate life, but which is as dropped stitches in our life. The angel of inspiration bids us look up, and calls, "Come"; but, in looking and going upward, we lift the world with us. Believe that inspiration is ahead of you and within. It is a messenger of God. It is the crown of effort and of purity. It does not descend with family heirlooms, mental or moral. It is the gift of God to the individual. There are many angels besides those I have named. Belief is one, if it is allied to inspiration; but let these three lead you—Advancement, Morality, Inspiration. They can open to you abiding joys of which my word is but a feeble hint:—

“Around your lifetime golden ladders rise;
And up and down the skies,
With winged sandals shod,
The angels come and go, the messengers of God.”

(A. S. Nickerson.) *Angelic ministries*:—I. The most obvious truth herein conveyed is, of course, the constant presence and activity of the inhabitants of heaven; and indeed it is the general tenor of Scripture that God acts upon us men by and through the angelic host. “The providence of God,” says Bishop Bull, “in the government of

this lower world, is in a great part administered by the holy angels. These, as Philo terms them, are 'the ears and eyes of the Universal King.' The expression alludes to the government of earthly monarchs, who have their deputies in all parts of their dominion, who are, as it were, the eyes by which they see and the hands by which they act. Now, if we learn to believe in the principle that God deals with us through the ministrations of angels, we shall have to believe also that we ourselves are in these days the subject of these ministrations, although we behold them not. It is not empty space between earth and heaven; the pathways of the air are filled like the roads and avenues of this world. "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels." Bound upon unnumbered missions, they hurry to and fro, those swift and shining forms; now to superintend a kingdom's welfare, now to hold up a monarch's steps; now to guard the head of some mighty chief in the shock of battle, now to wait beside the sick bed of some houseless poor one, to suggest thoughts of peace to the heart racked with pain and care; and eventually, when the last sand has run out, to wait the liberated soul to the green pastures and the still waters of paradise: for have we not read how it is that they receive us into the everlasting habitations? And it is as revealing this general and universal law that the dream of Jacob is especially remarkable. What he saw then is always, unceasingly, going on. "Ascending and descending!" From the beginning of the world's history until now that ever-moving host have been rushing to and fro, unseen, save by him who slumbered on the couch of stone. "He called the place Bethel," and supposed that the particular spot on which he rested was opposite to the gate of heaven. Ah! vain imagination! in every quarter of creation the same dazzling scene is being enacted. From every part of the firmament are ever, ever issuing those "watchers and holy ones." No foot of earth is unvisited by them, no tract of air is unswept by their forms of fire. In the bright sunshine they are with us; in the still hours of slumber they keep sentinel watch around us. Do you ask how it happens that we feel them not? Yea, sirs, do we not feel their influence? Have we never experienced strong and irresistible impulses upon our minds to do certain things, impulses which we cannot explain, but which the event proves to have been for our good? Have we never been diverted, by sudden and unexpected accidents cast in our way, from going on some journey which, if we had pursued, we learn afterwards, would have been productive of loss of life or limb? What strange ominous forebodings and fears oftentimes seize upon men of the strongest minds, warnings of approaching perils or of coming death, warnings which, if listened unto, would enable many a man to prepare for his meeting with God. And all these things we would have you attribute to nothing less than the care and tenderness of those guardian spirits, who are never far absent from the heirs of salvation. And is there nothing more? Have we not seen or read of death-beds where the sufferer hath been soothed by whisperings unheard by other ears, and charmed with the melody of strains which none could catch save the parting soul? Oh, men and brethren, call it not what the infidel calls it, the wanderings of a disordered mind. Rather believe that angel-guards are verily near, nerving the soul in the last agony, and beckoning onwards to its rest. Rather believe that, as the earthly house of this tabernacle decays, the immortal spirit gets closer converse with celestial things. Rather learn to hope that ye too, when your last hour arrives, and ye stand trembling on the brink of eternity, may be calmed and encouraged by the sight of the ministers of grace, and see in a measure what Jacob saw of old, "the angels of God ascending and descending" around you.

II. If we take the vision as designed to instruct the mind of the patriarch as to angelic ministries, we cannot suppose "the ladder planted upon the earth" to be without significance. What, then, may we hence learn? what further light is hence thrown upon the mysterious subject of spiritual agency? Now, the first truth conveyed to us has reference, we think, to the nature of angels. Jacob saw angels ascending and descending, but he saw this descent and ascent accomplished by a ladder. There was an external and independent instrumentality. The language of Scripture does not teach us to regard the angels as purely spiritual creatures. It is probably the peculiar property of God alone to be entirely immaterial. "God," it is emphatically declared, "is a Spirit." He, and none beside Him, is wholly without bodily parts. It is, indeed, said of the Almighty, "He maketh His angels spirits"; but we are not hence to conclude that they have no body at all. When the term spirit is employed to denote the angelic nature, we must take it in a lower sense, to denote their exemption from those gross and earthly bodies which the inhabitants of this world possess. They are not flesh and blood, as we are; nor

is their substance like any of those things that fall under our observation. Yet have they a body, subject, it would appear, to the action of time; for in the Book of Daniel the angel Gabriel declares that the command was given him to visit the prophet when he began his supplications; and it is added that, flying swiftly, he came to him and touched him about the hour of the evening sacrifice. Now, it is the proper attribute of a body, as distinguished from a pure spirit, to require time to convey itself from one locality to another. "God is a Spirit," a perfect Spirit, and He is everywhere at once; a body cannot be in more than one spot at a time. The angels, then, we conclude, have bodies, but bodies of a most refined and glorious quality. The bodies of angels, we may conceive, are spiritual bodies; not like ours, sluggish and inactive, incapable of keeping pace with the nimble and rapid movements of the mind, but of a wonderful subtlety, travelling with an inconceivable velocity, possessed of stupendous power. Jacob saw them ascending and descending upon a ladder, spanning the space between heaven and earth. He did not behold them moving about in an instant, everywhere at once; there was the appearance of a material communication, just such as beings with bodies would require. To delineate purely spiritual creatures as ascending and descending upon a ladder would be an absurdity. The introduction of a ladder into the patriarch's dream is an intimation that the angels, though vastly more glorious than men, are yet utterly unlike God in their nature; that they are not, in short, quite free from the burden of matter. And it may be that higher truths still are taught by the erection of that mystic ladder, whose foot was upon the ground, and its top reaching unto heaven. We cannot wholly dis sever the text from a remarkable speech of our blessed Lord. "Hereafter," said Christ, "shall ye see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." The Redeemer Himself steps forward as the interpreter of Jacob's dream, and represents Himself as fulfilling the type of the ladder which arrested the patriarch's gaze. And it is not hard to understand how this may be. For is it not through Christ, and for His merits, that the communication between man and God was not quite cut off at Adam's fall? Was it not for Christ's sake alone that the Almighty did not utterly excommunicate the race of men, and shut up His compassions from them? Indeed, indeed, if there has been angelic guardianship extended to the saints, if the seraphim and cherubim have busied themselves with this lower world, it has only been because Christ Jesus has vouchsafed to take our nature upon Him. He has been the Way. As none of us can come to the Father save by Him, so neither angel nor archangel can visit us save by Him. (*Bishop Woodford.*) *The Incarnation a helpful fact*:—Do you think the idea of the Incarnation too aerial and speculative to carry with you for help in rough, practical matters? The Incarnation is not a mere idea, but a fact as substantial and solidly rooted in life as anything you have to do with. Even the shadow of it Jacob saw carried in it so much of what was real that when he was broad awake he trusted it and acted on it. It was not scattered by the chill of the morning air, nor by that fixed staring reality which external nature assumes in the grey dawn as one object after another shows itself in the same spot and form in which night had fallen upon it. There were no angels visible when he opened his eyes; the staircase was there, but it was of no heavenly substance, and if it had any secret to tell, it coldly and darkly kept it. There was no retreat for the runaway from the poor common facts of yesterday. The sky seemed as far from earth as it did yesterday, his tract over the hills as lonely, his brother's wrath as real; but other things also had become real; and as he looked back from the top of the hill on the stone he had set up, he felt the words, "I am with thee in all places whither thou goest," graven on his heart, and giving him new courage; and he knew that every footfall of his was making a Bethel, and that as he went he was carrying God through the world. The bleakest rain that swept across the hills of Bethel could never wash out of his mind the vision of bright-winged angels, as little as they could wash off the oil or wear down the stone he had set up. The brightest glare of this world's heyday of real life could not outshine and cause them to disappear; and the vision on which we hope is not one that vanishes at cock-crow, nor is He who connects us with God shy of human handling, but substantial as ourselves. (*M. Dods, D.D.*)

Ver. 15. *I will not leave thee, until I have done all that which I have spoken to thee of.*—*Renewed pledges*:—There are two very observable facts which may be gathered from the joint study of the Bible and our own hearts. 1. That we are prone to distrust the promises of God, though we know Him to be unchangeable. 2. That God

so condescends to our weakness that He reduplicates His pledges, in order, as it were, to compel us into confidence. I. God speaks to His people of sin blotted out; He speaks of the thorough reconciliation which Christ has effected between Himself and the sinner; He speaks of His presence as accompanying the pilgrim through the wilderness; of His grace as sufficient for every trial which may or can be encountered. The things of which God speaks to His people spread themselves through the whole of the unmeasured hereafter, and it must follow that the pledge of our not being left until the things spoken of are done is tantamount to an assurance that we shall never be left and never forsaken. II. The text is thus a kind of mighty guarantee, giving such a force to every declaration of God, that nothing but an unbelief the most obstinate can find ground for doubt or perplexity. It does not stand by itself, but comes in as an auxiliary in declaring God's glorious intention. It is a provision against human faithlessness, words which may well be urged when a man is tempted with the thought that, after all, a thing spoken of is not a thing done, and which bid him throw from him the thought that God is not bound to perform whatever He has promised. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *God's purpose and its fulfilment*.—I. God has a plan or scheme of life for every one of us, and His purposes embrace every part of that plan. 2. No words of God about our life will be left unfulfilled. 3. There is no unfinished life. The promise is a promise of—(1) Presence. (2) Intercourse. (3) Fellowship. (*S. Martin.*) *The companionship of God*.—I. In what does the treasure of God's companionship consist? It consists—1. In the consciousness of God's personality. 2. In the precious possessions he gives us—love, reason, conscience, will. To our conscience new light is given; to our love new spheres are open; our will receives new strength from the new example of His love and grace. II. While these faculties are taken up the companionship of God becomes a reality of our daily life and our "exceeding great reward." And then, besides, and with all this, we have the consciousness of communion with the Incarnate Word—"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever"; we know what to do and where to find Him. In this life we are to walk by faith. Our capacities are not intended to be satisfied here, but they shall be satisfied hereafter. (*Bishop King.*) *A fourfold comfort*.—Against his fourfold cross, here is a fourfold comfort. 1. Against the loss of his friends, "I will be with thee." 2. Of his country, "I will give thee this land." 3. Against his poverty, "Thou shalt spread abroad to the east, west," &c. 4. His solitariness; angels shall attend thee, and "thy seed shall be as the dust," &c. And "who can count the dust of Jacob," said Balaam (*Numb. xxiii. 10*). Now, whatsoever God spake here with Jacob, He spake with us, as well as with him, saith Hosea (*Hosea. xii. 4*). (*J. Trapp.*) *Purpose in a promise*.—Every true man's life is charged with a purpose of God, which will mould it and master it, so as that it may best work out His glory. He who notes the fall of the sparrow sees, numbers, and knows each human soul. He has intrusted it with a certain office and privilege. He has created it that it might glorify Him. He has endowed that soul with existence that it might be guided into His all-wise purpose, and afterwards received to share with Him His glory. I. Observe, then, carefully in the first place, that this being the chief end of man, there will always have to be some secondary and subordinate ends. These must be reckoned in; for they all tend towards the main end, and indeed receive their entire value from their connection with that. II. Observe, furthermore, that if there be so many subordinate purposes in the one purpose of God, there must of necessity be many instruments also. III. Observe, in the third place, that with a purpose so complicated as God's is, in order to introduce every man's life into it, it will be possible that in some cases more than half the years which any given person lives will have to be spent just in rendering him ready to come in efficiently at the exact point when he is needed. IV. Observe, once more, that if these varied instruments employed in carrying out the grand purpose are so many, and need so much preparation, there will be an evident necessity that a large number of teachers and trainers shall be kept at God's service in instructing them. (*C. S. Robinson, D.D.*) *The Keeper of Israel*.—I. THE COMPANY. Jehovah Himself. II. THE OFFICE. The Keeper of Israel. III. THE MARCH. "All places whither thou goest." IV. THE ENGAGEMENT. "I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." (*J. Irons.*) *Jacob's protector*.—I. GOD'S PRESENCE. II. PROTECTION. III. GUIDANCE. IV. FAITHFULNESS. (*C. Clayton, M.A.*) *Four choice sentences*.—I. First, turn to the twenty-eighth chapter of Genesis, at the fifteenth verse, and read of PRESENT BLESSING. The Lord said to His servant Jacob, "Behold, I am with thee." 1. Jacob was the inheritor of a great blessing from his fathers, for this

sentence was spoken in connection with the following words, "I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac." It is an inexpressible privilege, to be able to look back to father and grandfather, and perhaps farther still, and to say, "We come of a house which has served the Lord as far back as history can inform us." Descended from Christians, we have a greater honour than being descended from princes. There is no heraldry like the heraldry of the saints. Be not satisfied unless you yourself obtain such mercy as God gave to your ancestors, and hear the Lord saying, "I am with thee." 2. This mercy was brought home to Jacob at a time when he greatly needed it. He had just left his father's house, and he felt himself alone. He was coming into special trial, and then it was that he received a fuller understanding of the privilege which God had in store for him. Let me read the words to you—"I am with thee." That God should send His angel with Jacob to protect him would have been much; but it is nothing compared with, "I am with thee." This includes countless blessings, but it is in itself a great deal more than all the blessings we can conceive of. There are many fruits that come of it, but the tree that yields them is better than the fruit. 3. Why, when God is with a man there is a familiarity of condescension that is altogether unspeakable: it ensures an infinite love. "I am with thee." God will not dwell with those He hates. 4. "I am with thee"—it means practical help. Whatever we undertake, God is with us in the undertaking; whatever we endure, God is with us in the enduring; whithersoever we wander, God is with us in our wandering. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" If God be with us, can we ever be exiled or banished? If God be with us, what can we not do? If God be with us, what can we not endure? II. Now turn to the thirty-first chapter of Genesis, at the third verse, and read these words—"I will be with thee." We will call this **FUTURE BLESSING**. It is almost unnecessary to take this second text; for if it is written, "I am with thee," you may depend upon it that He will be with us, for God does not forsake His people. III. I want to go a step further, and come, in the third place, to **EXPERIENCED BLESSINGS**. Let us look at Jacob's experience. Did Jacob find God to be with him? Turn to the thirty-first chapter again, and read the fifth verse. Up to as far as the time that he was about to leave Laban, he says—"The God of my father hath been with me." I have read that testimony with great joy. I thought of Jacob thus—Well, you certainly were not eminent for grace while with Laban. You were plotting and scheming—you against Laban and Laban against you; and yet your witness is, "The God of my father hath been with me." This is all the more encouraging as coming from you. Jacob seems to say of his God: It was He that gave me my wife and my children; it was He that prospered me in the teeth of those who tried to rob me; the God of my father hath been with me notwithstanding all my shortcomings. I trust that some of you can bear the like witness. Though you have not been all that you could wish in the Christian life, yet you can say, "The God of my father has been with me." Now, we will look at him a little further on, in the thirty-fifth chapter, and the third verse: there we shall find him saying—"Let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went." As I have already said, he left Laban's house; and it was a very venturesome journey, but God was with him: Jacob tells us that so it was. Poor Jacob was full of fear when he heard that Esau was coming to meet him. You can see that by the way in which he divided his flocks and his herds, and set apart so large a present for Esau. But God does not leave His people because of their fears. I am so thankful for that. There was a night of wrestling with Jacob. On that day, too, I have no doubt, Jacob was very much cast down, because he remembered his sin. He knew he had ill-treated Esau, and robbed him of the blessing; but, for all that, he came with a repentant heart to submit himself before his brother and to do what he could to please him. Because of this, God was with him. At the close of his life we find Jacob more fully than ever confessing that the presence of God had been with him. I read you the passage where he wished that the God that had been with him might be with his grandsons in the selfsame way—the forty-eighth chapter, at the fifteenth and sixteenth verses. "He blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads." There is his last testimony to the faithfulness of God. He had lost Rachel—oh, how it stung his heart! but he says, "God redeemed me from all evil." There had come a great famine in the land; but he says that God had fed him all his life long. He had lost Joseph, and that

had been a great sorrow; but now, in looking back, he sees that even then God was redeeming him from all evil. He said once, "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away; all these things are against me"; but now he eats his words, and says, "The Lord hath redeemed me from all evil." He now believes that God had been always with him, had fed him always, and redeemed him always, and blessed him always. Now, mark you, if you trust in God, this shall be your verdict at the close of life. IV. We have had present blessing; we have had future blessing; we have had experienced blessing three times over; and now we go to TRANSMITTED BLESSING; for we find Jacob transmitting the blessing to his son and to his grandson. Read in the forty-eighth chapter, at the twenty-first verse—"Behold, I die: but God shall be with you." I commenced by noticing the blessing which passed on from Abraham to Isaac; and now we see that Jacob hands it on to Joseph, Manasseh, and to Ephraim—"I die: but God shall be with you." Blessed be the everlasting God—if Abraham dies, there is Isaac; and if Isaac dies, there is Jacob; and if Jacob dies, there is Joseph; and if Joseph dies, Ephraim and Manasseh survive. The Lord shall never lack a champion to bear His standard high among the sons of men. Only let us pray God to raise up more faithful ministers. That ought to be our prayer day and night. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 16. Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not.—*The sense of God's presence*.—I. This living sense of God's presence with us is a leading feature of the character of all His saints under every dispensation. This is the purpose of all God's dealings with every child of Adam—to reveal Himself to them and in them. He kindles desires after Himself; He helps and strengthens the wayward will; He broods with a loving energy over the soul; He will save us if we will be saved. All God's saints learn how near He is to them, and they rejoice to learn it. They learn to delight themselves in the Lord—He gives them their hearts' desire. II. Notice, secondly, how this blessing is bestowed on us. For around us, as around David, only far more abundantly, are appointed outward means, whereby God intends to reveal Himself to the soul. This is the true character of every ordinance of the Church: all are living means of His appointment, whereby He reveals Himself to those who thirst after Him. We use these means aright when through them we seek after God. Their abuse consists either in carelessly neglecting these outward things or in prizing them for themselves and so resting in them, by which abuse they are turned into especial curses. (Bp. S. Wilberforce.) *Unconscious providences*.—You cannot understand the annals of the race, unless you employ the doctrine of special providence for your key. "We need celestial observations," said Coleridge, "whenever we attempt to mark out terrestrial charts." It was reported as great wisdom, though uninspired, when somebody remarked, "Man proposes, God disposes." But wisdom inspired had said long before that: "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." I. Let us look, for a moment, through the familiar incidents of the Scriptural story, for the sake of some quiet illustrations they furnish. . . . The only way to look upon Scripture characters is to contemplate them on the heaven side, to just look up straight at them. In our conceit, we are sometimes wont to estimate these worthies of the Old and New Testaments as being altogether such as ourselves, wilfullest and most blind, moving self-impelled in orbits of earthly history. Just as a child contemplates the stars it sees far down in a placid lake, over the surface of which it sails. They do seem mere points of fire under the water, and an infant mind may well wonder what is their errand there. It ought, however, to need no more than a mature instructor's voice to remind the mistaken boy that these are but images; the true stars are circling overhead, where the creating Hand first placed them in a system. So these orbs of human existence, distinct, rounded, inclusive, must be judged, not as they appear down here in the confused depths of a merely human career, but aloft, where they belong, orbited in their settled and honourable place in the counsels of God;—

"For ever singing, as they shine,
The hand that made us is Divine."

II. Nor is the case otherwise, when we enter the field of secular history for a new series of illustrations. The Almighty, in building up His architectures of purpose, seems to have been pleased to use light and easy strokes, slender instruments, and delicate tools. He uses the hands less, the horns coming out of His hands more,

for "there is the hiding of His power." He has employed the least things to further the execution of His wisest plans, sometimes bringing them into startling prominence, and investing them with critical, and to all appearance incommensurate, importance. What we call accidents are parts of His ordinary, and even profound, counsels. He chooses the weakest things of this world to confound the mighty. Two college students by a haystack began the Foreign Mission work. An old marine on ship-board commenced the Association for Sailors. The tears of a desolate Welsh girl, crying for a Testament, led to the first society for distributing Bibles. Were these events accidents? No; nor these lives either. God reached the events through the lives. "The Lord" was "in that place." He established those lives, nameless or named, like sentinels at posts. They did their office when the time came. They may not have understood it, but the Lord did. And even they understood it afterwards. III. We might arrest the argument here. I choose to push it on one step further, and enter the field of individual biography. In our every-day existence we sometimes run along the verge of the strangest possibilities, any one of which would make or mar the history. And nobody ever seems to know it but God. I feel quite sure most of us could mention the day and the hour when a certain momentous question was decided for us, the effect of which was to fix our entire future. Our profession, our home, our relationships all grew out of it. No man can ever be satisfied that his life has been mere commonplace. Events seem striking, when we contemplate the influence they have had on ourselves. A journey, a fit of sickness, a windfall of fortune, the defection of a friend—any such incident is most remarkable when all after-life feels it. We never appreciate these things at the time. Yet at this moment you can point your finger to a page in the unchangeable Book, and say honestly: "The Lord was in that place, and I knew it not." We are ready, now, I should suppose, to search out the use to which this principle may be applied in ordering our lives. 1. In the beginning, we learn here at once, who are the heroes and heroines of the world's history. They are the people who have most of the moulding care, and gracious presence of God. It may be quite true they know it not. But they will know it in the end. 2. Our next lesson has to do with what may be considered the sleeps and stirs of experience. The soul is beginning to battle with its human belongings, and to struggle after peace under the pressure of high purposes, the sway of which it neither wills to receive, nor dares to resist. The Lord is in that place, and the man knows it not. Now what needs to be done, when Christian charity deals with him? You see he is asleep; yet the ladder of Divine grace out in the air over him makes him stir. He dreams. He is sure to see the passing and repassing angels soon, if you treat him rightly. He must be carefully taught and tenderly admonished. 3. We may learn likewise a third lesson; the text teaches something as to blights in life. The world is full of cowed individuals; of men and women broken in spirit, yet still trying to hold on. Some catastrophe took them down. They cannot right up again. Many a man knows that a single event, lasting hardly a day or a night, has changed his entire career. He questions now, in all candour, whether he might not as well slip quietly out under the eaves, and take his abrupt chances of a better hereafter. If a blight results from one's own will and intelligent sin, he deserves a scar and a limp. Pray God to forgive the past, and try to work the robustness of what remains into new results. But if we were only sinned against, or were unfortunate, that goes for nothing. If we only suffered, and no sinew is wrung, we may well have done with thinking discontentedly of it. While the world stands, all Adam's sons must work, and all Eve's daughters must wail. No life is now, or is going to be, blighted, that can still take a new start. Begin again. These periods of reversal will all sweep by and by into the system of purposes. We shall sing songs of praise about them in heaven. 4. Hence our best lesson is the last; it tells us how to estimate final results. The true valuation of any human life can be made only when the entire account shall come in. Oh, how fine it is for any one to be told, as Jacob was: "I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of!" How it magnifies and glorifies a human life to understand that God himself is urging it on to its ultimate reckoning! (*C. S. Robinson, D.D.*) *Jacob at Bethel*.—I. The first circumstance we must notice, is THE TIME WHEN THIS DISCOVERY OF GOD TO JACOB WAS MADE. 1. It was in a season of distress. 2. It was just after he had fallen into a grievous sin. II. CONSIDER THE ENDS TO BE ANSWERED BY IT. 1. One design, then, of this vision certainly was to give Jacob at this time a lively impression of the presence and providence of God, His universal presence and ever active providence. 2. But God had another design in this vision. It was intended to

renew and confirm to Jacob the promises He had given him. III. But let us go on to notice THE EFFECTS PRODUCED ON JACOB BY THIS HEAVENLY VISION. 1. The first of these was just what we might have expected—a sense of God's presence; a new, startling sense of it. 2. This vision produced fear also in Jacob. "He was afraid," we read. "How dreadful," he said, "is this place!" And yet why should Jacob fear? No spectacle of terror has been presented to him. No words of wrath have been addressed to him. There has appeared no visionary mount Sinai flaming and shaking before him. All he has seen and heard has spoken to him of peace. We might have expected him as he waked to have sung with joy. What a change since he laid himself down on those stones to sleep! The evils he most dreaded, all averted; the mercies he mourned over as lost, all restored. Happy must his sleep have been, and happy now his waking! But not one word do we read here of happiness. The Holy Spirit tells us only of Jacob's fear. And why? To impress this truth on our minds, that the man who sees God never trifles with Him; that the soul He visits and gladdens with His mercy, He always fills with an awe of His majesty. 3. Notice yet one effect more of this scene—a desire in Jacob to render something to the God who had so visited him. And this seems to have risen up in his mind as soon as he awoke, and to have been an exceedingly strong desire. There is nothing he can do now for God, but he sets up a memorial of God's loving kindness to him, and binds himself by a solemn purpose and vow to show in the days that are to come his thankfulness for it. (*C. Bradley, M.A.*) *Jacob's waking exclamation*:—I. First, THE DOCTRINE OF GOD'S OMNIPRESENCE. He is everywhere. In the early Christian Church there was a wicked heresy, which for a long while caused great disturbance, and exceeding much controversy. There were some who taught that Satan, the representative of evil, was of co-equal power with God, the representative of good. These men found it necessary to impugn the doctrine of God's universal power. Their doctrine denied the all-pervading presence of God in the present world, and they seemed to imagine that we should of necessity have to get out of the world of nature altogether, before we could be in the presence of God. Their preachers seemed to teach that there was a great distance between God and His great universe; they always preached of Him as the King who dwelt in the land that was very far off; nay, they almost seemed to go as far as though they had said, "Between us and Him there is a great gulf fixed, so that neither can our prayers reach Him, nor can the thoughts of His mercy come down to us." Blessed be God that error has long ago been exploded, and we as Christian men, without exception, believe that God is as much in the lowest hell as in the highest heaven, and as truly among the sinful hosts of mortals, as among the blissful choir of immaculate immortals, who day without night praise His name. He is everywhere in the fields of nature. Ye shall go where ye will; ye shall look to the most magnificent of God's works, and ye shall say—"God is here, upon thine awful summit, O hoary Alp! in thy dark bosom, O tempest-cloud! and in thy angry breath, O devastating hurricane!" "He makes the clouds His chariot and rides upon the wings of the wind." God is here. And so in the most minute—in the blossom of the apple, in the bloom of the tiny field flower, in the sea-shell which has been washed up from its mother-deep, in the sparkling of the mineral brought up from darkest mines, in the highest star or in yon comet that startles the nations and in its fiery chariot soon drives afar from mortal ken—great God, Thou art here, Thou art everywhere. From the minute to the magnificent, in the beautiful and in the terrible, in the fleeting and in the lasting, Thou art here, though sometimes we know it not. 2. Let us enter now the kingdom of Providence, again to rejoice that God is there. My brethren, let us walk the centuries, and at one stride of thought let us traverse the earliest times when man first came out of Eden, driven from it by the fall. Then this earth had no human population, and the wild tribes of animals roamed at their will. We know not what this island was then, save that we may suspect it to have been covered with dense forests, and perhaps inhabited by ferocious beasts; but God was here, as much here as He is to-day; as truly was He here then, when no ear heard His foot fall as He walked in the cool of the day in this great garden—as truly here as when to-day the songs of ten thousand rise up to heaven, blessing and magnifying His name. And then when our history began—turn over its pages and you will read of cruel invasions and wars which stained the soil with blood, and crimsoned it a foot deep with clotted gore; you will read of civil wars and intestine strifes between brother and brother, and you will say—"How is this? How was this permitted?" But if you read on and see how by tumult and bloody strife Liberty was served, and the best interests of man, you will

say, "Verily, God was here." History will conduct you to awful battle-fields; she will bid you behold the garment rolled in blood; she will cover you with the thick darkness of her fire and vapour of smoke; and as you hear the clash of arms, and see the bodies of your fellow-men, you say, "The devil is here"; but truth will say, "No, though evil be here, yet surely God was in this place though we knew it not; all this was needful after all—these calamities are but revolutions of the mighty wheels of Providence, which are too high to be understood, but are as sure in their action as though we could predict their results." Turn if you will to what is perhaps a worse feature in history still, and more dreary far—I mean the story of persecutions. Read how the men of God were stoned and were sawn asunder; let your imaginations revive the burnings of Smithfield, and the old dungeons of the Lollards' Tower; think how with fire and sword, and instruments of torture, the fiends of hell seemed determined to extirpate the chosen seed. But remember as you read the bloodiest tragedy; as your very soul grows sick at some awful picture of poor tortured human flesh, that verily God was in that place, scattering with rough hands, it may be, the eternal seed, bidding persecution be as the blast which carries seed away from some fruit-bearing tree that it may take root in distant islets which it had never reached unless it had been carried on the wings of the storm. Thou art, O God, even where man is most in his sin and blasphemy; Thou art reigning over rebels themselves, and over those who seem to defy and to overturn Thy will. Remember, always, that in history, however dreadful may seem the circumstance of the narrative, surely God is in that place. 3. But we now come to the third great kingdom of which the truth holds good in a yet more evident manner—the kingdom of grace. In yonder province of conviction, where hard-hearted ones are weeping penitential tears, where proud ones who said they would never have this Man to reign over them are howing their knees to kiss the Son lest He be angry; where rocky, adamantine consciences have at last begun to feel; where obdurate, determined, incorrigible sinners have at last turned from the error of their ways—God is there, for were He not there, none of these holy feelings would ever have arisen, and the cry would never have been heard—"I will arise and go unto my Father." And in yonder providence which shines under a brighter sun, where penitents with joy look to a bleeding Saviour, where sinners leap to lose their chains, and oppressed ones sing because their burdens have rolled away; where they who were just now sitting in darkness and in the valley of the shadow of death have seen the great light—God is in that place, or faith had never come and hope had never arisen. And there in yonder province, brighter still, where Christians lay their bodies upon the altar as living sacrifices, where men with self-denying zeal think themselves to be nothing and Christ to be all in all; where the missionary leaves his kindred that he may die among the swarthy heathen; where the young man renounces brilliant prospects that he may be the humble servant of Jesus; where yonder work-girl toils night and day to earn her bread rather than sell her soul; where yonder toiling labourer stands up for the rights of conscience against the demands of the mighty; where yonder struggling believer still holds to God in all his troubles, saying—"Though He slay me yet will I trust in Him." God is in that place, and he that has eyes to see will soon perceive His presence there. Where the sigh is heaving, where the tear is falling, where the song is rising, where the desire is mounting, where love is burning, hope anticipating, faith abiding, joy o'erflowing, patience suffering, and zeal abounding, God is surely present. II. But how are we to recognize this presence of God? What is the spirit which shall enable us constantly to feel it? 1. If you would feel God's presence, you must have an affinity to His nature. Your soul must have the spirit of adoption, and it will soon find out its Father. Your spirit must have a desire after holiness, and it will soon discover the presence of Him who is holiness itself. Your mind must be heavenly, and you will soon detect that the God of Heaven is here. The more nearly we become like God, the more sure shall we be that God is where we are. 2. Next, there must be a calmness of spirit. God was in the place when Jacob came there that night, but he did not know it, for he was alarmed about his brother Esau; he was troubled, and vexed, and disturbed. He fell asleep, and his dream calmed him; he awoke refreshed; the noise of his troubled thoughts was gone and he heard the voice of God. More quiet we want, more quiet, more calm retirement, before we shall well be able, even with spiritual minds, to discover the sensible presence of God. 3. But then, next, Jacob had in addition to this calm of mind, a revelation of Christ. That ladder, as I have said in the exposition, was a picture of Christ, the way of access between man and God. You will never perceive God in

nature, until you have learned to see God in grace. 4. More than this, no man will perceive God, wherever he may be, unless he knows that God has made a promise to be with him and is able by faith to look to the fulfilment of it. In Jacob's case God said, "I will be with thee whithersoever thou goest, and I will not leave thee." Christian, have you heard the same? III. THE PRACTICAL RESULTS OF A FULL RECOGNITION IN THE SOUL OF THIS DOCTRINE OF GOD'S OMNIPRESENCE. One of the first things would be to check our inordinate levity. Cheerfulness is a virtue: levity a vice. How much foolish talking, how much jesting which is not convenient, would at once end if we said, "Surely God is in this place." And you, if you are called to enter a den such as Bunyan called his dungeon, can say, "Surely God is in this place," and you make it a palace at once. Some of you, too, are in very deep affliction. You are driven to such straits that you do not know where things will end, and you are in great despondency to-day. Surely God is in that place. As certain as there was one like unto the Son of God in the midst of the fiery furnace with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, so surely on the glowing coals of your affliction the heavenly footprints may be seen, for surely God is in this place. You are called to-day to some extraordinary duty, and you do not feel strong enough for it. Go to it, for "Surely God is in this place." You have to address an assembly this afternoon for the first time. Surely God is in that place. He will help you. The arm will not be far off on which you have to lean, the Divine strength will not be remote to which you have to look. "Surely God is in this place." And, lastly, if we always remembered that God was where we are, what reverence would it inspire when we are in His house, in the place particularly and specially set apart for His service! Oh, may we remember "Surely God is in this place," and it will give us awe when we come into His immediate presence! (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 17. *How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.*—*Reverential awe*:—I. It must have been the freshness of Jacob's sense of recent sin that made a spot so peaceful and so blessed seem to him a "dreadful" place. Everything takes its character from the conscience. Even a Bethel was awful, and the ladder of angels terrible, to a man who had just been deceiving his father and robbing his brother. The gates of our heaven are the places of our dread. II. Strange and paradoxical as is this union of the sense of beauty, holiness, and fear, there are seasons in every man's life when it is the sign of a right state of mind. There is a shudder at sanctity which is a true mark of life. The danger of the want of reverence is far greater than the peril of its excess. Very few, in these light and levelling days, are too reverent. The characteristic of its age is the absence. III. Our churches stand among us to teach reverence. There are degrees of God's presence. He fills all space, but in certain spots He gives Himself or reveals Himself, and therefore we say He is there more than in other places. A church is such a place. To those who use it rightly it may be a "gate of heaven." (J. Vaughan, M.A.) *The gate of heaven*:—I. GOD'S HOUSE IS ALWAYS WHERE THE LORD'S PRESENCE IS. 1. No forms whatsoever for church organization, or Sunday service, are given in the Bible. 2. Out-of-the-way places, unusual times, and unexpected assemblages of people, have been often chosen for extraordinary manifestations of the Lord's presence. 3. The Head of the Church has given blessings to all Christians alike, of every name, when they have fully kept His covenant. II. THE LORD'S PRESENCE IN GOD'S HOUSE MAKES IT TO BE THE GATE OF HEAVEN. 1. The figure used. Importance of gates to Eastern cities. 2. The Lord's presence, so near, so splendid, so significant, made Jacob seem to himself to be at the very portal of the celestial city. Practical thoughts: 1. Learn to prize church privileges. 2. Honour the Fourth Commandment. 3. Have done with jargon—sectarian clash and presumption. 4. Do not make the Lord's house the gate of hell. God's mercy never leaves a man where it found him. (C. S. Robinson, D.D.) *The house of God and the gate of heaven*:—I. THE PLACE HERE SPECIFIED. 1. It was a place distinguished by favourable circumstances. 2. It was a place of sacred instruction. (1) Jacob was instructed by what God here exhibited to his view. This ladder represented—(a) the mediation of Christ; (b) the Providence of God; (c) the ministry of angels. (2) Jacob was also instructed by what God said to him. 3. This was a place of covenant engagement between God and man. II. THE NAMES GIVEN TO IT. 1. The house of God. (1) In every such place God's family are associated in one community. (2) In every such place God is actually present. (3) In every such place God's favours are obtained by devout seekers (Luke xi. 9-10). 2. None other but the

house of God. (1) Not the house of amusement. (2) Not the house of merchandise. (3) Not the house of iniquity. 3. The gate of heaven. III. THE REFLECTIONS SUGGESTED BY IT. "How dreadful is this place!" The worship of God should be attended with habitual seriousness. 1. With serious consideration. 2. With serious watchfulness against all distractions. 3. With serious concern to obtain present blessings from God. 4. With serious intercession in behalf of others. 5. With serious gratitude for favours received. (*Sketches of Sermons.*) *Moral aspect of the world:*—The world itself is a dreadful place. 1. Because the visible things that are made display an eternal power and Godhead. II. Because the world evidences a design rising above, and superior to, the exhibition of a power capable of producing a mere physical universe. III. Because of its occupancy by an intellectual being. Intellect employs itself in a variety of ways, but these may all be classed under—1. Regard of the external or physical world. 2. The intellectual or spiritual. 3. The author of both. Under one of these may be placed all the subjects which have engaged man from the commencement of the world. IV. Because man is a moral being. I cannot think of an intellectual being as other than a moral one, because I cannot well conceive how a mind free and unconstrained can, while investigating the works of God, fail to have awakened some of those moral views and feelings, which to any mind are the legitimate concomitants. I have therefore adopted the distinction merely for the sake of the different position from which it enables us to regard man. V. Because man is a fallen being. VI. Because of the forbearance of God and man's consequent increased criminality. VII. Because of God's amazing condescension in seeking man's restoration. VIII. Because of the enormous expense at which the means of reconciliation were secured. IX. Because of the awful consequences resulting from the neglect of these means. (*F. Wright.*) *Places of worship:*—I. IN WHAT LIGHT ARE WE TO VIEW PLACES OF WORSHIP? 1. The house of God. (1) It originates with God. (2) It is the place where God chooses peculiarly to dwell. (3) It is the grand repository of God's eternal truth. (4) It is the theatre of God's greatest wonders. (5) It is the scene of God's richest mercies and greatest blessings. (6) It is most honourable to God. 2. The gate of heaven. It may be called so—(1) Because it is ordinarily in places of worship, and in hearing the gospel, that men begin to think about God and saving their souls. (2) Because it is there men enter actually on the way to heaven. (3) Because it is there both worlds meet. In old times all meetings were held at the gates of the cities. And the house of God is the gate of heaven, the meeting place, the assembly of all the spiritual beings in existence. 3. It is said, "This is none other than the house of God." And I trust this house never will be for any other purpose. I never like to see a place of worship turned to any other use, except it be for a school, for a place of instruction, or for something analogous to a place of worship. II. WHAT OUGHT TO BE OUR SENTIMENTS AND FEELINGS AS TO THE HOUSE OF GOD—AS TO A PLACE OF WORSHIP. 1. We should reverence it. So did Jacob, "How dreadful," said he, "is this place!" The Hebrew is, "How solemn—how reverential is this place!" I never like to see people enter a place of worship heedlessly, lightly, merrily. 2. We should delight to go up to the house of God. 3. We should come full of expectation. The house of God is the scene of mercy, the region of grace, the very element of salvation. 4. We should endeavour, by every means, to support places of worship to the best of our ability. (*John Stephens.*) *Public worship: how it is, and how it ought to be, attended:*—How do PERSONS USUALLY ATTEND THE HOUSE OF GOD? 1. Thoughtlessly. (1) Without sober and becoming thoughts of the great and glorious object of all religious homage and adoration. (2) Ignorant of their spiritual necessities. 2. Prayerlessly. 3. Faithlessly. II. How OUGHT PEOPLE TO COME THITHER? 1. With thought. 2. With prayer. 3. With faith. It is as faith is in lively and vigorous exercise that God is apprehended and felt to be really present. It is by faith we embrace the proffered mercies of the gospel. Concluding remarks: 1. See the true reason why many profit so little from their means of grace. 2. How abundantly you might profit by a more thoughtful, prayerful, and faithful use of your means. (*W. Mudge, B.A.*) *God's home, heaven's gate:*—There are four particular remarks which we have to make upon these words. 1. First, we observe from them that intercourse with God, instead of producing levity of mind, produces serious impressions. The man who was not at all afraid to lie down in this place, surrounded with danger and enveloped in darkness, is filled with fear in the morning. At what? At the thought of a present Deity. Not that this was a slavish dread, like that which Belshazzar felt

when he saw the handwriting upon the wall, and his countenance was changed in him, and the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote together; but he was filled with what the apostle calls reverence or godly fear. Such the seraphim know—they cover their faces when they appear before God. Such Isaiah knew when he said, "Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts!" Such Peter felt when he said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Such Job felt when he said, "I heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and in ashes." 2. Secondly, we observe from these words, that wherever God meets with His people, that place may be deservedly considered His house. How does this condemn bigotry! How seldom does God receive anything more than lip service and formality from those whose attachment to any particular place or usages induces them to say, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we. Nothing makes a people dear to God but their conformity to Him; and nothing makes a place of worship sacred but the Divine presence. 3. The experience of Christians sometimes approximates towards heaven. Therefore said Jacob—not only, this is the house of God, but—this is the gate of heaven. There was nothing that was outwardly inviting; but oh, that land, the angels ascending and descending!—oh, his God above, standing, and looking down, and addressing him!—oh, such scenery!—oh, such language!—oh, such communion made Jacob think that, though he saw from the place it was not heaven, heaven could not be far off. 4. Lastly, the house of God and the gate of heaven are related; there Jacob mentions them together, and mentions them in their proper order—this is the house of God—this is the gate of heaven. The one precedes the other—the one affords us the earnest and foretaste of the other. Philip Henry was accustomed to say at the close of his sabbath-day's exercises, "Well, if this be not heaven, it is the way to it." Those who call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, will enjoy an eternal sabbath. They who can now say, "I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth," shall serve Him day and night in His temple above, never more to go out. (*W. Jay.*) *Beautiful doors:*—Michael Angelo Buonarrotti said of the doors of the Baptistery at Florence, executed by Lorenzo Ghiberti, when asked what he thought of them, "They are so beautiful that they might stand at the gates of paradise." (*Old Testament Anecdotes.*) *Entrance to heaven:*—Al Sirat is a bridge extending from this world to the next, over the abyss of hell, which must be passed by every one who would enter the Mohammedan paradise. It is very narrow, the breadth being less than the thread of the famished spider, according to some writers; others compare it to the edge of a sword or of a razor. The deceased cross with a rapidity proportioned to their virtue. Some pass with the rapidity of lightning; others with the speed of a horse at full gallop; others still slower, on account of the weight of their sins; and many fall down from it, and are precipitated into hell. (*Wheeler.*) *Astronomical heavens:*—There is a saying of Hazlitt's, bold, and at first seeming wondrous true: "In the days of Jacob there was a ladder between heaven and earth; but now the heavens have gone farther off, and have become astronomical." (*George Dawson.*)

Vers. 18, 19. And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel.—*Memorials of blessing:*—I. First of all, we are told that Jacob erected a material monument, and planted it as a fixed landmark on the spot. Concerning which, remark these three things: he did it immediately, he did it symbolically, he did it religiously. There is instruction in each. 1. "He rose up early in the morning." He took the moment when the memory of his bright vision was the clearest, and the emotion it aroused was at its height. He caught the fitful experience when it had most force, as if he knew it might grow less before long. When Divine grace invites, and kindles, and stands ready to help, no time must be lost. 2. Remark, again, Jacob "took the stone that he had put for his pillow, and set it up for a pillar." That is to say, he made his affliction the monument of His mercy. Plenty of stones besides that there were lying about in that bleak plain. But he chose that one, so as to identify the history, when he saw the spot. Herein was the very spirit of splendid symbolism. Nothing could be finer. No emblem could be more pathetically accurate, as a picture of the utter desolation which he, as a

homeless fugitive, had felt the evening before, than the fragment of rock he had been obliged to lay his head upon to sleep. Now to make that, the reminder of his friendlessness, the monument also of his disclosure of Divine adoption, was matchless in ingenuity. When he should see that pillar in the future, he would say, "Behold the outcast, and the prince! behold man's necessity, and God's opportunity! behold earthly weakness, and heavenly help! see where I was, and where I am!"

3. But observe, once more, Jacob, having set up his pillar, "poured oil upon the top of it." You are quite familiar with Old Testament uses of oil in religious service. These were established by direct order. The command given early to Moses was, "Thou shalt take the anointing oil, and anoint the tabernacle, and all that is therein, and shalt hallow it, and all the vessels thereof, and it shall be holy." This direction was extended so as to cover the altar and the laver, and even the priests, Aaron and his sons. The spirit of inspiration laid hold of what was an earlier custom, and so consecrated it. If Jacob had said, concerning this great incident of his life, It is the turning-point in my history, and I will not forget it, he would have done no unimportant thing by itself. But by anointing the pillar he made it a definitely religious memorial. It recognized not only his extraordinary blessing, but recorded for ever the fact that God had bestowed it upon him. It was an act of devotion. There was worship in it. There was self-consecration in it.

II. The lessons thus far learned, however, will become clearer and more impressive when we pass on to consider the second form of perpetuation this patriarch adopted. He proceeded to invoke the help of his fellow-men. "He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was called Luz at the first." Conclusion: 1. Count up your mercies for rehearsal and record. 2. Confess Christ openly before men. 3. Set up memorials of blessing. 4. Expect to understand your own biography by and by. When Jacob next visited Bethel, he could read the meaning of the Divine promise. (*C. S. Robinson, D.D.*) *Bethel*:—I. BETHEL TELLS OF AN EXILE AWAY FROM HIS FATHER'S HOUSE. II. BETHEL TELLS OF A GLORIOUS VISION. III. BETHEL TELLS OF A HOLY VOW. IV. BETHEL TELLS OF A SACRED MEMORIAL. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *The memorial impulse in religion*:—I. THE TIME, PLACE, AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF A MAN'S DISCOVERY OF GOD IN HIS LIFE ARE THE MOST MEMORABLE IN PERSONAL EXPERIENCE. II. WITH SUCH A DISCOVERY, THERE ALWAYS RISES AN IMPULSE TO SET UP SOME LANDMARK FOR MEMORY. III. THE BEST MEMORIALS ARE THOSE WHICH RISE UP IN A MAN'S HABITS AND CHARACTER. (*The Preacher's Monthly.*) *Jacob at Bethel*:—I. We must observe, first, that in the action of the patriarch there was COMMEMORATION. It was clearly his design in erecting this pillar to commemorate the events which had recently transpired in his history, and, as far as possible, to give permanence to their remembrance. Before the invention, or the general use, of the art of writing, the commemoration of remarkable events by monumental pillars appeared the most apt and the most effectual that could be designed; and this mode, therefore, of giving permanence to great events, is a custom also very generally practised among the nations of antiquity. Although now we erect no monumental pillars, and although now we chisel not on those pillars any hieroglyphical symbols, yet we ought to cherish in our hearts the sacred recollection of the goodness we have received. That our past career has in every case been a career of mercy, and that we have all received the bounty of our common Father, is a fact which it is impossible not to admit; and of which in our remembrance no time and no change should exhaust the tenderness and the mercy; but it should continue supreme and paramount, until we are permitted to unite in the higher commemorations of that world where mercy will be consummated in salvation. But let us advert more distinctly to the nature of those mercies which it was the object of the patriarch to commemorate, and which permits a direct application to ourselves. 1. You will observe, in the first instance, that here was clearly a commemoration of providential favour. 2. Here was also the commemoration of spiritual blessings. II. We now require your attention to observe, secondly, that in the action of the patriarch there was DEDICATION. It will be observed "he took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it"—the oil being the sign, not merely that he dedicated the pillar for the purpose of commemoration, but that he also dedicated himself to the service and glory of that God from whom his mercies had been received. This act of the patriarch, my brethren, very clearly and beautifully sets forth the duty of the children of men in the review and retrospect of mercies which they have received from God—even the duty of dedicating themselves wholly to His praise and to His glory. Let me request you now, under this part of the subject,

with greater distinctness, to observe in what this dedication consists, and under what circumstances this dedication is especially appropriate. 1. Observe in what this dedication consists. It must be regarded, of course, as founded upon a recognition by men of the right of God, the Author of all their mercies, to the entire possession of whatever they possess, and of whatever they are; and comprehends within it certain resolutions which are intended to constitute a permanent state of heart and life. For, example, it comprehends a resolution that there shall be firm and unbending adherence to the truths which God has revealed; and whatever principles He is found to have announced for your cordial acceptance and belief, will be cordially embraced and adhered to. Again, it involves a resolution that there shall be anxious and diligent cultivation of the holiness which God has commanded; and whatever are the requirements of His law for governing the deportment and the affections of men, so as to conform them to His own image—these will be sincerely and cheerfully obeyed. Again, it comprehends the resolution that there shall be public and solemn union with the people whom He has redeemed; and whatever external ordinances and public professions have been appointed by Divine authority, as the pledge and the sign of that union, will be at once and readily performed; so that it may be seen by those around that the decision pronounced by Ruth has been taken in the highest and most spiritual sense with regard to those who constitute the Church of the living God: “Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.” And then it involves a resolution that there shall be zealous and persevering activity for the cause which God has established; and whatever objects God has determined upon and announced for the purpose of extending His authority and restoring His glory in this apostate and long-disordered world—these will be studiously and diligently pursued. There will be the rendering of time, there will be the rendering of talent, and the rendering (which is often the hardest of all) of property, for the purpose of carrying on those designs of mercy, which are not to terminate till the whole world shall be brought back to its allegiance to the Almighty. These, my brethren, is man called upon to give, and in the spirit in which the disciples remembered the saying and applied it to the Redeemer: “The zeal of the Lord’s house hath eaten me up.” 2. There is a second inquiry, which must be regarded as intimately connected with this, namely, under what circumstances this dedication is peculiarly appropriate. The spirit of dedication, as the result of the mercies with which God has been pleased to surround us, must properly be considered as furnishing and constituting what ought to be the habitual condition of man. There is not a pulse that beats, nor is there a throb that palpitates in the hand or in the heart, but what ought to remind every one amongst us that we should write upon ourselves “Corban”—a gift upon the altar of God. There are circumstances which sometimes peculiarly occur in the course of life, when it seems especially appropriate that the dedication should be undertaken, or, if already undertaken, that it should be renovated and renewed. We may, for example, mention seasons when new and extraordinary mercies have been received from God. We may mention, again, the seasons when new and extraordinary manifestations have occurred in the course of human existence. Here, for example, are the seasons when we constitute and enter into new domestic or social connections; the seasons when we commemorate the days of our birth, or the seasons when we mark the lapse of time by passing from one closing year to the commencement of another. III. In the action of the patriarch there was ANTICIPATION. The whole of the passage which is before us distinctly announces that, in connection with the retrospect of the past, there was, in the memorial of the patriarch, the anticipation of the future. Nor can we look upon the monumental pillar which he had erected, without finding that it was not merely a commemoration, but a prophecy; and that from the past he hurried his thoughts onward and still onward into the dark and almost impalpable future, showing him the destinies of his temporal prosperity in distant ages, especially exhibiting to him the day of Him whom Abraham rejoiced to see and was glad; and raising his thoughts above the scenes of this sublunary state to the enjoyment of that better country, that is, a heavenly, into which he knew his spiritual seed would be exalted, through the boundless mercy of God. And, my brethren, those of us who have performed the act of dedication to our God, and are desirous of preserving the spirit of dedication as long as life shall last, are called on to connect our commemoration and our dedication with

a spirit of anticipation, from which we shall find our highest and purest emotions to be derived. Observe that our expectation must involve future good in time. Having rendered yourselves to the service of that Jehovah who has conjured us by His past mercies, we have nothing before us, my brethren, in the prospect of the future, but calmness and peace. It is so in Providence. Affliction, poverty, bereavement, disease, "the rich man's scorn, the proud man's contumely," the worst storms and buffetings of "outrageous fortune"—these, separately or accumulated, form no drawback or hindrance to the enjoyment of the blessings we have announced. No, my brethren, these very things themselves, in consequence of our covenant connection with our God, are transformed, possess a new aspect; not rising before us like demons and fiends of terror, but like ministering angels, only to bring us nearer and nearer to our God, and to bring us nearer and nearer to His reward. Nor is there one who, in reviewing past mercies, which his God has rendered him, and who has been able to dedicate himself to the service of that God in return, who cannot rest in the prospect of the future, on that one stupendous, glorious announcement of the apostle, "All things shall work together for good to them that love God." And then, in the sphere of grace, what can we anticipate with regard to the future in the present life, but those enjoyments which "make rich," and can "add no sorrow"? We anticipate that we shall be kept; that we shall receive larger communications of knowledge, of holiness, of love, and of zeal; that we shall receive additional and nearer visions of Jehovah in spiritual intercourse and fellowship with Him; and that we shall be made more and more like unto Him who was given "that He might be the First-born among many brethren"; becoming etherealized in our own nature, and made thus to partake of the beginning of heaven below. Nor can we anticipate but that when the end of our pilgrimage is come, we shall go and stand by the side of the rolling stream of Jordan; not terrified nor shrinking back, as we behold it bear upon its flood the wrecks of departed beauty and departed power; for we shall find the ark of the covenant there, and the glory of the Shekinah there; and no sooner shall the foot touch the stream than the waters, as by magic power, shall cleave asunder, and will permit us to pass dry-shod through the deep, exclaiming, in triumphant language, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." And so, to use the language of Bunyan, we may anticipate that "all the trumpets shall sound for us from the other side." And my brethren, the future good which we may anticipate in time, must be also connected with the fact that we must anticipate future good throughout immortality. My brethren, there is not a blessing in Providence or in grace received by one who, as the result of an enlightened retrospective, has dedicated himself to the service of God, but what must be considered as a pledge and foretaste, a decisive promise of higher and more holy and extactic blessings which are reserved beyond the grave. And now, my brethren, in closing this address, let me present two calls to those who, perhaps, constitute a large proportion of this assembly. The first call is one to immediate repentance. In connection with our call to immediate repentance, we must also present a call to immediate dedication and devotedness to God, by which alone repentance can be testified and can be confirmed. (*J. Parsons, M.A.*)

Ver. 19. **And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first.**—*A Divine transformation*:—Luz transformed into Bethel! A grove of almonds into the house of God! The Bible is full of transformations. There is a law of gravitation spiritual as well as physical. The downward plunge, the leap earthward is natural because in accordance with this law. But what natural law can turn the current upward, heavenward? A burning brand and natural law can accomplish a transformation of ruin; but it needs Divine intervention, a law of supernatural potency, to repair the ruin, erect the pillars of redemption, and upon them to sweep the arch of perfected restoration. In other words, between Luz and Bethel—the grove of almonds and the house of God—I recognize the necessity of a Divine heart and a Divine hand. I. Let us view LUZ BEFORE THE TRANSFORMATION. In the midst of a wild and rugged region, broken here and there by hills, from the top of one of which Lot surveyed the well-watered valley of Jordan, and Abraham scanned his promised inheritance, a few stunted almond trees, drawing precarious nourishment from the scanty soil, afford grateful shade to the traveller. Gray, bare rocks everywhere shoot their sharp peaks through the parched earth, and not a vestige of

verdure relieves the eye save the little clump of trees which gives Luz its name. Significant symbol—the almond tree! Precious, princely, yet, if embittered, a deadly poison. Does the patriarch in famine-stricken Canaan design to send presents to Egypt to propitiate “the man, the lord of the country,” then he chooses the fruit of the almond tree to make his offering acceptable. Precious fruit! There is uniting in the wilderness among the princes of the host of Israel against the supremacy of Aaron, and a rod of the almond tree is chosen to represent the head of each tribe in the tabernacle of witness. Princely fruit! Precious, princely man! The almond tree of this bleak and rugged world. Let us reverence humanity. Not the rank or station, the varied and varying adventitious enwrappings of his lot, but the man himself! But alas! the almond may become embittered and transformed into deadly poison. Strangely, the bitter fruit does not differ in chemical composition from the other, yet by a mysterious change of nature, it becomes a deadly thing. Sad, yet striking symbol of man! A virulent poison has entered his life-blood and venomated the whole. Men are apt to regard sin as the commission of a few evil acts, and they are disposed to balance their so-called good acts, against the evil, with a secret complacency that the account must balance in their favour. But sin is a permeating poison, engendering the habitual disposition of rebellion against and distrust toward God, circulating its venom through every artery of the soul and tainting all the issues of life and thought. II. But notice THE TRANSFORMATION. Luz is changed to Bethel; the grove of almonds into the house of God. One evening a solitary traveller, with weary step, approaches the little clump of almond trees, and, noticing the grateful shade, casts his way-worn form upon the scant but welcome grass. His countenance betokens youth, but there are lines of deep sorrow and premature care upon his brow. The story of the prodigal son is being rehearsed in the desert of Haran. It is Jacob, the dishonest supplanter, leaving his father's house. The curtains of darkness fall upon the scene and we see the pilgrim no longer with his awful burden of woe. Does he pray? Does he weep? Jacob sleeps as soundly and sweetly that night with the bare ground for a bed, and a rock for a pillow, as he ever did when a child, upon his mother's breast. In other words, Luz is transformed into Bethel, the grove of almonds into the house of God. But wherein does this transformation consist? 1. Jehovah unbars the casement of heaven and reveals Himself to Jacob. Now it is not Jacob who discovers God; it is God who reveals Himself to the poor wanderer. Wondrous revelation! Luz is transformed into Bethel, the place is sacred ground, for where the Supreme reveals Himself, there is the house of God. This is the age of exploration and discovery. Hidden continents, unscaled summits, untraversed deeps, secret forces have been tracked and discovered. But why is it that the explorer, the man of science, the astute discoverer has brought no tidings of God? The knowledge of the Divine Being is not a discovery by man, but a revelation from God! It is He and He alone who can unfilm the eye and unstop the ear and reveal Himself. And this He does to the “babes,” to those who, like Jacob, get to the end of their resources, and in their extremity and self-destitution cry out to Him. And where He reveals Himself there is Bethel, the house of God. 2. But there is more here than a dim and distant revelation; broad as is the gulf between earth and heaven, that gulf is bridged by a ladder, the foot of which rests upon earth while the top reaches heaven. The revelation of God as He is, without such a connecting bridge, would be no boon to the sinful soul. On the 10th of May, 1869, at a place called Promontory Point, the junction was made completing the railway communication between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans in the United States of America. A silver spike was brought by the Governor of Arizona, another was contributed by the citizens of Nevada. They were driven home into a sleeper of Californian laurel with a silver mallet. As the last blow was struck the hammer was brought into contact with a telegraph wire, and the news was flashed and simultaneously saluted on the shores of two great oceans, and through the expanse of a vast continent, by the roar of cannon and the chiming of bells. When the awful abyss between God and man had to be bridged, the junction over the deepest chasm was made by the outstretched arms of the Son of God; and as the spikes crashed through His open palms He cried: “It is finished”; and swifter than electric current or lightning's flash, the tidings were winged to the farthest bounds of three worlds. The stairway connecting earth with heaven is completed; the awful chasm is bridged; Luz is transformed into Bethel. Christ by dying has opened up the way to God. 3. But Jacob not only saw the ladder erected; there was actual communication between earth and heaven; he beheld the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. Much interest concentrates in the first or trial

trip upon a new road, or over a wide and difficult bridge. And many a fair structure has succumbed to the actual strain of traffic. There are two angels at least with whom each of us may and ought to be acquainted; their names are Faith and Love. Let faith bear up your cry to the throne of God, and love will bring the answer down. Swifter than the eagle's wing, the message of grace will be borne to your needy heart, "if faith but bear the plea." And your weariness will be transformed into joy, your night of sorrow into a mid-day of gladness: in other words, Luz will be transformed into Bethel, the grove of almonds into the house of God. (*D. Osborne.*)

Vers. 20-22. And Jacob vowed a vow.—*Covenant vows*:—I. Let us, in the beginning, consider what is taught us in God's Word about vows in general, and that will lead the way easily to the examination of those peculiar in the Christian dispensation. 1. The Old Testament is the main source of all profitable information. Indeed it hardly appears necessary to go beyond it. Classic history, however, makes clear the fact that all religions and schemes of faith have encouraged their devotees in the practice of making vows to their deities. Temples of every sort, the world over, are filled with votive offerings, presented by grateful recipients of Divine favour, when they have been delivered from danger, or prospered in difficult enterprises. Even the rituals of heathenism, the wildest and the wisest seem to agree in this. The custom, therefore, has very ancient authority. It was not an original invention of Jacob. Nor was it introduced by Moses, nor was it ever announced from heaven. Its history is as old as the annals of the race. The great law-giver Moses, acting under Divine direction, found this custom when he came to the leadership of Israel. He simply set himself to regulate the practice, and put it under some code of intelligent management. 2. The New Testament doctrine. No precept given; no regulation prescribed. The spirit of the New Testament is one of freedom. Freedom, however, is not lawlessness; liberty is not license. It is possible that there may be found in our churches some persons, or even in our own moods, some moments to which vows could be of service. II. From these general considerations, it gives us pleasure and relief to turn to the special examination of what we term Christian vows. 1. We mean by this expression to cover a class of covenant engagements which stand in close relationship to the New Testament church. They are represented in the two ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. 2. The reach of these vows is universal. They cover our possessions—our ways—our hearts—our lives. 3. A reach so extensive as this flings over the whole transaction a spirit of profound solemnity. The parties to the covenant are not man and man, but man and God. The witnesses who stand around are the world, the church, angels—and devils. The sanctions of the covenant are expressively sacred and awful. All the good and evil of this life, all the blessings and the curses of the life to come hang upon the question of our fidelity in keeping the faith we have pledged. 4. Now no mere human being could abide the pressure of engagements of such reach and solemnity, except for the alleviation annexed to them. There is a promise underneath each one of them all. God not only keeps His own covenant, but helps us keep ours. 5. The use which can be made practically of these covenant engagements of ours is threefold. They give us a profitable caution; they furnish ground for fresh hope; they remind us of former experiences of trust and deliverance. The stated, steady repetition of them at periodic times, is of prodigious service. They suddenly arrest us in the midst of daily life, and demand a return of thoughtful surrender. The moment temptation confronts us, a voice seems to speak in the air—Remember thine oath! And if we are intelligent, we are quite glad to remember it; for God covenanted when we did. There is a dowry in every duty, and a promise in every call. Our vows come to be burdens less, and badges more; they are not fetters on our limbs, but rings on our fingers. (*C. S. Robinson, D.D.*) *A long look ahead*:—I. WHAT JACOB SOUGHT. 1. God's presence. 2. Divine protection. 3. Divine providence. 4. Divine peace. II. WHAT JACOB PROMISED. 1. To surrender himself, his entire being, to God. 2. To establish a perennial reminder of Divine goodness and mercy on the spot where he had first found it. 3. To consecrate to God a fixed portion of his income for all benevolent and religious use. (*Ibid.*) *The noble resolve*:—There were three steps in God's dealings with this mean and crafty spirit; and in one form or another they have a universal application. 1. To begin with, God revealed Jacob to himself. 2. In the next place, God permitted Jacob to suffer the loss of all earthly friends and goods. 3. Finally, God thrust into Jacob's life a revelation of His love. That ladder symbolized the love of God. All through his life that love had surrounded Jacob with its balmy atmosphere; but he

had never realized, or returned, or yielded to it. But now it was gathered up and crystallized into one definite appeal, and thrust upon him; so that he could do no other than behold it. And in that hour of conviction and need, it was as welcome as a ladder put down into a dark and noisome pit, where a man is sinking fast into despair; he quickly hails its seasonable aid, and begins to climb back to daylight. The revelation of God's love will have five results on the receptive spirit. I. **IT WILL MAKE US QUICK TO DISCOVER GOD.** Jacob had been inclined to localize God in his father's tents: as many localize Him now in chapel, church, or minister; supposing that prayer and worship are more acceptable there than anywhere beside. Now he learned that God was equally in every place—on the moorland waste as well as by Isaac's altar, though his eyes had been too blind to perceive Him. In point of fact, the difference lay not in God, but in himself; the human spirit carries with it everywhere its own atmosphere, through which it may see, or not see, the presence of the Omnipresent. If your spirit is reverent, it will discern God on a moorland waste. If your spirit is thoughtless and careless, it will fail to find Him even in the face of Jesus Christ. II. **IT WILL INSPIRE US WITH GODLY FEAR.** "He was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place!" "Perfect love casteth out fear"—the fear that hath torment; but it begets in us another fear, which is the beginning of wisdom and the foundation of all noble lives; the fear that reveres God, and shudders to grieve Him; and dreads to lose the tiniest chance of doing His holy will. True love is always fearless and fearful. It is fearless with the freedom of undoubting trust; but it is fearful lest it should miss a single grain of tender affection, or should bring a moment's shadow over the face of the beloved. III. **IT WILL CONSTRAIN US TO GIVE OURSELVES TO GOD.** IV. **IT WILL PROMPT US TO DEVOTE OUR PROPERTY TO HIM.** "Of all that Thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto Thee." There is no reason to doubt that this became the principle of Jacob's life: and if so, he shames the majority of Christian people—most of whom do not give on principle; and give a very uncertain and meagre percentage of their income. V. **IT WILL FILL US WITH JOY.** "Then Jacob lifted up his feet" (xxix. 1, marg.). Does not that denote the light-hearted alacrity with which he sped upon his way? His feet were winged with joy, and seemed scarcely to tread the earth. All sorrow had gone from his heart; for he had handed his burdens over to those ascending angels. And this will be our happy lot, if only we will believe the love that God hath to us. We, too, shall lose our burdens at the foot of the Cross; and we shall learn the blessed secret of handing over, as soon as they arise, all worries and fears to our pitiful High Priest. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) **Jacob's vow:—**I. **WHAT JACOB DESIRED OF GOD IN REFERENCE TO THIS WORLD.** 1. The comfortable presence and favour of God. "If God will be with me." When the ancients would express all that seemed beneficial in life, they used this phrase (Gen. xxxix. 2, 3, 21). The wisdom, courage, and success of David is resolved into this; "The Lord was with him" (1 Sam. xviii. 14, 28; 2 Sam. v. 10). This administers solid, satisfying comfort to the soul (Psa. iv. 6, 7; xxxvi. 7-9; lxxiii. 1; John iv. 14). 2. The guidance of the Divine counsel and the protection of the Divine providence. "And will keep me in this way that I go." This is a most sure direction and safe defence. The righteous shall not err in anything of importance, either as to this life or the next; either as to truth or duty. They shall be safe (Prov. xviii. 10; Psa. xxvii. 1-6; xxxii. 7). II. **WHAT JACOB PROMISED TO GOD.** "Then shall the Lord be my God." (*J. Benson.*) **The vow:—**I. **NOTICE THE IMPRESSION MADE UPON JACOB'S MIND.** This vision, which had been vouchsafed to him, was not a mere idle dream, passing confusedly away with the shades of night, and leaving no useful lesson impressed upon the heart. It was a mysterious scene, permitted to pass before the mind of Jacob in his sleep; but it left a real, powerful, and lasting impression behind. The impression produced was rational, powerful, convincing, and influential; it was such an impression as was most desirable under his circumstances, and such as issued in the most becoming and consistent conduct. 1. He was impressed with a sense of the presence and nearness of the invisible God. Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not." He had a clear conviction that God had been with him in a very peculiar manner. "He inhabiteth eternity. He filleth all in all. He is about our bed, and about our path, and spies out all our ways. If we go up to heaven He is there, if we go down to hell He is there also. In Him we live, and move, and have our being—and He is not far off from any one of us." But the scripture shows us also, that God is particularly present with, and near to His saints. A large portion of the revealed word of God is occupied in showing that "the Lord is nigh unto them that call upon Him";

that if we will "draw nigh to God, He will draw nigh to us." "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath these are the everlasting arms." The 121st Psalm seems almost to refer to this very event, when it says, "Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." There is then, for the first time, a consciousness of God's existence—of his presence and nearness to the soul—a reality of communion with Him—a living sensibly within the range of His holy influence and dominion—and a bringing this fact to bear continually upon the conduct and the heart. The impression produced on his mind through a vision, was the same as that which is now given through the shining of the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ into the heart. It was the knowledge of God. 2. He felt that the presence of God was awful. He said, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place!" No man can trifle with religious services who is admitted to the reality of religious privileges. The more his religious impressions, convictions, intentions, and enjoyments, assume the character of reality, the more serious will he be in his spirit, and in all his religious feelings and transactions. A becoming seriousness of deportment is always the result of frequent communion with God—of much living in the Divine presence. It will not be irrelevant to notice here that a truly sincere and serious spirit in religion will show itself in an enlightened, but not superstitious, attention to all the decencies and proprieties of the public service of God. 3. Jacob was impressed with the conviction that the place where God communicates with men is "the gate of heaven." That communion with God by faith is an opening to the mind of the eternal and invisible world, a realizing of that interior and more elevated scene of God's dominions, where He reigns unveiled. Faith is the gate of heaven. 4. This vision evidently impressed Jacob with a higher notion of the benevolence and kindness of God. It was altogether a revelation of a peculiarly merciful character. II. We come to notice THE CONDUCT WHICH JACOB IMMEDIATELY ADOPTED. His provision for the external act of worship was but scanty; but whatever, under his straitened circumstances, he could perform, he did. There was here no idle and specious delay. It would have been easy to have deferred this solemn scene of worship to a more seasonable opportunity, when he would be better provided. But this is not the effect of the gifts of Divine grace. The mercy of God, thus graciously revealed to him, had touched his heart; and it made the religious service, and the religious vow, his delight. He rose early, and while his feelings were yet fresh, and unblemished by the mere natural course of vagrant thought, he addressed himself to this act of piety, that he might perpetuate in his waking hours the enjoyments of his extraordinary dream. What could be more simple and spiritual than this act of worship? All the formalities of official sacrifice are, in the want of means for them, dispensed with. No bleeding sacrifice was there; but in the simple symbol that he was compelled to use, the true spirit of the appointed ceremony was retained. The type of the true Israel, he appears to have out-reached the bounds of knowledge in those earlier days, and to have approached God as a true worshipper, in spirit and in truth. III. But we shall consider this more particularly as we notice THE VOW WHICH JACOB MADE. There are several circumstances in the language of Jacob's vow which are worthy of remark. 1. His piety, "If God will be with me." He does not ask for the advantage of powerful friends, or connections in life. "He sought first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,"—counting "the loving-kindness of God better than life"; and the favour of God more valuable than worldly friends or honours. The love of God is the essential feature of true piety. 2. Observe his moderation. It is the legitimate effect of true religion, to moderate the desires of the heart for everything but spiritual blessings. "The land whereupon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed;" but he simply limited his prayer to this, "If God will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace." In the face of so extensive a promise, he asked only for food and clothing, and a return to his father's house. It is true, that generally in the outset of life, men's views and wishes are more moderate than they afterwards become; and even ambition is limited in its wishes, by the bounds of apparent probability—so much so, that in looking back upon past life, the moderation of man's early wishes is often a matter of surprise to themselves. But the spirit of Jacob was shown in this, that with the promise of wealth and exaltation before him, he still confined his wish to the needful supply of his daily wants—to food and raiment, and safe return. How few are there who are content with Jacob's portion! I speak of some, of whom there is reason to hope that they have Jacob's God for their God, but with whom there still seems a lingering attachment

to the world which they are professing to renounce, and an unjustifiable managing and contriving to obtain, either for themselves or their children, a surer hold upon its dignities and its possessions. 3. Observe, again, Jacob's gratitude. He prayed even for less than God had promised; but he felt that all that he could ever be possessed of was a merciful gift, and he was willing to acknowledge that it was due to him from whom it was received. "This stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that thou shalt give me, I will give the tenth unto thee." A zealous contribution of personal exertion, and pecuniary aid, to the cause of God and of truth, had always marked the real servant of the Lord. The worldly man may be benevolent to men, but he is never liberal for God. Again, fix your attention on the event of Jacob's life, and consider how important was the influence which it had upon him. All his life was coloured by this solemn and interesting transaction. How important it is, then, to begin life with God—to set out rightly. Lastly, let the whole tenour of Jacob's conduct on this occasion show you, in illustration of the remark with which we set out, the legitimate effect of Divine mercy. It leads directly to holiness of life. (*E. Craig.*) *Lessons*:—1. God's promises and appearance to His may well require their vows to Him. 2. Vows to God must follow His promises, not precede by conditioning with Him. 3. God's presence, provision, protection, and safeguarding His own, is just ground of vowing souls to Him. 4. It is just to vow man's self in inward worship to God, as the Lord promiseth Himself to him. 5. It is righteous to vow outward worship to God in time and place, as He desireth. 6. It is man's duty to vow and pay the tenth of all his estate to God for the uses He hath appointed (ver. 22). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Jacob's contract with God*:—This vow has been sneered at—a bargain of Jacob's it is said. And in truth it is not in the highest spirit. But at least there is no affection of superfluous piety in the Bible. That is something. What it is, it is. But what is this? Perhaps not a shrewd bargain, but a solemn and creditable contract with God, namely, that Jacob will be faithful to God if God will be faithful to him. Not the highest, certainly—not Job's "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Jacob would have stood on a far nobler height had he said, "I will worship this adorable God, who has shown me His glory as He stooped to my low estate. I will trust and obey Him though He desert me and strip me." Yes; but when shall we have done thinking that our refinements and perfections of view were theirs? An occasional spirit like Abraham's went higher than Jacob's. A spirit like Job's shot far higher yet, I think, and anticipated the whole possibility of man. These were splendid anomalies; but Jacob was the true representative of the good man of his time. Remembering this, the contrast was not as bad as it seems, but was natural and even beautiful. He does not ask God for riches, but simply, like a child (for these primitive men were but children), he asks only for protection and support: "If the Lord," &c. This, although it has a child's religious inferiority, yet seems so artless and heartless that I think it was, even to the ear of God, a very pleasing speech. And I wish that we would go as far. Suppose now, we say—which of us is ready?—"If the Lord will keep me alive for this year, and give me food and raiment, He shall be my God." Let no man sneer at Jacob until he is Jacob's equal. (*A. G. Mercer, D.D.*) Of all that Thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto Thee.—*Tithes at the start*:—The two important matters of notice, in this text, are the early purpose of this young patriarch to give a portion of his wealth to religious ends, and the establishment of a fixed system in presenting it. It seems to be in Scripture history the exact beginning of all that custom of tithing the people which meets us everywhere in the Old Testament. It has arrested my attention, because it is the act of a young man just starting in the new life. It furnishes me with this for a topic—Systematic beneficence: its principle and its measure. I. THE PRINCIPLE may be stated in one compact sentence: A Christian is to contribute, not on impulse, but by plan. Jacob seems to have understood in the outset that this was to be the practical side of his life. 1. This duty should be taken up early by every young Christian as a matter of study. 2. It will not do to discharge this work all at once. A settled habit of giving is promoted only by a settled exercise of giving. 3. It will not do to leave this duty to a mere impulse of excitement. Christians ought never to wait for fervid appeals or ardent addresses to sympathy. 4. It will not do to perform this duty as a mere mechanical form. We are told, in one familiar verse of the New Testament, that "he which soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly." This singular word "sparingly" occurs nowhere else in the Scriptures. It means grievously, regretfully; holding back after the gift, if such an expression may be

allowed. 5. This duty is to be discharged only with a diligent comparison of means with ends. System in giving is the secret of all success. II. THE MEASURE OF CHRISTIAN BENEVOLENCE. 1. Give tithes to start with. 2. Tithes, just to start with, will in many cases force a Christian on to increase as he grows in fortune. When life grows easier, and gains more plentiful, the good Lord, whose stewards we are, raises His rates of loan, and expects more liberal returns. III. CONSIDERATIONS WHICH ENTER INTO THE RECKONING. 1. Think of what has been done in our behalf by God, our Maker and Redeemer. We should measure our gifts in money by our receipts in grace. 2. Remember whence the prosperity came, out of which we give money. God seeks where He has given. 3. Consider the extent of the work which is to be accomplished. 4. Think of the promises which reward the free-giver. "The liberal soul shall be made fat." 5. Think of the exigencies arising under the favouring providences of God. 6. Think of the listlessness of others. Conclusion: He who gives tithes at the start will grow himself as his fortune grows. He that delays will harden. And it should never be forgotten that money is only the measure of manhood when consecrated to Christ. It is ourselves we give to Him, ourselves He demands. (C. S. Robinson, D.D.) *The tenth is God's*:—The late Bishop Selwyn used often to quote that motto of John Wesley's, "Save all you can and give all you save," and he did not think that charity began until after a tithe had been paid to God. "Whatever your income," he wrote once to his son, "remember that only nine-tenths of it are at your disposal." (*Old Testament Anecdotes*.) *Giving a tenth*:—Heathen nations used to give a tenth for religious objects. Oberlin, a poor French minister, did this in giving his tenth of income, and then God so blessed him in his circumstances, that he used to say he "abounded in wealth." One day Oberlin was reading in the Old Testament where God told the Jews that He expected them to give a tithe of all their property to Him, said he to himself, "Well, I am sure that I, as a Christian, have three times as many blessings as the Jews had. If it was right for a Jew to give one tenth of his property to God, surely I ought to give at least *three times as much as that*." So he made up his mind to do this. The Jews called giving "the hedge of riches." "Perhaps there was never a man more generous than Mr. Wesley." For years, when his yearly income was between £30 and £120, he lived upon £28 a year, and gave away the remainder. It is supposed that during his life he gave away £30,000, and when he died he left little more than was necessary to bury him, and to pay his debts. *A tenth of all*:—"Take it quick, quick," said a merchant who had promised, like Jacob, to return to the Lord a tenth of all that he should give him, and found that it amounted to so large a sum, that he said, "I cannot give so much," and set aside a smaller amount. Then his conscience smote him, and, coming to himself, he said, "What! can I be so mean? Because God has thus blessed me that I have this large profit, shall I now rob Him of His portion?" And fearing his own selfish nature, he made haste to place it beyond his reach in the treasury of the Lord, coming almost breathless to the pastor's house, and holding the money in his outstretched hand. *Helping on the work of God*:—A widow found pardon and peace in her Saviour in her sixty-ninth year. Her gratitude and love overflowed and often refreshed the hearts of Christians of long experience. The house of God became very dear to her, and she was often seen to drop a gift in the church door box though her income was only 2s. 6d. per week. A fall in her seventy-second year prevented her ever coming out again. A little boy being seen to drop something into the box, was asked what it was. He said, "It is Mrs. W——'s penny." He was told to take it back to her, and to say that her good intention was prized, but that her friends could not let her thus reduce her small means, especially as she could not come out to worship. She replied, "Boy, why did you let them see you give it? Take it again and put it in when no one sees you." Then weeping, she said, "What, and am I not to be allowed to help in the work of God any more because I can't get out?" *Substance consecrated to God*:—John Crossley, the founder of the firm of the Crossleys of Halifax, married a Yorkshire farmer's daughter, a woman of genuine piety and strong common sense. Crossley was frugal and thrifty. He got on well, laid by his earnings, and at length was able to rent a wool-mill and dwelling-house. When the couple were about entering their new quarters a holy purpose of consecration took possession of the young wife. On the day of entering the house she rose at four o'clock in the morning and went into the door-yard. There in the early twilight, before entering the house, she kneeled on the ground and gave her life anew to God. She vowed most solemnly in these words, "If the Lord does bless

me at this place the poor shall have a share of it." That grand act of consecration was the germ of a life of marvellous nobility. (F. G. Clarke, D.D.)

CHAPTER XXIX.

VERS. 1-14. Then Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the east.—*Jacob's experience on his journey*:—I. THAT GOD'S PRESENCE WITH HIM MADE HIS DUTIES AND HIS TROUBLES LIGHT. He who casts his burden upon the Lord ceases to weary himself, and finds that even labour is rest and pain is sweet. II. THAT PROVIDENCE WAS STILL HIS GUIDE. All his life through Providence had guided him, but he knew it not as he ought to know. Now, even in the most ordinary and likely events of life he learns to trace the hand of Providence. Providence brings to this spot the very woman who is designed to be the wife of Jacob. Surely he could not fail to see that even through all the strange trials of his journey, and through the most untoward events, the will of God was being accomplished. III. THAT GOD'S GRACIOUS DEALINGS WITH HIM CALLED FOR GRATITUDE. Jacob was deeply touched by the kindness of God; and while he embraced Rachel, he "lifted up his voice and wept." They were tears started by the remembrance of his faithless misgivings, but they were also tears of joy at the thought that his difficulties were at an end, and that the great object of his mission had been gained. (T. H. Leale.) *Providential guidance*:—1. God's gracious appearances to a soul may encourage it to go any whither where God would have them. 2. Encouragements from God and engagements to Him will make a man speed in the way where God calleth. 3. Providence bringeth an obedient soul safely to the place appointed for him. 4. Providence sendeth to every part His servants to raise His Church. The East is not exempted, Abraham from hence, Job in this place were eminent, and now Jacob is sent to it (ver. 2). (G. Hughes, B.D.) *Jacob, the pilgrim*:—Rich in distant hopes, but cheerless in his immediate prospects, Jacob left the land of promise. He was a true pilgrim; and his whole life was a wearisome and changeful pilgrimage. The gold of his capacious and lofty mind was to be purified from its strong alloy of dishonesty and cunning in the furnace of misery and toil; his moral education commenced at his departure from the parental house, and after many tribulations only, resulted in that peace of mind which is at once the surest symptom and the choicest reward of true virtue. Jacob's life has always been considered as a type; we see in it, indeed, the eternal image of man's protracted contests, both against the foe in his heart and with his destinies, till at last the internal enemy is either wearied out by his resistance, or expelled by his energy, or reconciled by his sufferings (see on xxxiv. 1-4). Among the earliest seeds sowed by Jacob were deceit and craft; and flight and exile were the first fruits of his harvest. While his grandfather's servants had undertaken the journey to the town of Nahor with ten camels laden with all the most precious treasures (xxiv. 10); the offspring of the alliance concluded in consequence of that journey, left his father's roof, as a poor wanderer, without an friend or an attendant, and without an animal to lighten the fatigues of the way. (M. M. Kalisch, Ph.D.) *Lessons*:—1. Providence maketh God's servants to see in due time some characters of their being near their journey's end, and accomplishment of His promise. 2. Things of usual account by some may be made by Providence of special use to comfort others. So the well, &c., here spoken of Jacob (ver. 2). 3. To seek community of good in neighbourhood is the very law of nature. Not each to prevent other. 4. Preservation of public commodities for life and comfort, is that which nature will teach men. It is unnatural to destroy (ver. 3-5). (G. Hughes, B.D.) *Lessons*:—1. Providence maketh questions means to the satisfaction of His. 2. Sons are best known by the most eminent of their ancestors. 3. Nahor and his descent, with their way and religion, were known in Syria (ver. 5). 4. It is but Nature's dictate to inquire of the welfare of related friends. 5. Providence orders peace to others, that with them His servants may have peace. 6. Providence orders meeting of friends and comforts which man cannot project, and doth little think of. Here Jacob meets Rachel (ver. 6). (Ibid.)

Rachel his daughter cometh.—*LESSONS*:—1. Providential meetings may justly occasion providential advice from strangers to others. 2. Time and business should be rationally managed to the improvement of both (ver. 7). 3. Ingenuity taketh not amiss occasional advice from strangers. 4. Ingenuous men, if they follow not counsel, will give their reason. 5. Impotency to duty justly may excuse it. 6. Iniquity must not be done to others for private advantage (ver. 8). (*Ibid.*) *LESSONS*:—1. God's good hand sendeth the mercy sometimes to His servants while they inquire about it. 2. The eminent in His church God hath called from the lowest condition in the world. 3. It is not unbecoming the greatest ladies to be found in honest labour. It was not to Rachel. It suits the mother of the Church to be a shepherdess (ver. 9). (*Ibid.*) *LESSONS*:—1. Discoveries of such as are near in the flesh is enough in nature to move for doing them good. 2. Readiness and pains to show kindness unto friends in the flesh becometh both grace and nature (ver. 10). (*Ibid.*) *LESSONS*:—1. Self-discovery is proper, when God sends friends to meet at unawares. 2. Ingenuity gladly receiveth the manifestation of near friends in the flesh. (*Ibid.*)

The meeting of Jacob with Rachel and Laban.—I. **THE STRANGER AT THE WELL.** Jacob. 1. The journey ended. Canaan, Bethel, and his father's house behind him. Mountains, deserts, rivers, and rocky wildernesses between. God had kept him (xxviii. 20), so far, from wild beasts and robbers, and all "perils of the wilderness." 2. He arrives on the confines of civilized life once more; yet knows not how near the end of his journey he is. Finds flocks, and pasturage, and the dwellings of men. 3. Rests by the well side. Knows that it will soon be the meeting-place of men, from the flocks that are gathering round the spot. 4. The shepherds arrive. He converses with them. Finds they are of Haran, the place he is journeying to. Inquires concerning his kindred. Discovers that they are well, and that Rachel, the daughter of Laban, is on the way to water the flock. II. **THE SHEPHERDESS.** Rachel. 1. Primitive habits, and pastoral life in the East. The daughters of large land owners, and men of substance, tending sheep. 2. Rachel approaches the well. Finds a stranger sitting near. Knows him not. He has been told who she is. 3. Though weary with his journey, Jacob rises, and rolls the stone away, and waters Rachel's flock for her. Rachel doubtless wondering at this unexpected kindness. 4. Jacob, having watered the flock, salutes the shepherdess after the common fashion of the country. A courteous and customary greeting. 5. Jacob weeps tears of joy that he has found the kindred of whom he is in search; and of thankfulness that God has so far guided and blessed him. Rachel wondering. 6. Jacob tells his story. Mentions the name of that Rebekah of whom she had heard, and who years before had gone across the great desert to her distant home. III. **THE WELCOME HOME.** The home of Laban. 1. Rachel, full of joyful surprise, hastens forward, and tells the story of the strange traveller to her father. 2. Laban, also surprised, quickly goes to the well to meet him. Salutes him, as Jacob had saluted Rachel, and brings him home. Eastern hospitality. 3. Jacob repeats his story to Laban. Doubtless, while silent about many things, related that the birthright and the blessing were his; and described the vision he had by the way. 4. Laban cordially—because of his relationship especially—invites Jacob to abide with him. Learn: I. That a good man's steps are ordered of the Lord, and He delighteth in his way. II. If we commit our way unto the Lord, He will bring it to pass. III. As Jacob watered Rachel's flock, so should we be self-denying and helpful. IV. Aim, like Rachel, at living a useful life. It was when she was employed in her works of duty that she met with Jacob. V. Like Jacob, acknowledge God as the giver of all good, and the guide of our life. (*J. C. Gray.*)

We cannot, until all the flocks be gathered together.—*Watering the sheep*:—A scene in Mesopotamia, beautifully pastoral. A well of water of great value in that region. The fields around about it white with three flocks of sheep lying down waiting for the watering. I hear their bleating coming on the bright air, and the laughter of young men and maidens indulging in rustic repartee. I look off, and I see other flocks of sheep coming. Meanwhile, Jacob, a stranger, on the interesting errand of looking for a wife, comes to the well. A beautiful shepherdess comes to the same well. I see her approaching, followed by her father's flock of sheep. Jacob accosts the shepherds and asks them why they postpone the slaking of the thirst of these sheep, and why they did not immediately proceed to water them? The shepherds reply to the effect: "We are all good neighbours, and as a matter of courtesy we wait until all the sheep of the neighbourhood come up. Besides that, this stone on the well's mouth is somewhat heavy, and several of us take hold of it and push it aside, and then the buckets and the troughs are filled,

and the sheep are satisfied. We cannot, until all the flocks be gathered together, and till they roll the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep." Now a great flock of sheep to-day gather around this Gospel well. There are a great many thirsty souls. I wonder why the flocks of all nations do not gather—why so many stay thirsty; and while I am wondering about it, my text breaks forth in the explanation, saying: "We cannot, until all the flocks be gathered together, and till they roll the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep." This well of the Gospel is deep enough to put out the burning thirst of the twelve hundred million of the race. Do not let the Church by a spirit of exclusiveness keep the world out. Let down all the bars, swing open all the gates, scatter all the invitations: "Whosoever will let him come." I. You notice that this well of Mesopotamia had a stone on it, which must be removed before the sheep could be watered; and I find on the well of salvation to-day IMPEDIMENTS AND OBSTACLES, which must be removed in order that you may obtain the refreshment and life of this Gospel.

1. In your case the impediment is pride of heart. You cannot bear to come to so democratic a fountain; you do not want to come with so many others. You will have to remove the obstacle of pride, or never find your way to the well. You will have to come as we came, willing to take the water of eternal life in any way, and at any hand, and in any kind of picture, crying out: "O Lord Jesus, I am dying of thirst. Give me the water of eternal life, whether in trough or goblet; give me the water of life; I care not in what it comes to me." Away with all your hindrances of pride from the well's mouth.

2. Here is another man who is kept back from this water of life by the stone of an obdurate heart, which lies over the mouth of the well. You have no more feeling upon this subject than if God had yet to do you the first kindness, or you had to do God the first wrong. Seated on His lap all these years, His everlasting arms sheltering you, where is your gratitude? Where is your morning and evening prayer? Where are your consecrated lives? O man, what dost thou with that hard heart? Canst thou not feel one throb of gratitude towards the God who made you, and the Christ who came to redeem you, and the Holy Ghost who has all these years been importuning you?

II. Jacob with a good deal of tug and push took the stone from the well's mouth, so that the flocks might be watered. And I would that this morning my word, blessed of God, might remove the hindrances to your getting up to the Gospel well. Yea, I take it for granted that the work is done, and now like Oriental shepherds, I PROCEED TO WATER THE SHEEP.

1. Come, all ye thirsty! You have an undefined longing in your souls. You tried money-making; that did not satisfy you. You tried office under government; that did not satisfy you. You tried pictures and sculptures, but works of art did not satisfy you. You are as much discontented with this life as the celebrated French author who felt that he could not any longer endure the misfortunes of the world, and who said: "At four o'clock this afternoon I shall put an end to my own existence. Meanwhile, I must toil on up to that time for the sustenance of my family." And he wrote on his book until the clock struck four, when he folded up his manuscript and, by his own hand, concluded his earthly life. There are men in this house who are perfectly discontented. Unhappy in the past, unhappy to-day, to be unhappy for ever, unless you come to this Gospel-well. This satisfies the soul with a high, deep, all-absorbing, and eternal satisfaction.

2. Come, also, to this Gospel-well, all ye troubled. I do not suppose you have escaped. Compare your view of this life at fifteen years of age with what your view of it is at forty, sixty, or seventy. What a great contrast of opinion! Were you right, then, or are you right now? Two cups placed in your hands, the one a sweet cup, the other a sour cup. A cup of joy and a cup of grief. Which has been the nearest to being full, and out of which have you the more frequently partaken? Oh, you have had trouble, trouble, trouble. God only knows how much you have had. It is a wonder you have been able to live through it. It is a wonder your nervous system has not been shattered, and your brain has not reeled. Trouble, trouble. If I could gather all the griefs, of all sorts, from this great audience, and could put them in one scroll, neither man nor angel could endure the recitation. Well what do you want? Would you like to have your property back again? "No," you say, as a Christian man: "I was becoming arrogant, and I think that is why the Lord took it away. I don't want to have my property back." Well, would you have your departed friends back again? "No," you say: "I couldn't take the responsibility of bringing them from a tearless realm to one of tears. I couldn't do it." Well, then, what do you want? A thousand voices in the audience cry out: "Comfort, give us comfort." For that reason I have rolled away the stone

from the well's mouth. Come, all ye wounded of the flock, pursued of the wolves, come to the fountain where the Lord's sick and bereft ones have come. I gather all the promises to-day in a group, and I ask the shepherds to drive their flocks of lambs and sheep up to the sparkling supply. "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth." "Though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion." "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." Oh, what a great flock of sheep God will gather around the celestial well. No stone on the well's mouth, while the Shepherd waters the sheep. (*Dr. Talmage.*)

Vers. 15-20. Jacob served seven years for Rachel.—*Jacob's lowly estate*:—I. ITS EVIDENCE. 1. He is obliged to accept a position of servitude. 2. He is obliged to prostitute the most sacred affections by consenting to a mercenary bargain. II. ITS CONSOLATION (ver. 20). Love lightens and cheers every task of labour and endurance. A week of years was like a week of days to him. Coleridge says, "No man could be a bad man who loved as Jacob loved Rachel." III. ITS LESSONS FOR HIS POSTERITY. Israel was destined to rise to eminence and power amongst the family of nations. But it was necessary for that people to be reminded of the lowly estate of their forefather. When the Israelite presented his basket of first fruits before the Lord, he was instructed to confess, "A Syrian ready to perish was my father" (Deut. xvi. 5). The nation was thus taught that all its greatness and prosperity were not due to natural endowments and industry, but to the electing love of God. The strength of His grace was made perfect in weakness. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Jacob's servitude*:—1. His agreement with Laban. (1) The degraded position in which women were regarded among the ancients. (2) Laban's dishonesty in the non-fulfilment of his agreement. 2. In this servitude of Jacob, we find the principle of inevitable retribution. He had deceived his father, and here in his turn he was overreached. Leah deceived her husband, and in consequence lost his affection. Here both deceivers were justly punished. O my beloved brethren, be sure, be sure, be sure, your sin will find you out. 3. We have here, lastly, the principle of compensation; Leah lost her husband's affections, but she was blessed in her family (ver. 31). Here we have punishment tempered with mercy. This is what the Cross has done for us; it prevents penalty from being simply penalty; it leaves us not alone to punishment, but mingles all with blessing and forgiveness. Through it life has its bright as well as its dark side. (*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*) *The education of home*:—I. THE FOUR CONDITIONS OF A TRUE HOME. 1. There must be a supreme affection (ver. 18). No two should marry unless each feels that life without the other would be incomplete. 2. Marriage must be "only in the Lord" (see Deut. vii. 3; 1 Cor. vii. 39; 2. Cor. vi. 14, 15). A mixed marriage is a prolific source of misery. The ungodly partner despises the Christian for marrying in the teeth of principle. The Christian is disappointed because the apparent influence gained before marriage is dissipated soon after the knot is irrevocably tied. 3. A true home should be based on the good will of parents and friends (Gen. xxviii. 1-5). 4. There should be some prospect of suitable livelihood. II. THE EXPULSIVE POWER OF SUPREME AFFECTION (ver. 20). Love's labour is always light. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Marriage difficulties*:—1. No sin against our bodies, or against the trust which man should repose in man or God, goes altogether unpunished. 2. Changes in life are steps in our education by God. 3. God deals with all parts of human dispositions. 4. Yield yourselves unto God. 5. Expect difficulties in your way to do right. (*D. G. Watt, M.A.*) *The years of exile and servitude*:—I. THE ERRORS OF THE YEARS OF SERVITUDE. II. ITS TRIALS. III. ITS BLESSINGS. (*T. S. Dickson.*) *Lessons*:—1. Honest, gracious souls dare not be idle when they do but visit friends. Jacob. 2. Laborious men in God's fear will want no hirers; Laban looks after such a servant. 3. Labans are first motioners for Jacobs; the covetous masters for honest servants. 4. The most unrighteous men may grant principles of equity which they never mean to practice. So Laban. 5. The faithful servant and labourer is worthy of his due reward. A brother servant that is faithful is worthy of any wages reasonably to be expected (ver. 15). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *The purchase of a wife*:—As Jacob possessed no property, and could not, therefore, buy his wife, he paid for her by seven years of service. But was this indeed so degrading as it has, by almost general consent, been denounced to be? It is alleged that, as the wife is, in the East, regarded only as a kind of slave, first subordinate to the father, and then to the husband, she was, like the slave, acquired by purchase, and for

almost exactly the same price. Such certainly was and is the case among many uncivilized tribes. But does the purchase not admit of another construction? Among some nations, the marriage-price is distinctly regarded as a compensation due to the parents for the trouble and expense incurred by the education of the daughter. From this view there is but one step to the notion that the parents deserve the gratitude of the man to whom they give their child; and the Hebrews, who assigned to the women a position eminently high and honourable, who regarded the wife as an integral part of the husband, and as the indispensable condition of his happiness, and among whom it was a proverbial adage, that "an excellent wife is far more precious than riches"—the Hebrews bought their wives as a treasure and the most valuable possession. It may be seriously asked whether such a purchase was, in principle, not more dignified than the custom according to which the wife buys, as it were, a husband by her dowry, and in consequence of which the daughters of poor parents are in a very precarious position, while, in the East, daughters are at least no burden on their fathers. In practice, that custom is certainly liable to considerable abuses; heartless or avaricious parents, without consulting the inclination of their daughters, may sell them to those who bid the highest price; but scarcely any principle, however lofty, is safe against abuse; besides, it was a law among most tribes, that the daughter's consent must first be obtained; and it was a custom among some, that the money received by the parents should be applied for the benefit of the bride or the young couple. But suppose even that the manner of courting and acquiring the wife was not in every respect noble and delicate among the Hebrews, it certainly did not affect the relative position of husband and wife; the one was no master, the other no slave; the usual customs could, therefore, safely be retained, as long as they did not endanger the beautiful principles which guaranteed the dignity of the other sex. (*M. M. Kalisch, Ph.D.*) *Serving for a bride*:—It is related that a rich saddler, whose daughter was afterwards married to Dunk, the celebrated Earl of Halifax, ordered in his will that she should lose the whole of her fortune if she did not marry a saddler. The young Earl of Halifax, in order to win the bride, served an apprenticeship of seven years to a saddler, and afterwards bound himself to the rich saddler's daughter for life.

Vers. 21-28. **He took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him.**—*Laban's fraud on Jacob*:—I. THE CHARACTER OF THE FRAUD. 1. Deliberate. 2. Bold. 3. Selfish. II. THE FRAUD CONSIDERED AS A RETRIBUTION. There are sins which in this world are often punished in kind. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Lessons*:—1. The day revealeth that evil usually which the night covereth, sin may hide itself a little while till the morning. 2. Seeming Rachel over night is found Leah in the morning. Fair offers to be deceits. 3. Honest souls, though drawn into error, are full of indignation against it, and the cursers of it when discovered. 4. Plain covenant work is sufficient to convince deceivers that forsake it. 5. Service for Rachel should have Rachel for its reward. 6. It is gross falsehood and deceit to deny covenant reward, and adulterate it with worse (ver. 25). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Laban's deceit*:—This discloses a baseness in Laban's character, arousing contempt and aversion; but it ought not to blind us against the redeeming qualities of his heart. In the human mind, fragrant flowers often blossom surprisingly by the side of noxious weeds. The deceit of Laban was practicable, on account of the custom by which the bride is, on the day of marriage, conducted veiled to her future husband. (*M. M. Kalisch, Ph.D.*) *Evil result of Laban's fraud*:—But the fraud of Laban was not only a moral offence in itself; it was the more deplorable, as it destroyed the principle of monogamy to which the patriarchs on the whole adhered. Jacob had intended to marry Rachel alone; and when he found himself, against his will, allied with Leah, his heart could not renounce her from whom he expected the best part of his happiness; he took her to wife besides Leah; nor was he permitted to dismiss the latter after the solemnization of the marriage. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 29-35. **He loved also Rachel more than Leah.**—*Leah and Rachel: their trials and compensations*:—I. THEIR TRIALS. Leah was "hated" (ver. 31), i.e., she was loved less than Rachel. By becoming a party to a heartless fraud she lost her husband's affections. And Rachel, the beloved wife, was denied the blessing of children, so coveted by the ancient Hebrew mothers (ver. 31). Both had trials, though of a different kind. II. THEIR COMPENSATIONS. Leah was blessed with

children, which compensated her for the loss of her husband's love. The names of the four sons successively born to her were all significant, and betoken that pious habit of mind which recognized the hand of God in all that befel her. She called the first-born, Reuben (Heb.) "see ye a son." The second, Simeon (Heb.) "hearing," for God had heard her prayer and seen her affliction. The third was named Levi (Heb.) "joined." Now, surely, would the breach be healed and the husband and wife joined together by this threefold cord. The fourth she called Judah (Heb.) "praise," as if recording her thankfulness that she had won the affections of her husband by bearing to him so many sons. Rachel, on the other hand, continued barren. But she was compensated by her beauty, and by the thought that she was first in her husband's affections. Thus with the evils which fall to the lot of individuals, there are compensations. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Lessons:—* 1. God doth not see as men, not as good men see sometimes in accepting persons. 2. God's providence may be regardful of them who are neglected by men. 3. Undervalued and hated mercies may, under God's ordering, prove most fruitful to men. 4. The most regarded by men may be disrespected upon some accounts with God. 5. The most lovely mercies in man's eye may prove barren and unfruitful to him (ver. 31). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Worth better than beauty:—* The cultivation of the beautiful is, indeed, the first step towards civilization; but it is no more than a means of education; it has accomplished its purpose when it has contributed to awaken the interest for thought and truth; the Greeks were an element in the development of mankind; but their mission ceased when they had opened the minds of men for the reception of abstract ideas; and the sentence which a Greek sage wrote over his door: "nothing ugly must enter," was to be superseded by the Biblical maxim: "deceitful is gracefulness, and vain is beauty; a woman who feareth the Lord, she alone deserveth praise" (Prov. xxxi. 30). While the first woman was merely "she who gives life" (Eve); the daughter of Lamech, seven generations later, was the "beautiful" (Naamah); this was certainly a progress; but many centuries were required to elapse before men ceased to regard beauty both as the test of worth, and a proof of special Divine favour. To contribute towards this important lesson is the end of this portion; for, "when the Lord saw that Leah was hated, He opened her womb; but Rachel was barren"; by the same act He taught Jacob wisdom, and procured justice to Leah. The latter was clearly aware of this turning-point in her life; for when she gave birth to a son, she exclaimed: "Surely, the Lord hath looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me." Nor does she seem to have been unworthy of being blessed with offspring; the love of her husband was the sole object of her thoughts and feelings. (*M. M. Kalisch, Ph.D.*)

CHAPTER XXX.

VERS. 1-13. Rachel envied her sister.—*Rachel's impatience:—*I. IT WAS UNGODLY. 1. She was the victim of unholy passions. Envy and jealousy. 2. She took a despairing view of life. 3. She failed rightly to recognize the true Author of all good things. II. IT LED TO THE ADOPTION OF WRONG EXPEDIENTS. Showing impatient haste of unbelief, and a want of confidence in God. III. IT HAD AN INFLUENCE FOR EVIL. 1. Upon her own character. Boasting (vers. 6, 8). 2. Upon her sister (ver. 9). (*T. H. Leale.*) *Domestic irritations:—*I. JACOB TOOK UPON HIMSELF DOMESTIC TROUBLES. II. IT REQUIRES SOMETHING ELSE THAN THE ATTAINMENT OF OUR WISHES TO BRING HAPPINESS. III. BLESSINGS DO NOT ALWAYS COME AS WE EXPECT. IV. HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF. V. THE PROMISES OF GOD ARE GRADUALLY FULFILLED. VI. THE UNDESERVING ARE BLESSED BY GOD. VII. HAVE PATIENCE WITH IRRITATING ASSOCIATES. (*D. G. Watt, M.A.*) *Envy:—*The infatuated Caligula slew his brother because he was a beautiful young man. Mutius, a citizen of Rome, was noted to be of such an envious and malevolent disposition, that Publius, one day, observing him to be very sad, said: "Either some great evil has happened to Mutius, or some great good to another." "Dionysius the tyrant," says Plutarch, "out of envy, punished Philoxenus the musician, because he could sing, and Plato, the philosopher, because he could dispute, better than himself." Cambyse killed his

brother Smerdis, because he could draw a stronger bow than himself or any of his party.

Ver. 8. With great wrestlings have I wrestled.—*Great wrestlings* :—Thus speaks Rachel : and this woman's experience, multiplied as it is a thousand-fold in hearts that never told their struggles, shows us that life is not so calm as it seems. Beneath many a placid stream there are deep and dangerous under-currents. Often a quiet face hides the deep things, which even the dearest intimacies cannot draw out, and which constitute the tragedies of the heart's history. It is well that we learn the need of wrestling ; for life, especially Christian life, has flesh and blood to battle with. Paul says, " we wrestle " ; and goodness, even at its best, is dearly bought and hardly won. I. THIS IS TRUE OF THOSE WHO ARE OUTWARDLY THE WEAKEST. Nothing betokens the warrior ; there is no mailed breast, no gauntleted hand. The character seems like the face perhaps, to be common-place and dull. But what a world there is within the humblest forms that move to and fro amongst us ! That plain face that we mark no loveliness in, is beautiful perhaps in the eyes of angels—that unillustrious life is associated with paths where some Goliath has been laid low, and where the Philistine host has been dispersed. II. THIS IS TO BE THE LOT OF OUR CHILDREN. Listen, and you may hear a sigh as of a distant storm, in the spring breeze of childhood's morning, which may break into a weird tempest over their heads before the evening comes. These children of ours cannot do without religion, without Christ—the Brother and the Saviour of men. Do these little ones look made for the endurance of hard wrestlings ? Perhaps not. But these little hands will be stretched out in the dark night ; these little feet will have to climb in loneliness the toilsome way, when you and I are gone. Who can wonder that we wish to see them before we die in the covert of the great rock ? III. THIS IS THE ONLY PATH TO VICTORY. God sees that it is best. The oak that struggles with the tempest strikes deeper root in the soil ; and the faith that has struggled with doubt is the firmest of beliefs. The love which has learnt human insincerity, learns to prize beyond all price the less demonstrative love of true natures. We gain conquest through hardship, defeat, and peril. We wrestle with great wrestlings over inborn tastes and desires, over habits that have steadily risen to dominance, over affections that are carnal and corrupt, and over enemies visible and invisible. For ease is death. When we cease to wrestle, the enemy binds us with fetters of iron. Conquer we may and can—through the faith that looks upward all through the wrestling years. To him that overcometh the glorious promise of victory is vouchsafed. But the struggle will be severe ; we shall have not only ordinary sorrows, superficial anxieties, but great wrestlings ; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. These wrestlings are not mere matters of mental energy ; they are connected with moral pain. Dispositions natural to us have to be overcome ; human nature, like a child, likes to be spoiled and petted—it can ill-endure rebuke and resistance ! Consequently the battle is hard, and there is no plaudit of honour, no noise of conquest, no palm-wreath on the brow. IV. THIS IS THE ANCIENT WAY. It leads us back to Moses, to Abraham, and to Jacob who was left alone—" and there wrestled a man with him till the break of day " (Gen. xxxii. 24). And that we have a Divine nature is proven by man's spiritual wrestlings from the earliest dawn of history. And the rendering of this text, as you will see in the margin of your Bibles, leads us to think of God. " With great God-wrestlings have I wrestled." And this ancient way will be our way too. (*W. M. Statham, M.A.*)

Vers. 22-24. And God remembered Rachel.—*God's favour towards Rachel* :—I. IT WAS LONG DELAYED. Discipline. II. IT WAS GRANTED TO HER AFTER SOME SOLEMN LESSONS HAD BEEN LEARNED. 1. Dependence. 2. Patience. 3. Faith and hope. III. IT AWAKENED GRATITUDE. 1. Grateful recognition of God's dealings (ver 23). 2. Heartfelt acknowledgment of God (ver. 24). (*T. H. Leale.*)

Ver. 25. Send me away that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country.—*The lights of home* :—There is in Switzerland a hill known as the Heimweh Fluh, or Home-sick Mount. It is so called because it is usually the last spot visited by the traveller when leaving that part of the country at a time when his thoughts are turned homeward. It commands a glorious view of the whole valley of Interlaken, with its fields and pastures, its villages and lakes, with a back-ground of snow-capped mountains. It is a fair scene, but the heart of the traveller is not there. His thoughts are with his friends and loved ones at home. He looks upon the home-

sick mount, and seems to murmur with the patriarch Jacob, "Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country." There are many such homesick mounts, such landmarks, to remind us of home. The sailor on the slippery deck points to some dark towering cliff, and says, "We shall soon see the Lizard Light"; or, "Yonder is Beechy Head!" The traveller along the wintry road strains his eyes through the darkness to catch a glimpse of the lights of home. And we, if we have learnt to think of our life here as a pilgrimage, shall often stand, as it were, upon some Heimweh Fluh, some mount of home-sickness, and whilst we gaze on the beauties of this world, we shall feel, "This is not my home, I am a stranger and a sojourner, as all my fathers were." We shall press onward "through the night of doubt and sorrow," straining our eyes to catch sight of the lights of home. Let us, by God's grace, try to live and work for Him daily, and when death comes we can say, without fear, "Send me away, that I may go to mine own place, and to my country." The dying Baxter, who wrote "The Saints' Rest," said, "I am almost well, and nearly at home!" and another dying man exclaimed, "I am going home as fast as I can, and I bless God that I have a good home to go to." Yes, that thought of home is a blessed one, both for time and for eternity. During the American Civil War the two rival armies were encamped opposite each other on the banks of the Potomac River. When the federal bands played some national air of the union, the confederate musicians struck up a rival tune, each band trying to out-play and silence the other. Suddenly one of the bands played "Home, Sweet Home," and the contest ceased. The musicians of both armies played the same tune, voices from opposite sides of the river joined the chorus, "There's no place like home!" So we, the pilgrim band, are bound together by that one strong link—we are going to our own place and our own country, "Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem." When that brave soldier of Jesus Christ, Charles Kingsley, lay dying, he was heard to murmur, "No more fighting; no more fighting." No one knows the full meaning of those words except one who has fought the good fight, whose life has been one long battle with sin. Those words have no meaning for the coward who yielded himself a prisoner to the enemy, the drunkard who never fought against his besetting sin, the angry man who never wrestled with the demon of his temper. What know they of fighting? (*H. J. Wilmot Buxton, M.A.*)

Ver. 27. I have learned by experience.—*Moral and religious lessons gained by experience*.:—The words are Laban's, and, taken in their connection, they intimate that even an utterly wordly man, such as he was, may be forced to acknowledge the moral providence of God, whereby He takes especial and peculiar care of His servants. Look at the moral and religious lessons which a thoughtful man may learn by experience. I. We learn by experience MUCH THAT IS WHOLESOME ABOUT OURSELVES. By the blunders we have made, the falls we have suffered, the injuries we have sustained, the sins we have committed, and the wrongs we have inflicted on others, God has enlightened us in the knowledge of ourselves, and made us feel that it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. II. Experience has taught us MUCH REGARDING THE WORLD AND ITS PLEASURES, POSSESSIONS, AND ENJOYMENTS. Even in the case of the Christian, there is much to wean him from the world as the years roll on. As he grows older the world becomes less and less to him, and Christ becomes more and more. He learns to delight in God, and his growth in holiness becomes the ambition of his life. III. The experience of the lapse of years teaches us MORE AND MORE OF GOD AS THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. We have increasing proofs of God's wisdom and God's faithfulness. Whoever has been false to us, He has remained true. This testimony of experience thus grows with our growth and strengthens with our strength. It is a fortress which is utterly impregnable. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Experience*.:—Find men where you may, they all agree in owning that they owe much to the same Instructor: they all agree in owning that they have grown wiser for the teaching of that unflattering Preceptor, who knows no royal road to truth, and in whose stern school you must stumble once, that you may learn to avoid falling again. And truly here is the best way to learn—the way that sinks the deepest, and is remembered the best. And if it be true, as the proverbial saying would have it, that experience teaches the foolish, surely it is true no less that experience makes the wise. And as experience is the teacher that instructs all men, and instructs them unthanked and unasked, so there are many things which no other can teach us: many lessons we never learn, and many matters we never rightly understand, till we have "learned by experience." We shall never know, for example, what our hearts can feel and bear, by the

descriptions of other people; no account can make us understand what great sorrow is, or great anxiety, or buoyant gladness, or hearty gratitude, or fixed determination; we must feel in ourselves the quickened pulse of hopefulness, the laden heart of care, the blankness of disappointment and failure; or we shall never know what they mean. Even Jesus Christ, our Maker, gained that consummate sympathy with us which it became our Saviour to have, through actual experience. But there is one class of subjects one great subject which above all others we must know by experience, or we shall not know at all. My brethren, this is a thing that is hard upon mere human reason; this matter of the real power and efficacy of prayer. If there be any truth in what we believe of the power of prayer, it is the mightiest agent—save God Himself—in all the universe: it is stronger than the hurricane that wrecks a navy: stronger than the great ocean to which man's mightiest works are as a plaything. Christian brethren, let us frankly confess what a weak state, what an insecure position we should be in, if we were taking all this on hearsay. Why, it looks such a truly monstrous deal to believe, that positively for your credit as a reasonable man, you would be half ashamed to say you fancied all this. Never concern yourself to unravel the threads the sceptic has twisted; never set yourself to answer by argument the objections he has raised. It can be done, but there is a far better way. Tell him that your Bible bids you pray, and assures you that prayer shall prevail; but tell him more—and God be thanked if you can say so much—tell him that you have put the matter to the proof!—that you were not content to take the thing on the word of others; that you fairly tried, and that you “learned by experience” that prayer is heard and answered! Another thing that we may learn by rote, but that we never shall really believe till we learn it by experience, is the insufficiency of this world to satisfy the soul; the great truth, that “This is not our rest.” For experience alone is enough to bring men to the strong belief, that all worldly things, even when possessed in their intensest degree, leave an aching void within the soul—many a stated man of pleasure, many a successful man of ambition, has told us as much as that—but it needs God's Holy Spirit to touch the soul, before it can take the next step—before it can draw the final conclusion—that the right things for the soul to love and seek are beyond the grave, and that the heart's true home and abiding treasure are there. But we shall give the remainder of our time to looking at one great fact which is best learned by experience—I mean the preciousness, the all-sufficiency, the love and grace, of our blessed Saviour. You remember it is written, “Unto you which believe He is precious.” Now that seems to mean, that to those who believe, He is more precious than He is to other people; that, in a peculiarly strong sense, His preciousness is a thing that must be learned by experience. So it is. And it is easy to see how it must be. For the value of a thing is understood fully only by those who know how much they want it. And if a man feels that he does not want a thing—that he can do perfectly well without it—why, he will esteem it as of very little value indeed. Now a perfectly worldly and unconverted man feels he needs food, he cannot do without that; and so of course he sets a value on it. He feels he needs a home to dwell in—he cannot do without that; and so of course he sets a value on it. He feels he needs friends—that life would be a poor, heartless thing without them; and so he sets a value on them. But the quite worldly and unconverted man, who brings everything to a quite worldly estimate, does not feel he needs Christ; he never feels any want of Him; he thinks he can do quite well without Him; and of course he sets no value on Him; of course the Saviour is not precious to that man—how can He be? But, brethren, look to the man who has been convinced of his sin and misery by the Spirit of God; and that only our Redeemer can save us from that dismal estate, and see what he thinks of Christ! Yes, that convicted sinner has found his need of the Saviour. He has learnt that food and raiment, and all things men work hardest for and value most, are not the one thing needful—are worth nothing when compared with a saving interest in the blessed Lamb of God. He has “learned by experience!” He has felt a want, felt that the Saviour alone could supply that want; and he knows what Christ is worth, by what Christ has done! (A. K. H. Boyd, D.D.) *Experience*:—1. The true teacher. 2. The universal monitor. 3. The indisputable evidence. 4. Experience of sin, pardon, peace. 5. Character thus becomes argument. 6. Let sin be subjected to this test. 7. The Christian triumphant here. 8. Many can answer by experience who cannot answer by controversy. (J. Parker, D.D.) *Learning by experience*:—The world is a school, and the period of our remaining here is the school-time of our existence. The school is a severe one, the discipline is hard, and the process is often tedious.

God is the teacher, and He has many assistants, which in various ways and manners are used to bring the soul to saving knowledge of the truth. Now, there is no method so potent for impressing facts on the mind as actual practice. Theory is an ideality which amid the whirl of time and business is soon dissipated. It is only when we ourselves apprehend, through actual touching and handling, that we get a positive and practical knowledge of anything. The most learned engineer who ever lived would feel at a terrible loss if put to drive an express locomotive or to superintend the engines of a vast steamship, if he had never seen one before, although he might have read and written on the subjects all his life. The most skilful theoretical architect would shrink from the ordeal of practical building. I. We learn by experience THE FLIGHT OF TIME. The child is scarcely conscious that time moves at all. It is to him a calm, placid, unruffled lake. But the illusion is gradually dispelled. Youth deepens into maturity, maturity glides into incipient decay, and the soul is startled to find how rapidly life is passing. Then it begins to fly by like a rushing river torrent. II. We learn by experience THE FRAILTY OF HUMAN NATURE. The curse of decay comes as a revelation. Death of a playmate or relation startles the little soul and awakens an unknown terror. Then with the flight of time comes the realization of weakness within ourselves. III. We have learned by experience the DISAPPOINTMENTS OF EARTH. How has the sanguine heart grown broken and seared! The rosy vision has minished into darkness. Disappointments! IV. We have learnt by experience THE VANITY OF TRUSTING TO SELF. Self-sufficiency is man's heritage and Satan's mightiest weapon. The best contrived scheme brought to nought, the wisest forethought nullified, the labours of a lifetime lost, have shown us how vain is man. V. We have learned by experience THE UNENDING LOVE, COMPASSION, AND GOODNESS OF GOD. (*Homilist.*) *Experience*:—I. SOME OF THE LESSONS LEARNED BY EXPERIENCE. 1. The unsatisfying nature of all earthly objects. 2. The preciousness of Christ. 3. The efficacy of prayer. 4. The benefit of affliction. 5. The sustaining power of God's grace. II. THE REASONS WHY GOD TEACHES US BY EXPERIENCE. 1. Because we will not learn our duty without it. 2. Because the lessons thus acquired are the most valuable and permanent. 3. Because we are then more useful to our fellow-men. (*Seeds and Saplings.*)

Vers. 28-43. **Appoint me thy wages, and I will give it.**—*Jacob's new contract of service*:—I. IT WAS ENTERED UPON IN OPPOSITION TO HIS BETTER FEELINGS AND CONVICTIONS. II. IT WAS MARKED BY WORLDLY PRUDENCE. 1. The prudence which calculates. 2. The prudence which takes advantage of superior knowledge. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Lawful diligence blessed*:—A Divine benediction is always invisibly breathed on painful and lawful diligence. Thus the servant employed in making and blowing of the fire, though sent away thence as soon as it burneth clear, oftentimes getteth by his pains a more kindly and continuing heat than the master himself who sitteth down by the same; and thus persons industriously occupying themselves thrive better on a little of their own honest getting than lazy heirs on the large revenues left unto them. (*Fuller.*) *Advised diligence*:—What though you have found no treasure, nor has any friend left you a rich legacy! Diligence is the mother of good luck, and God gives all things to industry. Then plough deep while sluggards sleep, and you shall have corn to sell or to keep. Work while it is called to-day, for you know not how much you may be hindered to-morrow. One to-day is worth two to-morrows, as poor Richard says; and further, never leave that till to-morrow which you can do to-day. (*Franklin.*) *Holiness*:—God has given us precepts of such a holiness and such a purity, such a meekness and such humility, as hath no pattern but Christ, no precedent but the purities of God; and, therefore, it is intended we should live with a life whose actions are not chequered with white and black, half sin and half virtue. God's sheep are not like Jacob's flock, "streaked and spotted," it is an entire holiness that God requires, and will not endure to have a holy course interrupted by the dishonour of a base and ignoble action. I do not mean that a man's life can be as pure as the sun, or the rays of celestial Jerusalem; but like the moon, in which there are spots, but they are no deformity; a lessening only and an abatement of light, no cloud to hinder and draw a veil before its face, but sometimes it is not so severe and bright as at other times. Every man hath his indiscretions and infirmities, but no good man ever commits one act of adultery; no godly man will at any time be drunk; or if he be he ceases to be a godly man, and is run into the confines of death, and is sick at heart, and may die of the sickness—die eternally. (*Jeremy Taylor.*)

CHAPTER XXXI.

VERS. 1-12. **And the Lord said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers.**—*Jacob's departure for Canaan*:—I. IT WAS HASTENED BY PERSECUTION. II. IT WAS PROMPTED BY A SENSE OF OFFENDED JUSTICE. III. IT WAS AT THE COMMAND OF GOD. IV. IT ILLUSTRATES THE IMPERFECTIONS AS WELL AS THE VIRTUES OF JACOB'S CHARACTER. (T. H. Leale.) *The stirring-up of the nest*:—Jacob was becoming too contented in that strange land. Like Ulysses and his crews, he was in danger of forgetting the land of his birth; the tents of his father; and the promises of which he was the heir. He was fast losing the pilgrim-spirit, and settled into a citizen of that far country. His mean and crafty arts to increase his wealth were honeycombing his spirit, and eating out his nobler nature, prostituting it to the meanest ends. His wives, infected with the idolatry of their father's house, were in danger of corrupting the minds of his children; and how then would fare the holy seed, destined to give the world the messages of God? It was evident that his nest must be broken up in Haran; that he must be driven back into the pilgrim-life—to become a stranger and a sojourner, as his fathers were. And this was another step nearer the moment when he became an Israel, a prince with God. I. THE SUMMONS TO DEPART. Whether there was voice audible to the outward ear I cannot tell; but there was certainly the uprising of a strong impulse within his heart. Sometimes on a sultry summer day we suddenly feel the breeze fanning our faces, and we say that the wind is rising; but we know not whence it comes, or whither it goes: so does the Spirit of God frequently visit us with strong and holy impulses. There is a Divine restlessness; a noble discontent; a hunger created in the heart, which will not be satisfied with the husks on which the swine feed. We cannot always understand ourselves; but it is the Lord saying to us. Arise and depart; for this is not your rest. II. THE TENACITY OF CIRCUMSTANCES. When the pilgrim-spirit essays to obey the voice of God, the house is always filled with neighbours to dissuade from the rash resolve. "As Christian ran, some mocked; others threatened; and some cried after him to return." There was something of this in Jacob's case. The bird-lime clung closely to him, as he began to plume his wings for his homeward flight. He was evidently afraid that his wives would hinder his return. It would have been natural if they had. Was it likely that they would at once consent to his proposal to tear them from their kindred and land? This fear may have greatly hindered Jacob. He at least thought it necessary to fortify himself with a quiverful of arguments, in order to carry his point. In those arguments we catch another glimpse of his cowardly and crafty nature. They are a strange medley of lies and cant and truth. He might have saved himself from all this, if he had only trusted God to roll away the stones from the path of obedience. For God had been at work before him; and had prepared their hearts, so that they at once assented to his plan, saying: "We have no further ties to home; now then, whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do." If we would only go forward in simple obedience, we should find that there would be no need for our diplomacy; He would go before us, making the crooked straight, and the rough smooth. In the endeavours of Laban to retain Jacob, we have a vivid picture of the eager energy with which the world would retain us, when we are about to turn away from it for ever. It pursues us, with all its allies, for seven days and more (ver. 26). It asks us why we are not content to abide with it (ver. 27). It professes its willingness to make our religion palatable, by mingling with it its own tabret and dance (ver. 27). It appeals to our feelings, and asks us not to be too cruel (ver. 28). It threatens us (ver. 29). It jeers us with our sudden compunction, after so many years of contentment with its company (ver. 30). It reproaches us with our inconsistency in making so much of our God, and yet harbouring some cunning sin. "Wherefore hast thou stolen my gods?" (ver. 30). Ah, friends, how sad it is, when we, who profess so much, give occasion to our foes to sneer, because of the secret idols which they know we carry with us! III. THE DIVINE CARE. Well might Jacob have thrilled with joy, as he said to his wives, "The God of my father has been with me." When God is for us, and with us, who can be against us? Blessed is he who is envied by God, and for whom God fights. He must be more than a conqueror. So Jacob found it; and, at the end of his encounter with Laban, he was able to repeat his assurance, that the God of his father had been with him (ver. 42). (F. B. Meyer, B.A.) *Jacob and Laban*:—I. JACOB'S ARRIVAL AND RECEPTION AT HARAN. 1. God's revelations of Himself, of His love and purposes,

are incentives to action and encouragements to duty. 2. Notice the similarity and difference between Eliezer's arrival at Haran and reception by Laban, and Jacob's. (1) Both met the object of their quest at a well. (2) Laban welcomed Eliezer because of his presents, and sent Rebekah away with him. He welcomed Jacob as a kinsman, but, with keen foresight that he should not be a loser, practically enslaved the heir of Isaac. II. THE LESSONS OF JACOB'S SERVITUDE AND PROSPERITY AT HARAN. 1. Even a wise custom is no justification of untruth or deceit (chap. xxix. 26). 2. There is a law of retribution and of compensation in life. Jacob's love for Rachel sweetened his servitude. 3. The danger of taking narrow views of life. 4. Faith is proved by patience rather than by retaliation (chap. xxx. 37-43). 5. The faithfulness of God is irrespective of man's desert. III. JACOB'S FLIGHT FROM HARAN, LABAN'S PURSUIT OF HIM, AND THE COVENANT WITH WHICH THEY SEPARATED. 1. Mutual distrust produces estrangement. 2. Suspicion leads to angry accusation and recrimination. 3. The use and misuse of solemn words (vers. 47, 48). (*A. F. Joscelyne, B.A.*) *Lessons*:—1. Prosperity usually draweth on envy to the best of men. 2. It is no rare thing that the saints of God should hear ill of evil men for their best doings. 3. Slandrous tongues are usually to be found in the houses of the wicked. 4. Children are the natural heirs of parents' corruptions; Laban's sons have Laban's heart. 5. Covetousness is discontented at any good that passeth unto others. 6. Heat of wicked youth is apt to break forth into railing upon the most upright. 7. Covetous, envious spirits transfer the blessing of God on His to base reproaches (ver. 1). 8. Old subtle sinners keep their tongues and vent their hatred in their looks. 9. As God changeth His providences from one to another, so the wicked change their carriages. 10. It is Christian prudence to observe the discontented and angry faces of wicked rulers. 11. Carnal respects from the wicked to the righteous are but momentary (ver. 2). 12. God sometimes useth the unjust carriages of wicked men to move His saints unto respect of Him. 13. God calleth His saints at last in His set time out of bondage to the wicked. 14. God's call alone warrants souls as to leaving of their stations. 15. God's gracious presence is ever with them, who are obedient to His call (ver. 3). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. God's call will put men upon honest endeavours to accomplish it. 2. It becometh godly husbands to communicate God's will to their wives about household affairs. 3. Prudence imparts counsel in fittest places. 4. Sedulity in men's calling will not suffer them to lose time (ver. 4). (*Ibid.*) *Lessons*:—1. Just occasions of moving place may be urged by husbands to wives for their concurrence to and comfort in it. 2. Real and undeserved disrespects from men are justly to be complained of, though fathers. 3. The gracious presence of God with His innocent ones is enough to counterpoise the frowns of men. 4. It is rational to leave fathers with their unjust frowns, and follow God with His smiles (ver. 5). (*Ibid.*) *Lessons*:—1. No fraud, lying, or deceit, come amiss to covetous worldly spirits for their own ends. 2. Multiplied falsehoods and oppressions are usual with wicked men, to oppress the innocent and to help themselves. 3. The greatest service is of no account with wicked worldly men. 4. Safe are those faithful ones who are taken into God's charge. 5. Men may invent many ways to hurt the righteous, but God giveth them not up to their hand (ver. 7). 6. God's power and justice turneth the very purposes of the wicked to His saints' good and their evil. 7. The subtlety of man can never prevent the power and wisdom of God (ver. 8). (*Ibid.*) *Lessons*:—1. Providence orders the best seasons of comforting His servants against their fears. 2. Saints must take their comforts in the way wherein God will impart them. In dreams, if God will. 3. The saints have real proof of God's care of them, and goodness in suiting to them their consolations (ver. 10). 4. God alone is the comforter of His people. 5. God calls by name to poor souls, in application of comfort, to prepare them thereunto. 6. God's servants answer at His call to receive His consolations (ver. 11). 7. God showeth His afflicted ones the way of His consolations for their support. 8. God's observation of the oppressions of men cannot but stir Him up to work His saints' relief (ver. 12). (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 13. I am the God of Bethel.—*The God of Bethel*:—I. THE GOD OF BETHEL IS A GOD OF PROVIDENCE, of a special gracious Providence towards His people; and of this as exercised through a Mediator, by the ministry of angels. 1. He is the God of Providence, extending to all the creatures He has made. God did not make the world, and then leave it, confining Himself to heaven, as some would have Him. Though His throne be above, His kingdom ruleth over all. He is no unconcerned spectator of what is done; but like a skilful pilot sits at the helm, and steers the

world to what course it shall move. His providence is often mysterious, but nevertheless real and universal. 2. God exercises a special gracious providence about His servants. God has a regard to all the works of His hands; but it is spoken with an emphasis, "Behold the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy." Upon every one of this number His eye is fixed with satisfaction and delight. 3. God employs His angels as the ministers of His providence in the world, particularly as to His people. Not that God needs the agency of any of His creatures, but for the honour of His majesty He is pleased to use them. II. THE GOD OF BETHEL IS THE GOD OF PROMISE. And as it is here declared by Himself, I am the God of Bethel, it plainly denotes—1. That He takes delight in the promises He hath made to His people, and the covenant engagements in which He stands to them. 2. These words, "I am the God of Bethel," being spoken twenty years after the promises and appearances there, were first made, God intimated by them, that He was the same now as heretofore; as able to guide and guard, as formerly. 3. God proclaims this to tell His servant that all the mercies he enjoyed came from His hand and love, as his God in covenant; and that under this notion, he was still to look to Him for all he should further need. III. At Bethel Jacob vowed a vow, which was in confirmation of his covenant with God; and so God's styling Himself the God of Bethel denotes in general that He TAKES SPECIAL NOTICE OF THE SOLEMN TRANSACTIONS OF HIS SERVANTS, what promises and vows they make to Him and where. Particularly He is the God of Bethel, *i.e.*, of His house, of every place appointed for His worship, as observing who there vow and dedicate themselves to Him, and who do not; in what manner any vow unto Him, whether in truth and with the heart, or deceitfully and with guile. God cannot be ignorant of what is done, and where; but He would be considered as particularly observing what passes at Bethel, *i.e.*, in His house, and at His table there, now under these New Testament ages. 1. God takes notice who carries away from His house that ought to be there; and He takes notice too, in what dress every individual comes thither. 2. God is the God of Bethel, as approving His people's dedicating themselves by vow, in confirmation of their covenant to Him. This is their reasonable service, and what His promises and grace should readily lead them to. 3. God is the God of Bethel, as He is ready to reward His servants who make conscience of keeping their engagements, and walk in a sense of the vows of God upon their souls. IV. And now as THE USE of all. 1. How desirable is a special relation to the God of Bethel, as the God of Providence, and of this as in a peculiar manner exercised about His people. 2. As the God of Bethel is ever mindful of His promises, His people can never want encouragement to come to His throne of grace. 3. Does God style Himself the God of Bethel, as denoting His strict observance of what passes in His house? What seriousness becomes us in all religious duties and services, or when, in a way of worship, we have to do with God? 4. Is the God of Bethel to be conceived of, as a witness to all our solemn transactions and engagements? how great must be the sin and folly of being formal and insincere in vowing to the Lord, or in pretending, either to enter into or confirm our covenant with Him, when leaving our hearts behind? 5. Does God as the God of Bethel remember the vows there made, with what confusion will they appear before Him who have omitted to perform their promises? (*D. Wilson.*) *The God of Bethel:*—I am the God of Bethel! When at Bethel, the Lord said, "I am Jehovah, God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac." He might have said the same now; but it was His pleasure to direct the attention of His servant to the last, and to Him the most interesting of His manifestations. By giving him hold of the last link in the chain, he would be in possession of the whole. The God of Bethel was the God of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac; the God who had entered into covenant with the former, had renewed it with the latter, and again renewed it with him. What satisfaction must it afford, to be directed by such a God! (*A. Fuller.*) *God's reminders:*—"I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and vowedst a vow unto Me." It is not only necessary that we be reminded of God's promises for our support in troubles, but of our own solemn engagements, that the same affections which distinguished the best seasons of our life may be renewed, and that in all our movements we may keep in view the end for which we live. The object of the vow was, that Jehovah should be his God: and whenever he should return, that that stone should be God's house. And now that the Lord commands him to return, He reminds him of his vow. He must not go to Canaan with a view to promote his own temporal interest, but to introduce the knowledge and worship of the true God. This was the great end which Jehovah had in view in all that He

did for Abraham's posterity, and they must never lose sight of it. (*Ibid.*)
Lesson:—1. God sets Himself out to His saints distinctly and eminently from the misconceits of Him by nations. 2. God is the God of Bethel to His Jacobs, of sweet providences and precious promises to His saints. 3. God's providence and promise may justly cause souls to dedicate and vow themselves to Him. 4. Souls devoting of themselves to God, engageth them to follow Him at this call. 5. God is forced to put His saints in mind of their engagement sometimes before they think of it. 6. God's call alone is the just ground of the egress and regress of His servants, for blessing, and with it. 7. God will surely call in His set time to His saints for their returning to the place of rest. 8. Preparation and execution to go where God calleth, is due from saints to the call of God (ver. 13). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*)
The God of Bethel:—I. Does not that mean, first, that our God is the God of our early mercies? Bethel was to Jacob the place of early mercy. Let us look back upon our early mercies. Did they not come to us, as they did to him, unsought and unexpected, and when, perhaps, we were unprepared for them? II. Does it not mean, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ? What is "Beth-el" but "the house of God." And the house of God, the true Bethel, is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, for "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." III. Still further let us remember that this God of Bethel is the God of angels. We do not often say much about those mysterious beings, for it is but little that we know of them. This, however, we know—that angels are set by God to be the watchers over His people. We shall not come to harm if we put our trust in God. "I will lay me down to sleep, for Thou makest me to dwell in safety." These angels were also messengers. "Are they not all ministering spirits?" and are they not sent with messages from God? Moreover, they are our protectors. God employs them to bear us up in their hands, lest at any time we dash our foot against a stone. We do not see them, but unseen agencies are probably the strongest agencies in the world. IV. Notice, once more, that the God of Bethel is the God of our vows. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 14. Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house.—Inheritance for us:—So asked Rachel and Leah of Jacob. And we see how suggestive these historical touches in Old Testament story are, when vitalized by the spirit of the gospel. We think at once of the Saviour, who is the open door to the great Father's house. There are multitudes who have lost their portions, and some are very sad and weary. Prodigal meets prodigal, and recounts the story of the painful way. Ruins always touch us with sadness; and "human hearts get ruinous in so much less time than stone walls do!" I. **THE CRY IS PERSONAL.** Men do not ask, "Is there hope for the lost—the profligate, the vile?" but, "Is there hope for me?" The soldier lying wounded in the battle-field thinks of the home harvest-fields far away, and the soul amid its wounds and woes whispers, "I will arise and go to my Father. There is a home-returning way for me!" II. **THE CRY IS ANXIOUS.** "Is there yet?" Once the soul was ready to surmise there might be! But is there now? when sin has consolidated into habit, when the door has been shut so often in the marred face of the Man of Sorrows! "My sin is ever before me," is the great cry of conscience. We sympathize with human anxiety. We watch with moistened eyes the widow who asks, "Is there yet a table in the wilderness for me and my little ones?" In reply to the "yet," let us answer, "Though thy sins be as scarlet, He shall make them white as wool"; "He shall blot out thy transgressions as a cloud, and thine iniquities as a thick cloud"; "He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him." III. **THE CRY IS CHILDLIKE.** "My Father's house!" For we are, in one sense, all of us God's offspring. True, we have lost likeness to Him and peace with Him; and only by faith can we become the spiritual sons of God. But there is memory of the lost estate in every heart. Man was made for God, and He is the only home of the soul. God gave us our earthly homes and relationships, to be parables of that great central truth. No word thrills us like "home"; no picture on Academy walls touches us like Provis's interiors. And this is natural. For let home be dark or deserted, let the dove of peace leave that, let those sweet sanctities be desecrated, and no outside joys, no travels, no pursuits can make compensation! And to know the value of a home, you must lose one. IV. **THE CRY IS ANSWERED.** Yes! in many parables, in many promises, in deeds of love and sacrifice. Faith leads all along the way, from justification to glory. But it were wrong to conceive of the inheritance as all future. Heaven does begin on earth, because the heavenly principles, purposes, and pleasures may be ours

now. CONCLUSION. We close with the remembrance that there is welcome for us, room for us, reward for us. Have you ever stood outside a flower-show in the summer-time, and seen carriage after carriage drive up, with rustling silks and dazzling liveries and crested panels, pride and pomp entering in; and then caught the wistful face of a poor child at the gate, with another child in her arms, shut out from seeing God's beautiful flowers? The poor, the blind, the maim, the halt, the prodigals of every type are welcome. What, does He want me? does He wait for me? has He asked for me? (*W. M. Statham, M.A.*) *A worldly-spirited reply*:—We have seen some things in the history of these women which have induced us to hope well of them, notwithstanding their many failings; but though in this case it was their duty to comply with the desire of their husband, and to own the hand of God in what had taken place between their father and him; yet there is something in their manner of expressing themselves that looks more like the spirit of the world, than the spirit which is of God. A right spirit would have taught them to remember that Laban, whatever was his conduct, was still their father. They might have felt it impossible to vindicate him; but they should not have expiated on his faults in such a manner as to take pleasure in exposing them. Such conduct was but too much like that of Ham towards his father. And as to their acknowledging the hand of God in giving their father's riches to their husband, this is no more than is often seen in the most selfish characters, who can easily admire the Divine providence when it goes in their favour. The ease, however, with which all men can discern what is just and equitable towards themselves, renders the love of ourselves a proper standard for the love of others, and will sooner or later stop the mouth of every sinner. Even those who have no written revelation have this Divine law engraven on their consciences: they can judge with the nicest accuracy what is justice to them, and therefore cannot plead ignorance of what is justice from them to others. (*A. Fuller.*) *Lessons*:—1. It becometh wives, especially in good families, to listen unto advice of husbands from God. 2. God can make them that disagree in a family sweetly to concur to do His work. 3. It is unnatural for children to find no portions in their father's house, when they abound. 4. Such brands of cruelty are left upon unnatural fathers by the Spirit (ver. 14). 5. It is cruel for fathers to use their children as slaves and make merchandize of them. 6. It is savage for parents to consume the substance of children for whom they should provide. 7. Such unnatural dealings, in God's justice, alienate hearts of children from parents (ver. 15). 8. It is fit to consider how God recompenseth cruelties of unnatural parents in depriving them of their children. 9. What God giveth to parents and children may be justly owned by them. 10. Good women will be free and helpful to their husbands to go and do whatever is the will of God unto them (ver. 16). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*)

Vers. 17-21. Then Jacob rose up.—*Lessons*:—1. Concurrence of all things with the call of God points out the time of man's obedience to him. 2. He that hath God's call for himself and others to any undertaking should prepare first for it. 3. It concerns husbands and fathers to provide for convenient motions of wives and children upon God's call (ver. 17). 4. Prudence teacheth men to order all their substance as motions rightly upon God's call. 5. Justice will suffer no man to take anything but that which is his own. 6. Courage becometh God's servants to break through all difficulties to follow God (ver. 18) and go where He calleth them. (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. Providence finds work to call off such as would hinder obedience to His work from His servants. 2. Hard it is for souls bred up in superstition to be wholly taken off from it. 3. There may be a temptation upon children to rob parents, but it is grievous wickedness. 4. Hearts not purged will have their superstitions and means of will-worship, though they steal them. 5. God suffers such irregular practices in good families sometimes for the trial of His own (ver. 19). (*Ibid.*) *Lessons*:—1. Providence directs God's servants to prudence for escaping the hands of wicked men at His call. 2. It is no iniquity, not to declare God's call and way to such as would oppose them (ver. 20). 3. Flight is not unbecoming saints from under the hands of oppressors when God calleth to it. 4. Difficult passages God's servants find sometimes in following God's call. 5. No difficulties should discourage where God appears to warrant man's motions. 6. Man's face should be set to that mark which God points him out in his pilgrimage (ver. 21). (*Ibid.*) *Lessons*:—1. Providence ordereth tidings of His delivering His servants, to come to their enemies when they are not to be hindered by them (*Job v. 12, 10*). 2. Tidings of mercy to saints may come to the wicked soon enough to

try them (ver. 22). (*Ibid.*) *The Teraphim*:—Rachel stole the Teraphim, either, as has been advanced, because she wished to prevent Laban's consulting them on the direction of their flight, or to secure their guardianship for a journey apparently fraught with difficulties and dangers. The value of the precious metal of which the idol might have been made was certainly a temptation subordinate to the superstitious motive. The example given by Jacob with regard to the worship of God, had manifestly exercised a greater influence upon Leah than upon Rachel; though both, therefore, acknowledged, in Jacob's blessing, the will and favour of God, and urged him to follow the Divine directions (ver. 16), Rachel continued to attach a high value to dumb images, and regarded herself safe only under the guardianship of her own gods. Our knowledge concerning the shape of the Teraphim is very limited. They resembled the form of man (1 Sam. xix. 13), either consisting of the entire human body, or only of head and breast. They were made of various materials, and not unfrequently of silver, two hundred shekels of which were employed for one statue (Judg. xvii. 4). Our information is more accurate respecting the use and nature of the Teraphim. But we must distinguish between the earlier and later history of the Hebrews. The origin of the Teraphim seems to have been in Mesopotamia or Chaldea, a supposition probable from our passage, and from a later allusion in which the Babylonian king is related to have consulted them (Ezek. xxi. 26). Although no doubt comprised amongst the idols which Jacob is recorded to have removed in Shechem (xxxv. 4), they long remained in favour among his descendants; and while the Hebrews were always conscious of their crime whenever they worshipped other gods, they do not seem to have regarded the adoration of the Teraphim as equally reproachful. On this point, the history of Micah is highly instructive (Judg. xvii.; xviii.). It shows clearly, that the Teraphim were considered as tutelar deities, fully compatible with the homage solely due to the Lord; that they were used, by many, as oracles, like the Urim and Thummim, or like the Ark of the Covenant; and that they were deemed sacred and lawful, if but a descendant of Aaron performed the ministerial functions: they implied a transgression of the second, not of the first commandment. Thus we account for the fact, otherwise most strange, that the prophet Hosea enumerates the Teraphim among the boons of which the disobedient Israelites would be deprived (iii. 4); he threatens them with the dissolution of national and of family life; he predicts, that princes and sacrifices will disappear, and together with them their own domestic gods, the Teraphim, who, therefore, have there a political and social rather than a religious import. The prophet does not hesitate to mention them, because they were evidently in his time still considered as the mildest and most harmless form of idolatry. But gradually, when the pure doctrines of Mosaism began to be enforced with greater rigour, the Teraphim were naturally included among the objects of religious aversion; even the author of the Book of Judges, who wrote in the latest times of the monarchy (xviii. 30), inserted in his truthful narrative a remark of disapproval: "in those days there was no king in Israel, every one did what was right in his own eyes" (xvii. 6); when king Josiah established the strict worship of monotheism, he destroyed among the other idols, the Teraphim also (2 Kings viii. 24); and, perhaps, exactly because they were considered as almost innocent images, the later writers were extremely severe in denouncing them: the crime of obstinacy against the Divine will is compared to the idolatry of the Teraphim (1 Sam. xv. 23); they are classed among the "detestations and abominations" (2 Kings xiii. 24); their oracles are described not only as falsehood, but as wickedness; they lead astray those who consult them like sheep which have no shepherd (Zech. x. 2); and they are attributed to the Babylonian monarch together with his other absurd modes of divination, as the auguries taken from "looking in the liver" (Ezek. xxi. 26, 28). (*M. M. Kalisch, Ph.D.*)

Vers. 22–42. Laban said to Jacob, What hast thou done, that thou hast stolen away unawares to me, and carried away my daughters, . . . ?—*Laban's ex-postulation with Jacob, and Jacob's defence*:—I. LABAN'S EXPOSTULATION WITH JACOB. 1. There was, apparently, cause for just complaint. (1) There were some criminal elements in the conduct of Jacob. (2) There was unkindness and a breach of social obligations. 2. But this complaint was, really, the disguise of Laban's own evil nature. II. JACOB'S DEFENCE. 1. He challenges proof of his dishonesty. 2. He appeals to many years of faithful and honest service. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Lessons*:—1. Laban, upon tidings of Jacob's deliverance, haste in fury to avenge themselves on them. 2. Wicked men of might join to themselves their allies, to help on their

furious revenges. 3. Injustice and cruelty will spur souls on to the persecution of the innocent many days. 4. Envy and revenge will not give over pursuing the innocent until they overtake their prey (ver. 23). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) I. THE FLIGHT of Jacob from Laban. 1. Cause. (1) Jealousy of Jacob's prosperity amongst Laban's family (ver. 1). (2) Jacob had himself been not very kindly treated by Laban (ver. 7). (3) Command of God that he should return (ver. 13). Added to this, Rachael and Leah, also, were willing to depart, as feeling that they were not so welcome at home as formerly (vers. 14, 15); (4) and yet could not go away openly. Laban would have hindered him, or have prevented his carrying away the whole of his property (ver. 42). 2. Time. Sheepshearing. So important a duty that Laban must himself superintend it. He goes some distance from home. While Laban is absent, Jacob steals away. Collects his flocks and herds, servants and substance, and sets out over the desert which he had traversed some twenty-one years before with only his staff in his hand. II. THE PURSUIT. Of Laban after Jacob. Laban did not hear of Jacob's flight till three days had passed. This part of the journey Jacob would naturally travel with all speed. So large a caravan could not march without leaving the plain track behind. Laban in pursuit for seven days, i.e., until ten days after Jacob had started. Reaching the mountains of Gilead and their defiles, and not overtaken; Jacob might think the pursuit had not been undertaken, or if so, then abandoned. Evening of tenth day Laban and his band approach. Too exhausted by the march to bring matters to an issue at once. The two camps retired to rest. Night settles down on the hills of Gilead, and watch fires, &c. Probably it was this night that Laban had a wonderful vision, in which he was warned respecting his treatment of Jacob. From the nature of the vision it is plain how murderous his intentions were. III. THE PARTING. Of Jacob and Laban. 1. The controversy between Laban and Jacob. Laban's charge against Jacob. Going by stealth. Leading his daughters as captives (comp. vers. 14, 15 with 26). Pretence of great affection (vers. 27, 28). Assertion of power. Acknowledgment of Divine interference. Charge of stealing the idols. 2. Jacob's reply. Tells the truth (ver. 31), but not all the truth (comp. vers. 1—16). Repudiates, sternly and promptly, the charge of carrying off the images. 3. The search for the idols, which are not found. 4. They set up a memorial pillar, and so part at Mizpah. The two camps remaining there another night, and travelling, east and west, early in the morning, to meet no more. Learn: I. Be thankful for the domestic relations of life, and that ours do not demand our flight from home and kindred. II. Jacob bore cruel usage for twenty years, and even then did not prepare for flight till God had given him the command. III. The vision sent to Laban shows that God would have family meetings peaceably conducted, and those who have had unkind thoughts, He would have them lay them aside. IV. Christ Jesus, the Prince of Peace, is the Great Reconciler. (*J. C. Gray.*) Lessons:—1. The Almighty God appears seasonably to stop the rage of cruel oppressors against His saints. 2. Night apparitions in dreams God can make to terrify wicked enemies from their purposes. 3. God warns envious spirits, that they look to themselves, if they oppress His saints. 4. God curbs the spirits of wicked men sometimes, and charges them not to speak an evil word to His people (ver. 24). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) Lessons:—1. It is no harm for the wicked to overtake the righteous, while they are curbed by God. 2. Providence may bring enemies near to His saints, and yet keep mischief far off from them. 3. God can cause the righteous to pitch near their oppressors, and yet secure them (ver. 25). (*Ibid.*) Lessons:—1. The worst dealers are most apt to question others for their doings though good. 2. Violence questions innocence for escaping from its heart, though God call it. 3. The interrogatories of oppression pretend captivity of daughters, when they go freely (ver. 26). 4. Unreasonable oppressors require a reason of the innocent's escape, where there needs none to be rendered; it being apparent. 5. Injurious men are displeased when the righteous escape without their knowledge. 6. Hypocritical violence may pretend a free dismissal of the righteous, which it never meant. Laban's music (ver. 27). 7. Unnatural fathers are apt to question others as causes of their unnaturalness to children. 8. Wicked and foolish men are very forward to charge the innocent with doing wickedly (ver. 28). (*Ibid.*) Lessons:—1. It is the property of wicked oppressors to boast of their strength, which is more than they have. 2. Wicked injurious men boast that they can do mischief against the righteous (Psa. 52. 1). 3. The hand of the wicked is ready to oppress the innocent, if God hinder not. 4. Wicked oppressors complain that God hinders them in their cruel designs. 5. The ungodly will not learn to own God, though they find Him too mighty for

them. 6. Fear of self-destruction keeps oppressors from destroying saints. 7. God worshipped in truth by His, is stronger than God falsified by the wicked. 8. God maketh the wicked enemy confess His sovereignty sometimes against their will (Deu. xxxi, xxxii. 29). (*Ibid.*) *Lessons*:—1. Plain and ready answers become the saints against the charges of the wicked. 2. Just fear of violence is a just ground of the saints escaping it, under God's call. 3. God's call and saints' fear of dangers from men may well consist together. 4. Violent rapture of wives and children by cruel men may make the saints afraid of, and fly from it (ver. 31). 5. Holy souls abhor idols, and much more the covering of them. 6. Innocency is not afraid to put itself upon trial of life. 7. Plain honest hearts dare put themselves upon the search and judgment of their enemies. 8. Good fathers of families would have all with them innocent as themselves. 9. Good men may be too confident of the goodness of such as are under them. 10. Ignorance of other's hearts and actions makes men so rash and confident of them (ver. 32). (*Ibid.*) *Lessons*:—1. False accusers of the saints are willing to turn every stone, to make good their charge upon them (ver. 33). 2. God in His wisdom useth the sins of one creature to frustrate the sin of others (ver. 34). 3. Sin once committed putteth souls upon more sin to conceal it. 4. Hypocrisy and lying is the way that sinners use to cover stealing. 5. God may bear with the iniquity of some to clear the innocency of others. 6. Such as seek occasion against the saints, God so orders, that they find it not (ver. 35). (*Ibid.*) *Jacob at Haran; or, The disciplinary retributions of life*:—I. THE RETRIBUTIONS THAT MARKED THE LIFE OF JACOB.

1. Jacob had sought by fraud, position and possession in his father's house. He is now an exile from his father's house—an outcast and a wanderer. 2. He who had defrauded Esau, is now himself defrauded by Laban. 3. He who had deceived his father was afterwards himself deceived by his sons. 4. Another form of retribution that awaited Jacob, was the having to encounter and deal with the brother whom he had so cruelly and foully wronged. II. THE DISCIPLINARY CHARACTER OF THE RETRIBUTIONS THAT MARKED THE LIFE OF JACOB. We are slow to learn the lessons of a godly life by precept. God therefore teaches us them by experience. Jacob's character did certainly advance under the discipline. 1. At Haran he applied himself at once to honest industry, instead of having recourse to artifice and cunning. 2. A spirit of magnanimity marked many of his dealings with his uncle, contrasting favourably with his earlier indications of self-seeking. (*W. Roberts.*) *The years of servitude*:—I. THE RELIGIOUS CONSISTENCY OF JACOB. 1. His trials. And among these we should rank, as of the first importance, that he had been compelled by circumstances to dwell beyond the range of true piety, and to sojourn in an idolatrous land, and with an idolatrous family. Another of the trials to which Jacob was exposed, was the footing on which he stood in the family of Laban. The whole period had been to him a time of affliction; and, but for the favour of his God, this lengthened service, hard as it was, would have terminated in poverty. "Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty." Jacob had no reason to expect such treatment as this from a cousin and a father-in-law. A third trial which Jacob had to endure was, to a feeling mind, peculiarly severe. His attachment to Rachel appears to have been sincere and ardent. He could not, then, but feel deeply the deception that was practised upon him. Among Jacob's trials we must enumerate also many of the scenes of domestic life. 2. We come to notice Jacob's errors. 3. But we turn now to a more gratifying subject of consideration, when we notice, the personal piety of Jacob—the influence which, during twenty years of trial, his principles had upon his personal character. (1) With reference to his sobriety, excepting the error of polygamy, which was indirectly sanctioned, there is nothing on record against him. He was not guilty of any of that violence which had filled the earth, or of those vices which were too general all around him. (2) With reference to the righteousness of his dealings with his fellow-men, he was zealous in the service of his master, moderate beyond measure in his requirements, and faithful in his engagements. He could appeal to Rachel and to Leah, "Ye know that, with all my power, I have served your father." And he had their testimony, and even that of Laban, to the faithfulness of his service. (3) Of his godliness there can be no question. It is manifest that he dwelt with God, and God with him. His habits were those of piety and communion with God; and even the language of Leah and of Rachel show that, by his influence, they were led to cultivate the same spirit. We are told that they prayed, and that God hearkened to them. "The God of my fathers hath been with me, God suffered him not to hurt me." "God

hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me." And again, "Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty." "God hath seen my affliction, and the labour of mine hands, and rebuked thee yesternight." And this view of Jacob's devotional habits is confirmed by the testimony of the sacred writer, that God really was with him. II. But before we draw a practical conclusion from these things, there is another point on which we shall do well for a moment to delay. It is the FAITHFULNESS OF GOD TO HIS SERVANT. God had made a covenant with Jacob by promise; and when Jacob journeyed onward from Bethel, the promise of Divine favour rested upon him. Jacob was pious, because God was gracious. Jacob persevered, because God was faithful. His God had promised "to be with him, and to keep him in all places whither he should go"; and not one word failed of all that the Lord had spoken to him of. The secret agency of God's providence availed for his protection, and for his correction in righteousness. From this period, then, of the Patriarch's life, let us learn the wisdom of confiding ourselves to the care of the Almighty God. "He careth for us." You, then, who are only entering upon the world, or are now struggling with its cares and its temptations—who feel how difficult it is to walk humbly, circumspectly, and without offence—let the twenty years of Jacob's hard service teach you a useful lesson. The path of probity and rectitude is the path of honour, happiness, and success. It is not man, but God that you serve, and He will not forget you. At the same time this history will administer to you a salutary caution. You must not expect deliverance precisely when you wish it, nor in the way most satisfactory to yourself. Clouds may gather when you look for sunshine. Look to the covenant of His grace, and lean upon it, for "it shall not be moved"; and determine, that by His grace you will faithfully fulfil all the relative duties of life, however painful and distressing. (*E. Craig.*)

Lessons:—1. Faithfulness in good servants makes them undergo day and night labours for the good of their rulers. 2. Heat and cold consumptions with restless nights will grace incline to endure to honour God in service. 3. Such faithful service is a testimony against the wrongs and injustice of cruel masters (ver. 40). 4. Unwearied doth grace make souls to be in the service to which they are called by God. 5. Faithfulness will not let a soul to take wages or receive good gratis. 6. The best service may be repaid with hardest measure from graping masters. 7. Good service will rise in judgment against the hard dealings of evil rulers (ver. 41). 8. Where man is injurious God Himself will plead for righteous servants. 9. The true God is known to be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 10. Propriety in God and fear of Him is the best way of knowing God. 11. It is the design of wicked men to undo those in this world whom God doth own and will prosper in it. 12. God takes special notice of the sufferings and faithful doings of His servants towards wicked men. 13. God rebukes the envious and malicious spirit of cruel men against His righteous servants. 14. God's approbation of His own and reprehension of the wicked is a full defence against false charges or criminations (ver. 42).

(*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Laban:*—Laban seeks to get God's blessing, as it were, at second-hand. If men could be related to God indirectly, as if in law and not by blood, that would suit Laban. If God would admit men to His inheritance on any other terms than being sons in the direct line, if there were some relationship once removed, a kind of sons-in-law, so that mere connection with the godly, though not with God, would win His blessing, this would suit Laban. Laban is the man who appreciates the social value of virtue, truthfulness, fidelity, temperance, godliness, but wishes to enjoy their fruits without the pain of cultivating the qualities themselves. He is scrupulous as to the character of those he takes into his employment, and seeks to connect himself in business with good men. In his domestic life he acts on the idea which his experience has suggested to him, that persons really godly will make his home more peaceful, better regulated, safer than otherwise it might be. If he holds a position of authority, he knows how to make use, for the preservation of order and for the promotion of his own ends, of the voluntary efforts of Christian societies, of the trustworthiness of Christian officials, and of the support of the Christian community. But with all this recognition of the reality and influence of godliness, he never for one moment entertains the idea of himself becoming a godly man. In all ages there are Labans who clearly recognize the utility and worth of a connection with God, who have been much mixed up with persons in whom that worth was very conspicuous, and who yet, at the last, "depart and return unto their place," like Jacob's father-in-law, without having themselves entered into any affectionate relations with God. (*M. Dods, D.D.*)

Vers. 43-48. Let us make a covenant, I and thou; and let it be for a witness between me and thee.—*Laban's covenant with Jacob*:—I. It was FORCED UPON HIM BY CIRCUMSTANCES. 1. His long journey in pursuit of Jacob. 2. The Divine warning. 3. His failure to criminate Jacob. 4. The overwhelming force of Jacob's self-defence. II. It SHOWED AN IMPERFECT SENSE OF RELIGIOUS DUTY AND OBLIGATION. 1. The natural love of kindred may exist apart from piety. The social affections are beautiful in themselves, but they may be exercised by those who have very imperfect notions of religion, or who even set it aside altogether. 2. The forms of religion may be used with but an imperfect recognition of their real significance. The setting up of this pillar, and the pious motto attached to it, seemed to indicate a most sacred friendship and a solemn regard to the realities of religion. The all-pervading presence and the power of God were recognized. God is regarded as One to whom men are ultimately accountable. But this transaction, though employing the sanctions of religion, shows but a very low apprehension of its nature. This heap was set up by enemies who called upon God to protect them, each from the encroachments of the other. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Bethel to Mizpah; or, Service in a strange land*:—I. JACOB'S REMONSTRANCE WITH LABAN. 1. He had served a long time. 2. He had served Laban honestly. 3. He had undergone much toil. II. JACOB'S CONFIDENCE IN GOD. III. JACOB'S COVENANT WITH LABAN. Learn: 1. God's providence. 2. God's faithfulness. (*W. S. Smith, B.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. False accusers, though silent at a just defence, yet are not ready to clear the innocent. 2. Guilt makes wicked men dumb to answer the plea of the righteous. Laban knew his guilt, but owns it not. 3. Proud oppressors, when they cannot hurt, yet they brag all is theirs. 4. Unnatural parents, when found out, pretend nearness and interest in their offspring. 5. Cruelty is sometimes crafty to pretend to spare for relation's sake (ver. 43). 6. Bloody men overawed by God are forced to seek peace with the righteous whom they hate. 7. Oppressors are wily to secure their peace by covenant with the innocent when forced to it. 8. Crafty persecutors overcome desire engagement from the persecuted for their safety (ver. 44). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. The righteous and wicked in covenants of peace may agree in the same terms, but not in the same heart. 2. Good and bad have inclination to use terms consonant to their country and religion. 3. Imposition of names upon dead things may tend to the information of the living (ver. 47). 4. Visible tokens may lawfully bear the titles of things signified by them. 5. The worst souls may be ready in word to appeal to witness, but such as they conceive cannot hurt them. 6. Pillars and places may bear the name of memorable actions to teach posterity (ver. 48). 7. Titles and words enough the falsest hearts may use for their own ends. 8. Jehovah may be appealed unto by false hearts as to self-seeking and their own security. 9. Fair pretences and guilty fears may move wicked souls to lay bonds from God upon the innocent for their own safety. 10. God doth oversee and watch all parties covenanted what they do when they are separated (ver. 49). (*Ibid.*) *The pillar a witness*:—The following story is told of a rich old citizen of Bermago. He had lent to one of his countrymen at Florence four hundred crowns, which he advanced without any witness, and without requiring a written acknowledgment. When the stipulated time had elapsed, the creditor required his money; but the borrower, well apprised that no proof could be brought against him, positively denied that he had ever received it. After many fruitless attempts to recover it, the lender was advised to resort to the duke, who would find some method of doing him justice. Alessandro accordingly ordered both the parties before him; and after hearing the assertions of the one, and the positive denial of the other, he turned to the creditor, saying, "Is it possible, then, friend, that you can have lent your money when no one was present?" "There was no one, indeed," replied the creditor. "I counted out the money to him on a post." "Go, bring the post then, this instant," said the duke, "and I will make it confess the truth." The creditor, though astonished at receiving such an order, hastened to obey, having first received a secret caution from the duke not to be very speedy in his return. Meantime the duke employed himself in transacting the affairs of his other suitors, till at length, turning to the borrower, he said, "This man stays a long time with this post." "It is so heavy, sir," replied the other, "that he could not yet have brought it." Again Alessandro left him, and, returning some time afterward, carelessly exclaimed, "What kind of men are they that lend their money without evidence? Was there no one present but the post?" "No, indeed, sir!" replied the knave. "The post is a good witness then," said the duke, "and shall make thee pay the man his money."

Vers. 49-55. **The Lord watch between me and thee.**—*Lessons*:—1. Injurious persons are most apt to suspect the innocent for doing wrong. 2. Wicked men would not have others wrong their children though they do it themselves. 3. Nature denieth polygamy though men's lusts design and plead for it. 4. Want of human witness to require fealty is no ground of breaking covenant security. 5. God Himself is witness to the covenants of men, and will see right to be done by them or judge for it. 6. The most fraudulent men may be strict upon others to press on them the testimony of God (ver. 50). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. Treacherous, deceitful men are most fearful of hurt pursuing them. So Laban. 2. Guilty fear makes men solicitous and intent to save themselves. 3. Sinful solicitousness for safety is full of words to little purpose (ver. 51). 4. Jealousy groundless contents not itself with God's witness, but will have visible assurance. 5. Wickedness may sometimes be content not to do harm to others when it is afraid itself. 6. The most injurious are most solicitous to secure themselves from the innocent, who think no harm unto them (ver. 52). (*Ibid.*) *Lessons*:—1. An oath of God is a just means of confirmation to a lawful covenant for setting things out of doubt. 2. Superstitious men, though convinced of the true way of God, yet worship and swear in old corrupt ways. 3. Oaths taken by false gods, or the true in false ways, are yet binding. 4. In making peace with idolaters it is lawful to take their corrupt swearing, but not to follow it. 5. True saints, when called to swear, must do it in the true fear of the true God. 6. It is just for saints to glorify God by swearing in just cases and making Him Judge (ver. 53). (*Ibid.*) *Lessons*:—1. It is suitable unto a day of peacemaking for God's servants to make a feast. 2. The spirits of good men are free and ingenious even to such as have been adversaries to them. 3. Friendly invitations and communion are the best issue of hot debates. 4. The power of God so overrules as to make persecutors sleep under the shelter of such whom they have oppressed (ver. 54). (*Ibid.*) *Lessons*:—1. The purposes of wicked men are not in their own hands to effect them. Laban goeth changed home. 2. Furious pursuits of the innocent God turneth to early departures of their enemies. 3. Overruling Providence can make unnatural men show natural affection. 4. Wicked men are convinced there cometh good to men only from the blessing of God. 5. Ungodly ones may use forms of blessing when yet they can procure none from God. 6. God turns oppressors to their own with rebukes who thirsted after the possessions of the innocent (ver. 55). So God delivereth His out of temptations. (*Ibid.*) *Mizpah*:—I. The ordinary use of this word is not quite the same as its original use. It is generally used as a kind of bond or link between parted friends; whereas it was first used as a SAFEGUARD AND WARNING between two men who were in some sort enemies, or, at least, but doubtful friends, and one of them very suspicious of the other. 1. When two men part, as Laban and Jacob parted, and their circumstances are such that, while absent from one another, one of them, or perhaps each of them, will have it in his power to injure the other in any way, in such a case let this word act as a wholesome warning: "Mizpah," a beacon or watch-tower. The Lord Himself is such. He overlooks all. 2. A servant must often be free from the ken of master or mistress. But there is an eye on that servant always—the all-seeing eye of God. He stands as a watch-tower between servant and master or mistress, marking and judging how each fulfils his part. Is the master or mistress kind, just, considerate? Is the servant faithful and true, honest, upright, diligent? 3. Men have many dealings with one another in business. The Lord stands and overlooks each bargain. II. But though the original application of the word was such, yet it may very well be applied also in that other way in which it is so often used. When those who love one another are called to part—when friends, for instance, go from each other, when brothers and sisters separate, when children leave home, when even a husband is called to a distance, perhaps to a foreign land, and that for a long time—it is a GREAT COMFORT to remember that the Lord is as a watch-tower between those thus parted. The closest and dearest of all bonds is that of having one Father, one Saviour, one Spirit, one hope now, one eternal home hereafter. Those thus united are hardly absent, even when parted in the body. (*F. Bourdillon, M.A.*) "*Mizpah*" tokens:—Tokens and memorials are not without use. The "*Mizpah*" on seal or ring, on locket or in book, may well bring to mind those absent, and even serve to draw the thoughts to God. The daughter, whose home is among strangers, will think of the fond mother who made that parting gift, and whose wish and prayer seems to be contained in that little word. The son, far off in a foreign land, carries with him a memorial of the same kind; and when he reads that word his thoughts go back to the home of his child-

hood, a father and mother's loving words and earnest prayers come back to his mind, his heart is softened, and he remembers Him who is above all, whose eye is in every place, and now watches over both him and those at home. (*Ibid.*)

CHAPTER XXXII.

VERS. 1, 2. And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim.—*The ministry of angels*:—I. THE ANGELS THEMSELVES. 1. Their number is very great. 2. They are swift as the flames of fire. 3. They are strong. 4. They seem to be all young. 5. They are evidently endowed with corresponding moral excellences. II. THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS HAS THESE CHARACTERISTICS. It is a ministry of—1. Guardianship. 2. Cheerfulness. 3. Animation. 4. Consolation. 5. Fellowship and convoy through death to life, and from earth to heaven. III. THE WHOLE SUBJECT SHOWS IN A VERY STRIKING MANNER—1. The exceeding greatness of the glory of Christ. 2. The value and greatness of salvation. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *Angelic ministrations*:—Every man has two lives—an outward and an inward. The one is that denoted here: "Jacob went on his way," &c. The other is denoted in verse 24: "Jacob was left alone," &c. In either state God dealt with him. I. THE ANGELS OF GOD MET HIM. We do not know in what form they appeared, or by what sign Jacob recognized them. In its simplicity the angelic office is a doctrine of revelation. There exists even now a society and a fellowship between the sinless and the fallen. As man goes on his way, the angels of God meet him. II. ARE THERE ANY SPECIAL WAYS IN WHICH WE MAY RECOGNIZE AND USE THIS SYMPATHY? 1. The angelic office is sometimes discharged in human form. We may entertain angels unawares. Let us count common life a ministry; let us be on the look-out for angels. 2. We must exercise a vigorous self-control lest we harm or tempt. Our Saviour has warned us of the presence of the angels as a reason for not offending His little ones. Their angels He calls them, as though to express the closeness of the tie that binds together the unfallen and the struggling. We may gather from the story two practical lessons. (1) The day and the night mutually act and react. A day of meeting with angels may well be followed by a night of wrestling with God. (2) Earnestness is the condition of success. Jacob had to wrestle a whole night for his change of name, for his knowledge of God. Never will you say, from the world that shall be, that you laboured here too long or too earnestly to win it. (*Dean Vaughan.*) *Meeting with angels*:—I. The angels of God meet us on THE DUSTY ROAD OF COMMON LIFE. II. God's angels meet us PUNCTUALLY at the hour of need. III. The angels of God come in THE SHAPE WHICH WE NEED. Jacob's want was protection; therefore the angels appear in warlike guise, and present before the defenceless man another camp. God's gifts to us change their character; as the Rabbis fabled that manna tasted to each man what each most desired. In that great fulness each of us may have the thing we need. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Jacob's visible and invisible world*:—I. JACOB'S VISIBLE WORLD. He had just escaped the persecutions of his father-in-law, and was now expecting to meet with a fiercer enemy in his brother. All was dread and anxiety. II. JACOB'S INVISIBLE WORLD. What a different scene is presented to him when his spiritual eye is opened, and God permits him to see those invisible forces which were engaged on his side. We are told that "the angels of God met him." He was weak to all human appearance; but he was really strong, for God's host had come to deliver him from any host of men that might oppose. The host of God is described as parting into two bands, as if to protect him behind and before; or to assure him that as he had been delivered from one enemy, so he would be delivered from another enemy, which was coming forth to meet him. Thus Jacob was taught—1. To whom he owed his late mercies. 2. The true source of his protection. 3. His faith is confirmed. It is justified for the past, and placed upon a firmer basis for the future. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Hosts of angels*:—1. God has a multitude of servants, and all these are on the side of believers. "His camp is very great," and all the hosts in that camp are our allies. Some of these are visible agents, and many more are invisible, but none the less real and powerful. 2. We know that a guard of

angels always surrounds every believer. "Omnipotence has servants everywhere." These servants of the strong God are all filled with power; there is not one that fainteth among them all, they run like mighty men, they prevail as men of war. We know that they "excel in strength," as they "do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word." Rejoice, O children of God! There are vast armies upon your side, and each one of the warriors is clothed with the strength of God. 3. All these agents work in order, for it is God's host, and the host is made up of beings which march or fly, according to the order of command. "Neither shall one thrust another; they shall walk every one in his path." All the forces of nature are loyal to their Lord. They are perfectly happy, because consecrated; full of delight, because completely absorbed in doing the will of the Most High. Oh that we could do His will on earth as that will is done in heaven by all the heavenly ones! 4. Observe that in this great host they were all punctual to the Divine command. Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. The patriarch is no sooner astir than the hosts of God are on the wing. They did not linger till Jacob had crossed the frontier, nor did they keep him waiting when he came to the appointed rendezvous; but they were there to the moment. When God means to deliver you, beloved, in the hour of danger, you will find the appointed force ready for your succour. God's messengers are neither behind nor before their time; they will meet us to the inch and to the second in the time of need; therefore let us proceed without fear, like Jacob, going on our way even though an Esau with a band of desperadoes should block up the road. 5. Those forces of God, too, were all engaged personally to attend upon Jacob. I like to set forth this thought: "Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him"; he did not chance to fall in with them. They did not happen to be on the march, and so crossed the patriarch's track; no, no; he went on his way, and the angels of God met him with design and purpose. They came on purpose to meet him: they had no other appointment. Squadrons of angels marched to meet that one lone man! He was a saint, but by no means a perfect one; we cannot help seeing many flaws in him, even upon a superficial glance at his life, and yet the angels of God met him. All came to wait upon Jacob, on that one man: "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him"; but in this case it was to one man with his family of children that a host was sent. The man himself, the lone man who abode in covenant with God when all the rest of the world was given up to idols, was favoured by this mark of Divine favour. One delights to think that the angels should be willing, and even eager, troops of them, to meet one man. Are ye not well cared for, oh ye sons of the Most High? 6. Those forces, though in themselves invisible to the natural senses, are manifest to faith at certain times. There are times when the child of God is able to cry, like Jacob, "The angels of God have met me." When do such seasons occur? Our Mahanaims occur at much the same time as that in which Jacob beheld this great sight. Jacob was entering upon a more separated life. He was leaving Laban and the school of all those tricks of bargaining and bartering which belong to the ungodly world. By a desperate stroke he cut himself clear of entanglements; but he must have felt lonely, and as one cast adrift. He missed all the associations of the old house of Mesopotamia, which, despite its annoyances, was his home. The angels come to congratulate him. Their presence said, "You are come to this land to be a stranger and sojourner with God, as all your fathers were. We have, some of us, talked with Abraham, again and again, and we are now coming to smile on you. You recollect how we bade you good-bye that night, when you had a stone for your pillow at Bethel; now you have come back to the reserved inheritance, over which we are set as guardians, and we have come to salute you. Take up the nonconforming life without fear, for we are with you. Welcome! welcome! we are glad to receive you under our special care." Again, the reason why the angels met Jacob at that time was, doubtless, because he was surrounded with great cares. He had a large family of little children; and great flocks and herds and many servants were with him. Again, the Lord's host appeared when Jacob felt a great dread. His brother Esau was coming to meet him armed to the teeth, and, as he feared, thirsty for his blood. In times when our danger is greatest, if we are real believers, we shall be specially under the Divine protection, and we shall know that it is so. This shall be our comfort in the hour of distress. And, once again, when you and I, like Jacob, shall be near Jordan, when we shall just be passing into the better land, then is the time when we may expect to come to Mahanaim. The angels of God and the God of angels, both come to meet the spirits of the blessed in the

solemn article of death. 7. Thus I have mentioned the time when these invisible forces become visible to faith; and there is no doubt whatever that they are sent for a purpose. Why were they sent to Jacob at this time? Perhaps the purpose was first to revive an ancient memory which had well-nigh slipped from him. I am afraid he had almost forgotten Bethel. Surely it must have brought his vow at Bethel to mind, the vow which he made unto the Lord when he saw the ladder, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. Here they were; they had left heaven and come down that they might hold communion with him. Mahanaim was granted to Jacob, not only to refresh his memory, but to lift him out of the ordinary low level of his life. Jacob, you know, the father of all the Jews, was great at huckstering: it was the very nature of him to drive bargains. Jacob had all his wits about him, and rather more than he should have had, well answering to his name of "supplanter." He would let no one deceive him, and he was ready at all times to take advantage of those with whom he had any dealings. Here the Lord seems to say to him, "O Jacob, My servant, rise out of this miserable way of dealing with Me, and be of a princely mind." Oh for grace to live according to our true position and character, not as poor dependents upon our own wits or upon the help of man, but as grandly independent of things seen, because our entire reliance is fixed upon the unseen and eternal. Believe as much in the invisible as in the visible, and act upon your faith. This seems to me to be God's object in giving to any of His servants a clearer view of the powers which are engaged on their behalf. If such a special vision be granted to us, let us keep it in memory. Jacob called the name of that place Mahanaim. I wish we had some way in this western world, in these modern times, of naming places, and children, too, more sensibly. We must needs either borrow some antiquated title, as if we were too short of sense to make one for ourselves, or else our names are sheer nonsense, and mean nothing. Why not choose names which should commemorate our mercies? (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *God's host:—I. THE PATH OF COMMON DUTIES IN DAILY LIFE IS THE BEST AND SUREST WAY TO HEAVENLY VISIONS.* Jacob's track lay downward to the deep valley, and through its shadows to the fords of Jordan. So, if our life is led downward, through toil and care and sorrow, heaven may open as freely above it as on the hill-tops. All know how the proof of a soldier is given on the march as much as in battle; and it is so in common life. But in spiritual application there is a difference: the rewards of men are won only on the field; but our Divine Commander observes and honours equally those equally faithful in the daily march, in farm, or shop, or household, or in the shut-in camp of sickness—those "faithful in that which is least." II. *GOD'S CARE OVER THOSE THAT FEAR HIM.* III. *GOD'S WAY OF APPEARING FOR MAN'S HELP.* (*W. H. Randall.*) *Lessons:—* 1. Laban's departure and Jacob's progress are adjoining. Oppressors retreat and saints advance. 2. God's servants are careful to move in their own way enjoined by God. 3. In their way commanded, God appoints His angels to meet them (*Psa. xci. 2, 4*). God with His angels appears to comfort His, after conflicts with their adversaries (*ver. 1*). 5. God sometimes affords His visible helps unto visible troubles for His saints' support. 6. God's angels are God's mighty host indeed, and that in the judgment of the saints. 7. Not single angels but troops God appoints for the guard of single saints. 8. God's saints desire to call mercies by their right names. God's angels are called God's hosts. 9. It is proper to God's saved ones, to leave memorials of God's strength in saving them (*ver. 2*). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Mahanaim:—*I cannot tell, for Scripture says not, in what form they appeared, or by what sign Jacob recognized them. It is perhaps in the most general view of the passage that its truest comfort lies. It matters not to us what the Patriarchs thought or knew of the ministry of angels, so long as we ourselves recognize the true place of that ministry in the economy of God. In its simplicity, the angelic office is a doctrine of revelation. There are beings beside and (for the present) above man; beings, like him, intelligent, rational, spiritual; beings capable, like him, of knowing, loving, and communing with God; beings, unlike him, pure from the stain of sin—tried once, as all moral natures must be tried, by the alternative of loyalty or self-pleasing—yet faithful among the faithless through that great ordeal, and now for ever secured by the seal of that holiness which they have chosen. Man is not yet, save in one single aspect, the head and the chief of all God's creation. In the person of the God-Man he has the pledge indeed that one day he shall be so. But as yet, when the eye of faith looks upward through the infinite space, it discerns essences in all things equal to the human, and in their sinlessness superior; it sees those who in heaven's

primeval warfare sided with God and conquered—left not their original estate, nor despised their first habitation. The existence of a nature purer than man's, more refined in its enjoyments and more elevated in its converse, presents no practical difficulty to the thoughtful. We find nothing but refreshment and nothing but encouragement in the belief that above as well as beneath us are beings performing perfectly the law of their creation; spirits that see God's face, as well as animals instinctively true to God's order. Man only mars the sweet accord: higher existences have not fallen, lower existences could not fall. If for man God has provided a redemption, then may there be in the end a restoration of that original perfection in which God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good. That contrast which shames shall also comfort. But how much more when we read in the sure word of revelation that there exists even now a society and a fellowship between the sinless and the fallen! As man goes on his way, the angels of God meet him. In all his ways they have charge of him, that he dash not his foot against a stone. That which God has done for man, angels desire to look into. Angels are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation. Angels spend not their immortal age in abject prostration, or in delicious dreamy contemplation; rather do they excel in strength, doing God's commandments, hearkening (for obedience sake) to the voice of God's Word. When God spake to man from a material mountain, His holy ones were around Him: "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels; and the Lord is among them, as in the holy place of Sinai." Theirs were those wondrous utterances, which Israel took for the voice of the trumpet, sounding long, and waxing louder and louder; theirs those fearful manifestations of blinding smoke and consuming fire, amidst which the Lord descended, while all the people that was in the camp trembled; theirs, it may be, the hewing and the graving of those tables of stone, on which were written, as by God's finger, the words of His first testimony. The law was ordained by angels; the law was given by the disposition of angels; the word spoken by angels was steadfast. And if even that temporary, that parenthetical dispensation was thus introduced by the ministry of angels; if man's recovery was dear to them, even in its earlier and more imperfect stages, while he was but learning his lesson of weakness, and heaving his first sighs after forgiveness and sanctification—well can we understand how they might herald a Saviour's birth, and soothe a Saviour's sorrows; strengthen Him in His agony, and minister in His tomb; proclaim His resurrection, predict His advent, and greet at the everlasting doors the return of the King of glory. Not even there, nor then, did their ministry terminate. He Himself has told us how in heaven, in the presence of the angels of God, there is joy still over each sinner that repenteth; how His little ones below, His weak and tempted disciples, have their angels ever in heaven, beholding the face of His Father; how angels carry dying saints into Abraham's bosom; and how, in the last great crisis of the world's harvest, it is they who shall execute the reapers' office, gather together His elect from the four winds, and gather also out of His kingdom all things that offend. Wheresoever there is a work to be done as between God and man, there is the great ladder still reared, and the angels of God are ascending and descending by it. Ministering spirits are they still; and man's best wish for himself is that he may at last be enabled to do as well as to suffer God's will, even as they, the inmates of heaven, have from the beginning borne and done it. They will be done, he prays, as in heaven, so on earth. Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. We know not how extensive, and we know not how minute, may be that ministration even in the things that are seen. We know not what angelic workings may be concealed behind the phenomena of nature, or latent in the accidents and the escapes of human life. We know not how, in seasons of mortal weakness or of fiendish temptation, we may be indebted to their instrumentality for the reviving courage or the resisting strength. We dare not say but that even the indwelling Spirit may avail Himself of their ministry to assist or to protect, to invigorate or to reanimate. This we know—for the Word of God has told us—that one portion of that holy communion and fellowship to which the citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem has come, not only in hope, but in present union and incorporation, is an innumerable company of angels. I read not these words as glimpses only of a glorious future, but as expressive of a present trust and a practical help and aid. The sympathy of angels is one of the Christian's privileges. Are there any special ways in which we may recognize and use this sympathy? As we go on our way, can we in any special manner hope to meet the angels? 1. An apostle speaks of entertaining angels unawares. He says that the

duty of hospitality may be exercised in this remembrance—thereby some have entertained angels. It is so still. The angelic office is discharged sometimes in human form. Let us count common life a ministry : let us, in common life, be on the look-out for angels ! 2. And more especially, in the exercise of a vigilant self-control, lest we harm or tempt. Our Saviour Himself has warned us of the presence of the angels as a reason for not offending—that is, for not thwarting and not tempting—His little ones. Beware, careless parent ! beware, sinful brother ! beware, false friend ! That child, that boy, that youth, has his angel, and the home of that angel is the heaven of God ! (*Dean Vaughan.*) *God's host always near* :—We who live in this matter-of-fact and mechanical age are apt to think that it was a wrapt and wondrous life which the patriarch led in that old time, when he could meet God's host among the hills, and could see convoys of bright angels like the burning clouds of sunset hovering round him in the solitudes of the mountains. But God's host is always nearer than we are apt to suppose in the dark hours of trial and conflict. The angels have not yet forsaken the earth, nor have they ceased to protect the homes and journeys of good men. Heaven and earth are nearer each other now than they were when Jacob saw God's host in the broad day and Abraham entertained the Divine messengers under the shadow of the oak at noon. The spiritual world is all around us, and its living inhabitants are our fellow-servants and companions in all our work for God and for our own salvation. The inhabitants of heaven find more friends and acquaintances on earth now than they did in former times. It is not from any want of interest in the affairs of men that they do not now meet us in the daily walks of life or speak to us in the dreams of the night. If we do not see angels come and take us by the hand and lead us out of danger, as they led Lot out of Sodom, it is not because they have ceased to come, or because they fail to guard us when we need protection. We must not think that God was more interested in the world in ancient times, when He spoke by miracles and prophets and apostles, than He is now when He speaks by His written word and by His holy providence. The heart of the Infinite Father never yearned toward His earthly children with a deeper or more tender compassion than now. There never was a time when God was doing more to govern, to instruct, and to save the world than He is doing now. To those who look for Him the tokens of His presence are manifest everywhere ; the voice of His providence is in every wind ; every path of life is covered with the overshadowings of His glory. To the devout mind this world, which has been consecrated by the sacrificial blood of the cross, is only the outer court of the everlasting temple in which God sits enthroned, with the worshipping hosts of the blessed around Him. We need only a pure heart to see God as much in the world now as He was when He talked with men face to face. He speaks in all the discoveries of science, in all the inventions of heart, in all the progress of the centuries, in everything which enriches life and enlarges the resources of men. All the great conflicts and agitations of society prove that God is on the field. We need only add the faith of the patriarchs to the science of the philosophers, and we shall find Bethels in the city and in the solitude, Mahanaims in every day's march in the journey of life (*D. March, D.D.*) *Angelic ministration* :—I did not see, early in the morning, the flight of all those birds that filled all the bushes and all the orchard trees, but they were there, though I did not see their coming, and heard their songs afterwards. It does not matter whether you have ministered to you yet those perceptions by which you perceive angelic existence. The fact that we want to bear in mind is, that we are environed by them, that we move in their midst. How, where, what the philosophy is, whether it be spiritual philosophy, no man can tell, and they least that think they know most about it. The fact which we prize and lay hold of is this, that angelic ministration is a part, not of the heavenly state, but of the universal condition of men, and that as soon as we become Christ's we come not to the home of the living God, but to the "innumerable company of angels." (*H. W. Beecher.*) *Angels on the path of life* :—Though no vision is vouchsafed to our mortal eyes, yet angels of God are with us oftener than we know, and to the pure heart every home is a Bethel, and every path of life a Penuel and a Mahanaim. In the outer world and the inner world, we see and meet continually these messengers of God. Wrestle with them in faith and prayer they are angels with hands full of immortal gifts ; to those who neglect or use them ill they are angels with drawn sword and scathing flame. I. The earliest angel is the angel of youth. Do not think that you can retain him long. Use, as wise stewards, this blessed portion of your lives. Remember that as your faces are setting into the look which they shall wear in later

years, so is it with your lives. II. Next is the angel of innocent pleasure. Trifle not with this angel. Remember that in heathen mythology the Lord of Pleasure is also the God of Death. Guilty pleasure there is; guilty happiness there is not on earth. III. There are the angels of time and opportunity. They are with us now, and we may unloench from their conquered hands garlands of immortal flowers. Hallow each new day in your morning prayer, for prayer, too, is an angel—an angel who can turn “pollution into purity, sinners into penitents, and penitents into saints.” IV. There is one angel with whom we must wrestle whether we will or no, and whose power of curse or blessing we cannot alter—the angel of death. (*Archdeacon Farrar.*)

Vers. 3-9. And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother.—The alarm.—I. We will consider, in the first place, THE PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES WHICH JACOB ADOPTED. In the first instance, as soon as he heard of the evil which apparently awaited him, he immediately divided “the people that were with him into two bands,” in the hope that if one company was suddenly surprised and smitten, the other might in the interim escape. II. But in the second place, let us notice WHAT WAS JACOB’S CHIEF RESOURCE IN THIS PRESSING EXIGENCY. It was the throne of grace. Prayer is, in fact, the peculiar privilege and the natural habit of a truly pious mind. Prayer also is a very powerful proof of the state of the heart. If we see men, who profess and call themselves Christians, struggling and contending in their own strength, with second causes, as the source of their sorrows, in the hope of overcoming them, and not affectionately, earnestly, spontaneously spreading their case before the Lord, we have reason to doubt the sincerity of their religious profession. III. But, with these prefatory remarks, let us now examine THE NATURE OF JACOB’S PRAYER. It is a very beautiful example of real prayer. It is simple, full, and energetic. We will glance briefly at its leading topics. 1. There is, first, a simple and vindictory statement of the circumstances in which Jacob was placed. He had not brought himself thoughtlessly or wilfully into this difficulty. “Thou saidst unto me, return unto thy country and thy kindred.” “I am here, in obedience to Thy command.” There is a very wide distinction between those trials and sufferings into which a man is brought by wilfulness and sin, and those which come upon him independently of his own control, and in respect to which, his mind must necessarily be free from guilt. 2. But, secondly, though in this instance Jacob was free to appeal to the knowledge of God for his acquittal from any wilful transgression in those steps which had led him into danger, yet he did not hesitate, in other respects, to take at once the only ground upon which a human creature can consistently stand before God; and, consequently, we find the justification of his conduct in his present circumstances, immediately followed by an humble acknowledgment of his utter unworthiness before God. “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, that Thou hast showed unto Thy servant.” How different is this from the proud feeling of independence with which men generally regard their property in this life! The language of a prosperous man among his fellows, as well as in his heart, is too frequently, “My power, and the might of my hand, have gotten me this wealth.” 3. But, thirdly, in the midst of humiliating confession, Jacob did not forget His mercies. He thankfully records them. He extols the mercy and the faithfulness of God. “With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and lo, I am become two bands.” If we would secure the continuance of our blessings, we should be free to remember them. But once more we notice, that Jacob continues his prayer by an affectionate enunciation of God’s promises. “I fear lest Esau come and smite me, and the mother with the children; and Thou saidst I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.” We are always safe when we can grasp the promises of God, and convert them into prayers. “Thou hast said, a new heart will I give thee, and a new spirit will I put within thee. O Lord, create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me.” 4. Lastly, Jacob evidently showed that he placed an unfeigned and implicit confidence in the covenant, the promises, and the mercies of God. All the language of his prayer, tends to call up before him an animating view of the character of Him whom he addressed. This is precisely the spirit in which the Christian is now encouraged to approach the Lord. He has purer light, and greater knowledge. (*E. Craig.*) **Jacob’s preparation for meeting his angry brother:**—I. He took those measures dictated by HUMAN PRUDENCE. 1. He sends messengers of peace. 2. He divides his company into two bands. 3. He sends a present. II. He took those measures dictated by RELIGION. Prayer. 1. He appeals to God as the Covenant God and Father

(ver. 9). 2. He pleads God's gracious promise to himself. "The Lord which saidst unto me, "Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee." 3. He confesses his own unworthiness, and God's goodness and faithfulness (ver. 10). 4. He presents his special petition expressing his present want (ver. 11). He prays to be delivered from his brother's anger, the possible consequences of which were fearful to contemplate. 5. He cleaves to God's word of promise (ver. 12). God had promised to do him good, and to make his seed as the sand of the sea for multitude. And Jacob pleads as if he said, how could this promise be fulfilled if himself and his family were slain? This prayer shows the kind husband, the tender father, the man of faith and piety. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Jacob's return from Padan-aram*:—I. In regard to THE CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH JACOB WAS PLACED, we may observe that he was surrounded by a numerous family, to whom he was strongly attached, and some of whom were of a very tender age; and that he saw the whole of them, with himself, liable, in the course of a few transitory hours, to be cut off by the sword of an enraged brother. II. THE CONDUCT WHICH JACOB ADOPTED UPON THIS OCCASION IS FULL OF INTEREST AND INSTRUCTION. It was equally removed from presumption and despair; and presents one of the most edifying examples of sanctified affliction. 1. He did everything in his power to avert his brother's wrath, and conciliate his favour. 2. He made an arrangement in regard to his family, which was calculated at least to save some of them. 3. He had recourse to earnest prayer. (1) It was addressed to the God of his fathers. Jacob had descended from ancestors distinguished by their piety; and he avails himself of that circumstance to raise his drooping faith. (2) In Jacob's prayer we observe an humble acknowledgment of his absolute demerit before God. (3) When asking of God the favour of protection, Jacob gratefully acknowledges the blessings he had already received. (4) The prayer which is now under our consideration contains an encouraging reference to the Divine direction, which Jacob was then in the very act of obeying. (5) In this most impressive prayer the patriarch pleads the promise of God in regard to his posterity. The facts which have now occupied our attention contain many practical lessons of general application. They remind us, in a very impressive manner—1. Of the established connection between sin and punishment. 2. The history of Jacob suggests the immense importance of genuine piety. 3. The example of Jacob, on the occasion described in the text, teaches the important lesson, that to obtain from God the blessing we desire, it is our duty to use the requisite means, and at the same time to place an absolute reliance upon His mercy. (*T. Jackson.*) *Lessons*:—1. Providence ordereth returns of messages sometimes to be cross to the expectation of His saints. 2. Messages of peace are delivered to wicked men from saints sometimes without answerable return. 3. Faithful messengers will perform their charge whatever the issue be (Prov. xxv. 13). 4. Wicked men though intreated, may show themselves in their power and terror to the saints (ver. 6). 5. Creature-terrors are apt to stir up fears vehemently in the hearts of God's dearest ones. 6. Fears in saints are not so violent, but that they rationally provide for their safety under them. 7. It is good prudence to save part from ruin when the whole is in danger. 8. Military order in setting troops in place, is not unbecoming saints (ver. 7; Gen. xiv. 15). 9. God's armies do not quiet saints sometimes, when sense worketh on outward danger. 10. Smitings of some by enemies are reasonable warnings for others to escape (ver. 8). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. Faith in prayer to God is the saints' immediate help against fear in the hour of temptation. 2. The saints' providence for themselves is but in order to their refuge in God. 3. God in gracious relations to poor souls is the proper object of prayer. 4. Saints may be bold to fly to God for help in the execution of His commands. 5. God in the promise of grace to His people is the special object of their faith and prayer. 6. Special faith evidencing and applying promises is very necessary to effectual prayer in temptation (ver. 9). (*Ibid.*) *Jacob at Mahanaim*:—I. JACOB'S PLAN. 1. How it originated. (1) In the report he heard of Esau's approach at the head of four hundred men (ver. 6). (2) His fear lest Esau might intend to carry out his old purpose of revenge (ver. 7; xxvii. 42). (3) His perplexity. Not having strength to resist such a force (ver. 7). (4) His desire to save, if possible, the half of his property (ver. 8). 2. In what it consisted. In the division of his flocks and herds, &c., into two companies. It must have been a huge company at the first, for him to think, after the message he sent (vers. 4, 5), that his brother would imagine the half was all he had. He thought that one half, hearing the attack upon the other, might in the confusion escape while Esau was driving off his plunder. 3. The plan was well contrived. A little of the old Jacob

is here planning and scheming. 4. How he wronged his brother by his unjust suspicions. 5. How he wronged God, by not in the first place seeking His guidance and help. His old method of taking the plan into his own hands. Still relying too much on human sagacity. II. JACOB'S PRAYER. 1. Having made his plans, according to his own wisdom, then he asked God to bless him; and in the end found that his plans were all needless. Prayer at the first would have saved him much perplexity and fear. 2. When he did pray he displayed great humility of soul and dependence upon God. (1) He approached God in His covenant relation as the God of Abraham. (2) He reminds his Divine friend of his own obedience in obeying His call to return. (3) He mentions the promise, "I will deal well with thee." (4) He protests his own great unworthiness. (5) He gratefully acknowledges the good hand of God in so increasing his substance. (6) He supplicates present help in his time of need. (7) He reminds God of the covenant promise. Having presented this his prayer, he proceeds to select a present for his brother. III. JACOB'S CONDUCT. All being ready, his company divided, the present prepared, Jacob sent the present forward in divisions, each drove with servants, and each servant with a message; one part of the message being that Jacob was himself about to follow the gift. The spirit of the gift conciliatory. Conciliation his avowed purpose (ver. 20). The present was designed to break down every feeling of revenge and anger supposed still to exist in the mind of Esau. Jacob himself would remain that night, which at one time he feared would be his last, with his company. Growing more confident as the night advanced, he arose and sent over his wives and children. Thus committed to the care of God all that he had. Learn: 1. That the fruit of past sins is sure to spring up in our way. Jacob cannot forget the evil he had done; nor return, after this long absence from home, without confronting its results. 2. That prayer is the best means of meeting great difficulties. Our best plans ineffective without that blessing which prayer secures. Prayer puts the heart into the best condition for enduring trial. (J. C. Gray.)

Ver. 10. **I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies.**—*A pilgrim's acknowledgment of God's goodness*:—Here we have the typical nature of this narrative brought out before us, as applying, first, to the material; secondly, to the mental; and thirdly, to the spiritual. I. First, with regard to the MATERIAL. If we can show that it is typical; if it applies to the human nature of the present day, then what we wish you to do is this, not to leave the acknowledgment of God's providence for future years and old age, when you will be able to say, "It is all Thy doing"; but even now to acknowledge the goodness and providence and omnipotence of God, and depending on Him to try and work in commercial matters in a righteous and God-fearing spirit. Look at the matter as typically understood. Jacob has prospered, and has come to a spot in his career when the circumstances of his poverty are brought to mind, and he falls down in thankful adoration. Are the types of this history died out in our own land? Is this narrative very different to the narrative we could give one of another? II. But the narrative also, we believe, IS TYPICAL IN A MENTAL SENSE. A man is about to study for a profession—no matter what it may be, he has toil, arduous labour, before him. He begins with nothing but good wishes from his friends that he may be successful, a good name and earnest determination; and he becomes eminently successful. And when he is sitting on the Chancellor's seat in the House of Lords, or has otherwise acquired fame and fortune, will he not remember the Power that has done it all, and, remembering, devoutly and most thankfully acknowledge that he was not worthy of so great a mercy? If a man has reflection, honesty and common-sense, and believes in the existence of a Deity, he is forced to admit that this is true; and therefore we say, oh! what ingratitude not to thank Him for the health and strength supplied, and the providential ordering of circumstances which produced the result! Now, if you go thus far, you must go still farther. Ought you not to ask His blessing on everything you do? And if you do this He will bless; and in your old age, when you take a review of the past—of the circumstances under which you began life, the hopes and the fears that passed through your mind, and the prosperity that attended your path, you will be able to say, and to say with joy and happiness, "Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life, and now I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." III. But we want now to come to the SPIRITUAL. And here perhaps we shall be joined by the experience of more than even the other two classes. It is not every one of us that can become rich—not every one of us that can develop our mental powers to the highest; but it is within

the reach of all to be spiritually minded. Now, you have been a Christian for many years; now your example has been a help to others, and you are filled with joy and peace. You live in the Lord Jesus Christ; your "life is hid with Christ in God," and you are looking forward to the period when you shall enter the eternal world. In a little time your body will be committed "dust to dust"; but you know and feel joyfully assured that there is a glorious resurrection life beyond, in the many mansions purchased with the blood of your Redeemer. Even now, in imagination, you join in the heavenly songs. You have felt the pressure of the golden crown on your forehead, and your fingers have seemed to sweep the strings of the golden harp. And sometimes you have felt to have a more intimate communion with Christ than you ever expected while in the body. When calling all this experience to mind, can you but remember the grace which has made you to differ from others, and remembering, say—"I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan: and now I am become two bands"? And feeling thus—remembering what God has done for you—can you be content to go through life without doing anything for Him, or without trying to serve Him? (*W. Cuthbertson, B.A.*)

Jacob's character.—I. THE ESTIMATE WHICH HE FORMED OF HIS OWN CHARACTER. "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies," &c. This acknowledgment implies—1. He was a believer in God. 2. He was a worshipper of God. 3. He was a follower of God. II. HIS GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE DIVINE GOODNESS. "All the mercies, and all the truth," &c. 1. They were abundant mercies. 2. They were unceasing mercies. 3. They were covenant mercies. III. HIS CONSCIOUS UNWORTHINESS OF SUCH PECULIAR BLESSINGS. "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies"; or, rather, "I am less than all the compassions," &c. 1. This is the language of conscious dependence. 2. This is the language of grateful recollection. 3. This is the language of deep self-abasement. How amiable is this disposition; it is the characteristic distinction of all the righteous (Gen. xviii. 27; 1 Chron. xvii. 16, 17; Eph. iii. 18; 1 Pet. v. 5). We may infer—1. The design and advantage of Scripture biography (Rom. xv. 4). 2. The duty of imitating the piety of the primitive saints (Heb. vi. 12). 3. The necessity of cultivating a spirit of humility and gratitude (James iv. 10). (*Sketches of Sermons.*)

Humility the friend of prayer.—Jacob's character was far from faultless, but equally removed from despicable. He was a man full of energy, active, enduring, resolute, and hence his infirmities became more conspicuous than they would have been in a quieter and more restful nature. Say what you will of him, he was a master of the art of prayer, and he that can pray well is a princely man. He that can prevail with God will certainly prevail with men. It seems to me that when once a man is taught of the Lord to pray, he is equal to every emergency that can possibly arise. The very first sentence of Jacob's prayer has this peculiarity about it, that it is steeped in humility; for he does not address the Lord as his own God at the first, but as the God of Abraham and Isaac. The prayer itself, though it is very urgent, is never presumptuous; it is as lowly as it is earnest. I. Our first observation is that HUMILITY IS THE FIT ATTITUDE OF PRAYER. Observe that he here speaks not as before man, but as before God; and he cries, "I am not worthy of the least of all Thy mercies." He had been talking with Laban—Laban who had made a slave of him, who had used him in the most mercenary manner, and who had now pursued him in fierce anger because he had quitted his service with his wives and children that he might go back to his native country. To Laban he does not say, "I am not worthy of what I possess," for, as far as churlish Laban was concerned, he was worthy of a great deal more than had ever been rendered to him in the form of wage. To Laban he uses many truthful sentences of self-vindication and justification. The same man who speaks in that fashion to Laban turns round and confesses to his God, "I am not worthy of the least of all Thy mercies." This is perfectly consistent and truthful. Humility is not telling falsehoods against yourself; humility is forming a right estimate of yourself. As towards Laban it was a correct estimate for a man who had worked so hard for so little to claim that he had a right to what God had given him; and yet as before God it was perfectly honest and sincere of Jacob to say, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto Thy servant." Now, whenever you go to prayer, if you have previously been compelled to say some rather strong thing as to your own integrity and industry; or, if you have heard others speak in your praise, forget it all; for you cannot pray if it has any effect upon you. A man cannot pray with a good opinion of himself: all he can manage is just to mutter,

"God, I thank Thee, that I am not as other men are," and that is no prayer at all. 2. Brethren, it would ill become any of us to use the language of merit before God; for merit we have none; and if we had any, we should not need to pray. It has been well observed by an old divine, that the man who pleads his own merit does not pray, but demands his due. 3. Let me add, also, that in times of great pressure upon the heart there is not much fear of self-righteousness intruding. Jacob was greatly afraid and sore distressed; and when a man is brought into such a state the lowliest language suits him. They that are filled with bread may boast, but the hungry beg. Let the proud take heed lest while the bread is yet in their mouths the wrath of God come upon them. 4. I call your attention to the present tense as it is used in the text—Jacob does not say, as we might half have thought he would have said, "I was not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which Thou hast made to pass before Thy servant," but he says "I am not worthy." He does not merely allude to his unworthiness when he crossed this Jordan with a staff in his hand, a poor solitary banished man: he believes that he was unworthy then; but even now, looking upon his flocks and his herds and his great family, and all that he had done and suffered, he cries, "I am not worthy." What! Has not all God's mercy made you worthy? Brethren, free grace is neither the child nor the father of human worthiness. If we get all the grace we ever can get we shall never be worthy of that grace; for grace as it enters where there is no worthiness, so it imparts to us no worthiness afterwards as we are judged before God. When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants; we have only done what it was our duty to have done. II. Secondly, the same thought will be kept up, but put in a somewhat differing light, while we note that THOSE CONSIDERATIONS WHICH MAKE TOWARDS HUMILITY ARE THE STRENGTH OF PRAYER. 1. Observe, first, that Jacob in this prayer showed his humility by a confession of the Lord's working in all his prosperity. He says with a full heart, "All the mercies and all the truth which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant." Well, but Jacob, you have immense flocks of sheep, but you earned them, and through your care they greatly increased—do you not consider that those flocks are entirely your own procuring? Surely you must see that you were highly industrious, prudent, and careful, and thus grew wealthy? No; he takes a survey of his great estate, and he speaks of it all as mercies—mercies which the Lord had showed unto His servant. I do not object to books about self-made men, but I am afraid that self-made men have a great tendency to worship him that made them. It is very natural they should. But, brethren, if we are self-made, I am sure we had a very bad maker, and there must be a great many flaws in us. It would be better to be ground back to dust again, and made over anew so as to become God-made men. 2. The next point is a consideration of God's mercies. For my part, nothing ever sinks me so low as the mercy of God, and next to that I am readily subdued by the kindness of men. The man who has a due sense of his own character will be laid low by words of commendation. When we remember the loving kindness of the Lord to us we cannot but contrast our littleness with the greatness of His love, and feel a sense of self-debasement. I have a dear brother in Christ who is now sore sick, the Rev. Mr. Curme, the vicar of Sandford, in Oxfordshire, who has been my dear friend for many years. He is the mirror of humility, and he divides his name into two words, Cur me? which means, "Why me?" Often did he say, in my hearing, "Why me, Lord? Why me?" Truly I can say the same, Cur me? This exceeding kindness of the Lord all tends to promote humility, and at the same time to help us in prayer; for if the Lord be so greatly good, we may adopt the language of the Phœnician woman when the Master said to her, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." She answered, "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." So we will go and ask our Lord to give us crumbs of mercy, and they will be enough for us poor dogs. God's crumbs are bigger than man's loaves; and if He gives us what to Him may be a crumb, it shall be a meal to us. Oh, He is a great Giver! He is a glorious Giver! We are not equal to His least gift. 3. Again, a comparison of our past and our present will tend to humility and also to helpfulness in prayer. Jacob at first is described thus, "With my staff I passed over this Jordan." He is all alone, no servant attends him; he has no goods, not even a change of linen in a parcel, nothing but a staff to walk with; now, after a few years, here is Jacob coming back, crossing the river in the opposite direction, and he has with him two bands. He is a large grazier with great wealth in all manner of cattle. What a change! I would have those men whom God has prospered never to be ashamed of what they used to be; they

ought never to forget the staff with which they crossed this Jordan. I had a good friend who preserved the axle-tree of the truck in which he wheeled home his goods when he first came to London. It was placed over his front door, and he never blushed to tell how he came up from the country, worked hard, and made his way in the world. I like this a deal better than the affected gentility which forgets the lone half-crown which pined in solitude in their pockets when they entered this city.

III. And now, as time flies, we must dwell upon the third point, still hammering the same nail on the head: *TRUE HUMILITY SUPPLIES US WITH ARGUMENTS IN PRAYER.*

1. Look at the first one, "I am not worthy of all Thy mercies"; nay, "I am not worthy of the least of all the many mercies which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant. Thou hast kept Thy word and been true to me, but it was not because I was true to Thee. I am not worthy of the truth which Thou hast shown to Thy servant." Is there not power in such a prayer? Is not mercy secured by a confession of worthiness? 2. Then please to notice that while Jacob thus pleads his own unworthiness he is not slow to plead God's goodness. He speaks in most expressive words, wide and full of meaning. "I am not worthy of the least of all Thy mercies. I cannot enumerate them, the list would be too long! It seems to me as if Thou hadst given me all kinds of mercies, every sort of blessing. Thy mercy endureth for ever, and Thou hast given it all to me." How he extols God as with a full mouth when he says, "All Thy mercies." He does not say, "all Thy mercy"—the word is in the plural—"the least of all Thy mercies." For God has many bands of mercies; favours never come alone, they visit us in troops. 3. Notice, next, how he says "Thy servant." A plea is hidden away in that word. Jacob might have called himself by some other name on this occasion. He might have said, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which Thou hast showed unto Thy child": it would have been true, it would not have been fitting. Suppose it had run—"Unto Thy chosen," it would have been true, but not so lowly; or "unto Thy covenanted one"—that would have been correct, but not so humble an expression as Jacob felt bound to use in this time of his distress, when the sias of his youth were brought to his mind. He seemed to say, "Lord, I am Thy servant. Thou didst bid me come hither, and hither I have come because of that bidding: therefore protect me." Surely a king will not see his servant put upon when engaged in the royal service. Jacob was in the path of duty, and God would make it the path of safety. If we make God our guide, He will be our guard. If He be our Commander He will be our Defender. 4. Jacob had yet another plea which showed his humility, and that was the argument of facts. "With my staff," says he, "I passed over this Jordan." "This Jordan," which flowed hard by, and received the Jabbok. It brings a thousand things to his mind, to be on the old spot again. When he crossed it before he was journeying into exile, but now he is coming back as a son, to take his place with loved Rebekah and father Isaac, and he could not but feel it a great mercy that he was now going in a happier direction than before. He looked at his staff, and he remembered how in fear and trembling he had leaned upon it as he pursued his hasty, lonely march. "With this staff—that is all I had." He looks upon it, and contrasts his present condition and his two camps with that day of poverty, that hour of hasty flight. This retrospect humbled him, but it must have been a strength to him in prayer. "O God, if Thou hast helped me from abject want to all this wealth, Thou canst certainly preserve me in the present danger. He who has done so much is still able to bless me, and He will do so." 5. In closing, I think I discover one powerful argument here in Jacob's prayer. Did he not mean that, although God had increased him so greatly, there had come with it all the greater responsibility? He had more to care for than when he owned less. Duty had increased with increased possessions. He seems to say, "Lord, when I came this way before I had nothing, only a staff; that was all I had to take care of; and if I had lost that staff I could have found another. Then I had Thy dear and kind protection, which was better to me than riches. Shall I not have it still? When I was a single man with a staff Thou didst guard me, and now that I am surrounded by this numerous family of little children and servants, wilt Thou not spread Thy wings over me? Lord, the gifts of Thy goodness increase my necessity: give me proportionately Thy blessing. I could before run away and escape from my angry brother; but now the mothers and the children bind me, and I must abide with them and die with them unless Thou preserve me." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Jacob's remembrance of past blessings:—I. JACOB'S THANKFUL REMEMBRANCE OF HIS PAST BLESSINGS. II. THE SOURCE TO WHICH JACOB HERE TRACES HIS BLESSINGS. 1.

He refers his blessings first to the mercy of God; for observe, he calls them *mercies*, and this shows us that he traced them all to God's free bounty and grace. 2. But the patriarch mentions also here, the truth of God. He couples it, you observe, with mercy, and this blending together of these two things as the source of our mercies is very remarkable in Scripture. "Not unto us, O Lord," says David, "not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy, and for Thy truth's sake." "God will send forth His mercy and truth." "Mercy and truth are met together." "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth." And in Jacob's case the connection between these two things is very plain. He deserved nothing of God; whatever, therefore, God bestowed on him came from God's mercy. But God promised to bestow many blessings on him; these blessings, therefore, when bestowed might be said to come also from God's truth. Mercy made the promise and prepared the blessings; truth fulfilled the promise and sent the blessings. III. THE TIME WHEN JACOB THUS REMEMBERED HIS BLESSINGS. We well know when we remember mercies; it is generally when they are first given us, and the heart is warmed and glowed by the first possession of them. And very little disappointment and vexation will, almost at any time, drive away all our thankfulness for them. Men, generally, never dream, when they get into trouble, of taking up the language of praise. But look back to the circumstances under which this patriarch thus thinks of mercy and truth. If we went no farther than the text, we should say he has just received some new proof of God's love to him. There he is, we should say, once again travelling, with joy and gladness, his native plains, and pitching his tent there in security and peace. But not exactly thus; he is in an extremity, and a very painful one. And yet, before any deliverance or any prospect of deliverance appears, we hear Jacob talking of mercy and truth; and he blesses God for His past goodness. IV. THE EFFECT PRODUCED IN JACOB BY THE REMEMBRANCE OF HIS MERCIES—OR ONE OF THE EFFECTS. I allude to this, a deep sense of his own unworthiness and nothingness. "I am less than all Thy mercies"—less, not only than the most signal of them, but less than any, the least of them; I cannot think of any one of them that is not larger than I am. He seems to dwindle away to nothing in his own view as he contemplates God's mercy towards him. There is no proportion between these mercies and myself; it is not only mercy, but abundant, marvellous mercy, that has bestowed them on me. And what has brought him into this state of feeling is, doubtless, a vivid remembrance at this time of those mercies. As his mind ran over them from year to year, tracing their multitudes and ways, there was something connected with them which he could not pass over—the vileness and nothingness of the creature on whom they had been bestowed. He thought, perhaps, of the baseness of his conduct which had driven him at first from his father's house; but, if that did not enter his mind, he thought, doubtless, of the ingratitude and many sins that had stained him since. A sense of God's love towards you lays you humble; and there is a tradition among the Jews, that all through his life this man was kept down. It is said, as a proof of his humility, that he had in his hand the staff which he carried with him over Jordan, when he went to Padan-aram; that he never afterwards parted with his staff; that it was upon this he leaned when he blessed the sons of Joseph, and that it was lying by him when he died. Now, let me ask you, Do you understand this truth? Have you ever experienced anything like it? Have the mercies of God towards yourselves ever made you shiver, as it were, from a sense of your guiltiness and nothingness? (*C. Bradley, M.A.*) *Jacob's experience illustrative of the life of a child of God:—I. JACOB'S CONDITION AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF HIS JOURNEY TO PADAN-ARAM.* "With my staff I passed over this Jordan." It is difficult to imagine a state of greater destitution. And well did the patriarch bear it in mind. It was engraven deeply upon his memory, and he could not forget it. It would have been his sin and his shame, if he could have banished it from his recollection. O, my dear friends, who have the God of Jacob for your refuge, but who know Him under an immeasurably dearer relation, as "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," "look to the rock from whence ye are hewn, and the hole of the pit whence ye are digged." What was your natural condition? A spiritual state immeasurably more dark and dreary than were the circumstances of Jacob, when he set forwards on his journey. II. BUT WHILE JACOB REVERTED TO HIS PAST WRETCHEDNESS, HE CONTRASTED IT WITH THE PROSPERITY INTO WHICH GOD HAD BROUGHT HIM. "Now I am become two bands." He had thus divided his wives and children, and servants and cattle, that if one were smitten, the other might escape; and the separation proved his wealth. Thus it is, that they whom the grace of God hath brought manifestly within the covenant, must compare the wretchedness of the past with the mercies

and the blessedness of the present, for His glory who graciously made the change. It is for each of them to say, as I trust may be said by each of many among yourselves, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." III. WELL, THEN, DID JACOB ACT IN GIVING UTTERANCE TO THE HOLY GRATITUDE AND DEEP HUMILITY OF HIS SOUL. "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant." O, never should one who hath experienced the gospel of Christ to be the power of God unto salvation, in believing—never should one in whom Christ hath been "formed the hope of glory," forget to own the Hand from whence all his blessings come; and his own unworthiness, who yet is privileged so largely and so freely to receive them. Observe the language of Jacob; "not merely the mercy, but all the mercies"; everything from the greatest to the least, and everything in the riches of absolute grace. The spring is inexhaustible, and the streams are many, suited to every need of every individual member in the Church of the Most High. There are mercies past, for which to thank a covenant Father, according to His promise; and there are mercies yet to come, secured to them by the promise. O, it is true grace in exercise, to lie low in the dust before God, acknowledging our vileness, and to know that we merit wrath, while yet we are emboldened to plead for mercy, and to expect it. IV. THE CONDUCT OF JACOB WILL NOW SHOW US THE DUTY OF ONE WHO HATH ACCESS TO A COVENANT GOD IN THE TIME OF TRIAL. Jacob's refuge was the throne of grace, and we find him pre-eminently a man of prayer. O, let trials, temptations, conflicts, sorrows, sins, shortcomings, lead you, dear brethren, thither. (*R. P. Buddicom.*) *Jacob's prayer*:—1. In the prayer itself, consider how sweet it is in the child's woe, for him to be able to remember that his parents were godly and in favour with the Lord. Then conceiveth he comfort, that he which loved the stock, will not cast away the branch, but graciously respect him. A great cause to make parents godly if there were no other, that their children ever may pray as did Jacob, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, look upon me, &c. 2. Consider how he groundeth both prayer and hope, upon word and promise, saying, "Lord, which saidst unto me, return unto thy country and to thy kindred, and I will do thee good." So let us do, and not first do rashly what we had no warrant for, and then pray to God for help wherein we have no promise: yea, if you mark it, he repeateth this promise over again in the twelfth verse, it was such strength unto him to consider it. 3. Not merit, but want of merit is his plea; I am not worthy of the least of all Thy mercies, and all the truth, which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant. (*Bp. Babington.*) *Jacob's prayer*:—1. He approaches God as the God of his father; and, as such, a God in covenant. This was laying hold of the Divine faithfulness: it was the prayer of faith. 2. As his own God, pleading what He had promised to him. 3. While he celebrates the great mercy and truth of God towards him, he acknowledges himself unworthy of the least instance of either. The worthiness of merit is what every good man, in every circumstance, must disclaim; but that which he has in view, I conceive, is that of meekness. Looking back to his own unworthy conduct, especially that which preceded and occasioned his passing over Jordan with a "staff" only in his hand, he is affected with the returns of mercy and truth which he had met with from a gracious God. By sin he had reduced himself in a manner to nothing; but God's goodness had made him great. As we desire to succeed in our approaches to God, we must be sure to take low ground; humbling ourselves in the dust before Him, and suing for relief as a matter of mere grace. Finally, having thus prefaced his petition, he now presents it (vers. 11, 12). This was doubtless the petition of a kind husband, and a tender father; it was not as such only, nor principally, however, but as a believer in the promises, that he presented it; the great stress of the prayer turns on this hinge. It was as though he had said, "If my life, and that of the mother, with the children, be cut off, how are Thy promises to be fulfilled?" (*A. Fuller.*) *Lessons*:—1. An humble self-denying frame is best for prayer of faith to God in time of temptation. 2. It is a special way to humble saints, by comparing themselves with God's mercy and truth. 3. The mercy and truth of God go always jointly together (Psa. xxv. 10). 4. God's servants have experience of His mercy and truth in their pilgrimages below. 5. Gracious souls judge themselves less than any mercy or truth of God. 6. It is good to keep souls low to remember their former empty conditions. 7. God can make the solitary a multitude and make the poor to be full. 8. The remembrance of such mercy from God should humble souls in their approaches to God (ver. 10). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Mercies remembered*:—Bishop Hutton was travelling between Wensleydale and Ingleton, when

he dismounted and retired to a particular spot, where he knelt down and continued some time in prayer. On his return, one of his attendants inquired his reason for this act. The bishop informed him, that when he was a poor boy, he travelled over that cold and bleak mountain without shoes or stockings, and that he remembered disturbing a cow on the identical spot where he prayed, that he might warm his feet and legs on the place where she had lain. His feelings of gratitude would not allow him to pass the place without presenting his thanksgiving to God for His mercies to him.

I am become two bands.—I. THE CONTRAST HERE PRESENTED BETWEEN THE EARLY LONELINESS AND POVERTY OF LIFE AND ITS GROWING RICHES IS UNIVERSAL. 1. What is life but a constant gathering of riches? Compare the man and the woman of forty with their childhood. They have made themselves a name and a place in life; they are centres of attraction to troops of friends. How rich has life become to them! how full its storehouses of knowledge, power, and love! 2. That which is stored in the mind, that which is stored in the heart, is the true treasure; the rest is mere surplussage. To know and to love: these are the directions in which to seek our riches. 3. There is no other way to make life a progress, but to root it in God. II. Consider THE HIGHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE LAW OF INCREASE, the deeper and more solemn sense in which, through the ministry of the angel of death, we become "two bands." 1. Through death there has been a constant progress in the forms and aspects of creation. The huge, coarse, unwieldy types which ruled of old in both the animal and vegetable worlds have vanished, and out of their ashes the young phoenix of creation has sprung which is the meet satellite of man. 2. This is the counsel of God: to make the darkness of death beautiful for us; to make it the one way home; to show us that the progress is not rounded, but prolonged and completed, and that the increase is not gathered, but consecrated by death as the possession of eternity. To bring heaven easily within our reach God separates the bands—part have crossed the flood, part are on the hither side, and the instinct of both tells them that they are one. At the last great day of God they shall be one band once more, met again and met for ever. (J. B. Brown, B.A.)

Vers. 11, 12. Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother.—*Jacob's prayer*:—Observe the spirit of Jacob's prayer. I. IT WAS A REVERENT SPIRIT. II. A HUMBLE SPIRIT. III. A THANKFUL SPIRIT. IV. A SPIRIT DEEPLY SENSIBLE OF ITS DEPENDENCY UPON GOD. V. A SPIRIT OF GREAT CONFIDENCE IN GOD. (*Homilist*.) *Lessons*:—1. The greatest fears do not drive away holy souls from prayer: faith looks to God for help. 2. Jehovah alone is the rock of salvation to whom believing souls fly for deliverance. 3. Dismal is the danger by the hand of a brother engaged that is cruel and bloody. 4. Fears may possess the hearts of God's covenanted ones in respect of such cruel instruments and of danger by them to them and theirs (ver. 11). 5. God's promise of salvation quickens faith and strengthens prayer in His saints against their own unworthiness. 6. It is fit for faith to press God with the certainty and enlargedness of His promise to His servants. 7. General promises of grace are to be drawn to special use in times of temptation. 8. Upon such promises saints dare trust God with themselves and children (ver. 12). (G. Hughes, B.D.) **I fear him.**—*Fear and faith*:—Jacob's fear, and Jacob's faith—"I fear him: and Thou saidst." Whether is that a contrast, or a connection, or both? I believe that it is both. And I have linked the two together as the text, because they will be found to stand thus related by the double tie of contrast and connection—deep, painful contrast, and yet strangely close kindredness also and connection—the fear with the faith—"I fear him: and Thou saidst." I. JACOB'S FEAR AT THIS TIME—"I fear him," said he. 1. My first remark respecting the fear is, that there was a great deal of unworthy unbelief in it. 2. And yet, secondly, there was not wanting in it an element, kindred at least to faith. True, he might have left the Divine promise—ought to have left it tranquilly—in the keeping of the Divine power and faithfulness. Still, this is no mere craven dread of his personal safety, nor of that even of his beloved family, simply as such, but for that family as in relation to the Divine covenant, with which his own hopes for eternity, and the welfare of all the families of the earth, were bound up. There was an element in his fear, I say, kindred at least to faith. 3. And, thirdly, I observe on Jacob's fear, that, amid all its unworthiness, it was a fear told freely out to God—laid bare before the omniscient One—"I fear him," says he, speaking to Jehovah. A great lesson this, beloved, for us in reference to our difficulties, temptations, fears—that we bring them all to the Lord—tell them freely out to Him. It may be that our fears are weak and

foolish—such as others might only smile at. Or it may be that they are deeply unworthy, and such as we should be ashamed to tell to others. But they shall be much more than safe with God. Let us tell them to Him, hearing the voice, "Bring them hither to Me." 4. As it was a fear told freely out to the Lord, so it shut up Jacob the more to the Lord, and to His word of promise.

II. JACOB'S FAITH: "Thou saidst"—"I fear him: and Thou saidst." 1. Well, the things that have been already said have prepared us for my first remark on the faith, which is, that it is faith in conflict—faith in a struggle with unbelief and fear. 2. And so, secondly, I observe, on Jacob's faith here, that, if it is faith in conflict—in a struggle with unbelief—it is faith prevailing, victorious, in the conflict, "I fear him: and Thou saidst." I pray you to note that that is Jacob's closing word—he ends here. He plants his foot on this rock of the promise, and here will abide, "Thou saidst." 3. But, thirdly, I observe in Jacob's faith, that it is faith in the midst of difficulties taking simple hold of God in his word of promise. 4. Once more, I observe that this is faith exercised in immediate converse and fellowship with God in prayer. Brethren, prayer and faith are entirely distinct; yet they are most intimately connected together. For, as there is no true prayer without some measure of faith, so faith is never better exercised than in prayer. (*C. J. Brown, D.D.*) **Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good.**—*The Master-key opening the gate of heaven:*—The possession of a God, or the non-possession of a God, makes the greatest possible difference between man and man. Esau is a princely being, but he is "a profane person." Jacob is a weak, fallible, frail creature, but he has a God. Have you not heard of "the mighty God of Jacob"? My dear hearers, you can divide yourselves without difficulty by this rule: have you a God, or have you none? If you have no God, what have you? If you have no God, what good have you to expect? What, indeed, can be good to you? If you have no God, how can you face the past, the present, or the future? But if you have God for your portion, your whole history is covered. The God of the past has blotted out your sin, the God of the present makes all things work for your good, the God of the future will never leave you nor forsake you. In God you are prepared for every emergency. He shall guard thee from all evil; the Lord shall preserve thy soul. 1. Because Jacob had a God, therefore he went to Him in the hour of his trouble. As well have no God, as have an unreal God, who cannot be found in the midnight of our need. But what a blessing it is to be able to go to our God at all times, and pour out our hearts before Him; for our God will be our Helper, and that right early! He is our near and dear Friend, in joy and in sorrow. 2. Make thou good use of thy God, and especially gain the fullest advantage from Him by pleading with Him in prayer. In troublous times, our best communion with God will be carried on by supplication. Tell Him thy case; search out His promise, and then plead it with holy boldness. This is the best, the surest, the speediest way of relief. 3. Beloved, we see that Jacob had a God, and that he made use of Him in prayer; but the point I want to call your attention to at this time is, that the stress, the force, the very sinew of Jacob's prayer consisted in his pleading the promise of God with God. When he came to real wrestling with the Lord, then he cried, "Thou saidst." That is the way to lay a hold upon the covenant angel—"Thou saidst." The art of wrestling lies much in a proper use of "Thou saidst." Jacob, with all his mistakes, was a master of the art of prayer: we justly call him "wrestling Jacob." He said, "I will not let Thee go." He gets grip for his hands out of this "Thou saidst." In handling my text, which was Jacob's prayer, I shall notice—I. First, it ought to be our MEMORIAL. I mean that we ought to recollect much more than we do what God has said. We should lay up His word in our hearts as men lay up gold and gems in their caskets: it should be as dear to us as life itself. My heart stands in awe of God's word, and I am sorrowful because so many trifle with it. No good can come of irreverence towards Scripture; we ought to cherish it in our heart of hearts. 1. We ought to do this, first, with regard to what God hath said. You notice that Jacob puts it, "Thou saidst," and then he quotes the words—"Surely I will do thee good." It is an essential part of the education of a Christian to learn the promises. 2. Moreover, Jacob also knew when God had spoken a promise, for he quotes twice the fact that God had spoken to him, and said so-and-so. It is clear that he knew when the promise was spoken. I have often found peculiar comfort, not only in a promise, but in noticing the occasion for its being made. 3. There is another matter which it is important for us to know, namely, to whom God made the promise. Jacob knew to whom it was spoken. He tells us in a previous verse that God had spoken

a certain promise to himself. "Which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee." A promise that was made to another man will be of no service to me until I can discover that I, being in the same condition as that other man, and being of like character to that other man, and exercising like faith to that other man, do stand before God in the same position as he did, and therefore the word addressed to him is spoken also to me. Brethren, I entreat you continually to study God's word to see whether the promise is made to your character and condition, and so is made to yourself, as much as if your name were written upon it. II. Secondly, "Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good"—this is God's bond. Nothing holds a man like his word, and nothing so fully fixes the course of action of the Lord our God as His own promise. From the necessity of His nature He will be faithful. What a mighty thing, then, is a promise, since it is a bond which holds God Himself! How does it do so? 1. I answer, it holds Him, first, by His truth. If a man says, "I will," it is not in his power, without a breach of truth, to refuse to make good his word. If a promise be made by one man to another, it is considered to be a matter of honour to fulfil it. Unless a man is willing to tarnish his honour, and disgrace his truthfulness, he will certainly do as he has solemnly promised to do. Alas! many persons think lightly of truthfulness: they even dare to swear lightly; but what do we think of such people? To utter solemn promises, and then to disown them, is not the way to be esteemed and honoured. It can never be so with God. None can impeach His veracity. None shall ever be able to do so. 2. But, next, he who enters into an engagement is bound to keep his word, or he is considered to be vacillating and changeable: the Lord is, therefore, held by His immutability. He is God, and changes not. 3. But sometimes men make a promise, and they are unable to fulfil it from want of power. Many a time it has cost honest minds great grief to feel that, though they are willing enough to do what they have engaged to do, yet they have lost their ability to perform their word. This is a grave sorrow to a sincere mind. This can never happen to the Almighty God. He fainteth not, neither is weary. To Him there is no feebleness of decline, or failure of decay. God All-sufficient is still His name. 4. Once more, the Lord's wisdom also holds Him to His promise. Men make engagements thoughtlessly, and before long they realize that it would be ruinous to keep them. It is foolish to keep a foolish promise. Yet because wisdom is not in us we make mistakes, and find ourselves in serious difficulties. It may so happen that a person may feel compelled to say, "I promised to do that which, upon more careful consideration, I find it would be wicked and unjust for me to do. My promise was void from the beginning, for no man has a right to promise to do wrong." Whatever justification an erring man can find in his folly to excuse him from fulfilling his rash promise, nothing of the kind can occur with God. He never speaks without knowledge, for He sees the end from the beginning, and He is infallibly good and wise. 5. I should not complete my statement if I did not add that to go to God through Jesus Christ, is to use the best and most powerful of pleas. III. So then, last of all, this may be, and this ought to be, in prayer our plea, as it was Jacob's plea—even this "Thou saidst." 1. We may urge the gracious promise of the Lord as pleading against our own unworthiness. This must win the suit. If a man has made me a promise, he cannot refuse to keep it on the ground that I am unworthy; because it is his own character that is at stake, not mine. However unworthy I am, he must not prove himself to be unworthy by failing to keep his word. 2. This is also good pleading as against our present danger. See how Jacob puts it with regard to his own peril. He sets out his very natural fear from his brother's anger: the mother, the children, everybody would be smitten by fierce Esau; and to save himself from this threatened horror Jacob lifts the shield of the promise, and as good as says to the Lord his God, "If this calamity should happen, how can Thy promise be kept? Thou saidst, 'Surely I will do thee good'; but, Lord, it is not good for Esau's sword to shed our blood! If Thou permit his anger to slay us, where is Thine engagement to do good unto Thy servant?" This reminds one of the plea of Moses, when he asked, "What will the Egyptians say?" If Israel were destroyed in the wilderness, what would Jehovah do for His great name? This is a prevalent argument. 3. Once more, as to future blessedness. Jacob used this argument, "Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good," as to all his future hopes, for he went on to say, "Thou saidst, I will make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude." Not as much as he should, but still in a measure Jacob lived in the future. He lived under the influence and expectation of the covenant blessing. Now, brethren, what hope have you and I of

getting to heaven? None, except that the Lord has said, "I give unto My sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish." I shall never perish, for Jesus says I never shall. He has also said, "Where I am, there shall also My servant be." Therefore I shall be in the glory with Him, and that is enough for me. (*C. H. Spurgeon*). *Good comes through difficulty* :—Now the highest and richest good often comes to men through difficulties and disappointments, losses and crosses, sicknesses and sorrows. Men are very prone to forget this, and to get discouraged in the hour of trial, but it is true nevertheless. The vinedresser does the vine good, not only by manuring its roots and admitting sunshine to its branches, but by sometimes opening his knife and cutting off superfluous leaves and wanton shoots, for by this pruning he has enabled the tree to bear more abundant fruit. The doctor does the patient good, sometimes by kindly looks and hopeful words, and soothing powders, but at other times by prohibiting favourite foods administering nauseous medicines, and even by using the sharp lancet. The father does his child good, not by gratifying all his desires and humouring all his whims, but rather sometimes by prohibiting certain pleasures, enjoying special tasks, and occasionally using the rod. The heavenly Vinedresser, Doctor and Father, deals with us on similar principles. He does not say to any one of us, I will always consult thy wishes, gratify thy tastes, and gladden thine heart, but I will always do thee good. And many have found that pain ministers to profit, that the sickness of the body promotes the health of the soul, that the cutting off of temporal comforts opens the way for the inflowing of spiritual blessings; and that the removal of earthly friends brings them into closer sympathy and communion with Jesus Christ the heavenly Friend; so that with David they have been able to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, for before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I know Thy law"; and with Paul, "These light afflictions which are but for a moment work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Vers. 13-20. A present for Esau.—Jacob's offering to Esau :—1. Prudent disposition of presents must follow the preparation of them. 2. Good servants are fit helps unto good masters for ordering their affairs. 3. Order is as needful as matter unto prudence to pacify enraged enemies. 4. Wise masters must give instructions to servants for the prosperity of their own affairs. 5. Lawful instructions from masters must be strictly observed by servants. 6. Humble presentations of saints to lords of the world is comely to procure peace. 7. Frequent and gradnal expressions of such goodness and humility is most likely to overcome them. 8. Faces of cruel men are hard to be reconciled unto the faces of the righteous. 9. By foregoing gifts and preventing grace from God, saints may get a good look from such men. 10. Jacob and Jacob's children are forced so to seek peace in the world. (*G. Hughes, B.D.*)

Vers. 21-23. Himself lodged that night in the company.—Lessons :—1. Honest hearts do not only intend good, but see it done, before they rest. 2. Means lawful being used for safety, men may better lie down in peace. 3. It becometh masters of families to rest among the charge, when it may be (ver. 21). 4. Diligence and early care of their's becomes Governors of families in times of danger. 5. Wives and children are the chiefest matter of a man's care and providence. 6. It is fatherly care to see as much as they can wives and children past danger (ver. 22). 7. It is the duty of the father of the family to order the motions of all under him. 8. After wives and children, substance is to be cared for, to keep it safe, for subsistence (ver. 23). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*)

Ver. 24. Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him.—The crisis in Jacob's life :—From this description of a day and a night in the life of Jacob we learn three things. 1. This is a crisis, a turning-point in his career. His experience at the ford of Jabbok is his "conversion" from the craft and cunning and vulturous greed of years to the sweet subjection of his will to the Eternal, and consequent victory over himself and his brother. 2. God is in this crisis from first to last and at every moment of these twenty-four hours. 3. The crisis closes in the victory of the patient and loving Lord over the resisting selfishness of Jacob. Note these points :—I. It must have been a welcome fore-gleam of approaching victory, and a pledge of the sustaining presence of Jehovah in the "valley of the shadow of death," that as this day of crisis broke on the pilgrim the angels of God met him. II. What is the significance of this terrific conflict? It means this assuredly.

Jacob having gone to God in quaking fear, God holds him and will not let him go; goads and harrows his soul, till his heart swells and is ready to break; urges him to such a relentless and soul-consuming struggle with his self-will that he feels as though he is held in the grip of a giant and cannot escape. He resists, he struggles, he writhes, and in his furious contortions is at last lamed and helpless, and therefore compelled to trust himself and his all to God. III. Jacob wrestled against God, but at last yielding, his soul is suffused with the blessedness of the man whose trust is in the Lord. Faber asks, with mingled beauty and force, "What is it will make us real?" and answers, "The face of God will do it." It is so. Israel is a new creation: Jacob is dead. Dark as the night was, Jacob passed through it, saw the face of God at day-dawn, and became himself, met his brother with serenity, and spent the rest of his days in the love and service of God. (*J. Clifford, D.D.*)

The change in Jacob:—I. In what position do we find Jacob's spiritual state up to the time of this second incident in his life? During the first period of his life he was simply a man of the world. After the vision at Bethel he was a religious man; the sense of religious influence was seen in his life; after the conflict at the ford Jabbok he became a spiritually minded man. He was going home with his sin yet weighty on his soul, unpardoned, unforgiven, uncleansed by the Divine power. Bethel was the house of God, to teach him that he could not set his foot upon a single acre of soil without finding that the Governor of the world was there; here we have the unfolding of the wider thought of the intercommunion and personal relationship between the soul of man and his Maker. II. Those who trust in the God of Bethel and providence are looking to Him for what He gives; but the aspirations of the spiritual man are wholly different. At Bethel Jacob said, "If Thou wilt be with me and wilt do me good." At Jabbok his first thought was, "Tell me Thy name." He desired to know more of God, not to get more from God. To gain further spiritual experience—this is the thirst of the spiritual man. To make a friend of God for the good that we can get—this is the idea of the merely religious man. (*Bishop Boyd Carpenter.*)

Jacob's struggle:—I. All the evidence here goes to prove that the wonderful wrestler, who contended with Jacob, was the one only true God. II. Being God and being man, we are right in calling Him Christ, and in placing this incident as the second of the anticipatory advents of the Messiah which lie scattered over the Old Testament. III. As Jacob wrestled with God in human form, so it is with God in the Lord Jesus Christ that in all our spiritual conflicts, in all our deep repentances, in all our struggling prayers, we must wrestle. IV. There were two things which Christ gave in this encounter—a wound and a blessing. The wound first and then the blessing. The wound was small and for a season; the blessing was infinite and for ever. (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*)

Jacob striving with God:—We see here the supernatural appearing in the world of the natural. We see God veiling Himself in human form, as He veiled Himself in the form of Christ His Son in after years. We must look at this story of miracle in the light of the miracle of the Incarnation. I. In this striving of the patriarch with God, and in the blessing he won at the end of the striving, we see the very height and picture of our life, if into that life has passed the life of Christ our Lord. II. It is by wrestling that we win the Divine blessing, but whether in struggling against doubt, against temptation, or against the enemies of the Church, we must take heed that we fight wisely as well as earnestly. We may strive, and we must strive; but let us strive wisely and lawfully if we would win the blessing. III. The homeliest, the least eventful life, may and should be a supernatural life—a life in which Christ dwells, a life which the Holy Spirit sanctifies. If we can thus strive and wrestle on, the dawn comes at last, and we are blessed of God. (*Bishop Magee.*)

Jacob's crisis-night:—I. Any attempt to make Jacob a hero, or even a good man, at the time of his deception of his father, must fail. At that time he represented the very lowest quality of manhood. We can call him a man only by courtesy; while Esau, a venturesome and kind-hearted child of nature, stands up as a prince, uncrowned indeed, but only because a thief had robbed him of his crown. In the fact that God chose Jacob we find the germ of the redemptive idea at work. II. Jacob was not at once promoted to his high place. As a wanderer and a stranger, he underwent most humiliating discipline, and on this night his old and wretched past was replaced by a new name and a new hope. III. There must be such a night in every life—a night in which the sinful past shall go down for ever into the depths of unfathomable waters. The wrestling of Jacob was (1) long, (2) desperate, (3) successful. IV. The night of wrestling was followed by a morning of happy reconciliation with his brother. (*J.*)

*Parker, D.D.) Jacob wrestling with the angel:—*Consider this incident—
I. AS TO ITS OUTWARD FORM. **II. AS TO ITS SPIRITUAL MEANING.** 1. That the great struggle of life is to know and feel after God. 2. That God reveals Himself through mystery and awe. 3. That God reveals Himself to us in blessing. 4. That God's revelation of Himself to us is intended to change our character. 5. That God is conquered by prayer and supplication. (*T. H. Leale.*) *The features of the development of revealed faith in Jacob's wrestling:—*1. The germ of the Incarnation. Godhead and humanity wrestling with each other; the Godhead in the form of a man. 2. The germ of the atonement. Sacrifice of the human will. 3. The germ of justification by faith. "I will not let Thee go," etc. 4. The germ of the new-birth. Jacob, Israel. 5. The germ of the principle of love to one's enemies. The reconciliation with God, reconciliation with the world. (*J. P. Lange.*) *Guilt all alone:—***I.** His EXPERIENCE is singularly transparent, though seriously mixed. 1. We know, for one thing, he was in positive fear. 2. There was solicitude in his experience. 3. There was reminiscence in his experience. 4. There was remorse in his experience. **II. THE INGENUOUS PRECAUTIONS HE TAKES.** He made the best disposal of all his affairs that he could under the circumstances. Four things there were on which he grounded some hope. 1. One was his late vision of the angels at Mahanaim. 2. His vast worldly wealth. 3. Disposition of forces. 4. Prayer. **III. HIS LONELINESS.** (*C. S. Robinson, D.D.*) *Jacob's wrestle:—***I. THE CONFLICT.** 1. Its loneliness. 2. Its earnestness. (1) Earnestness which absorbed Jacob's sense of material danger. (2) Earnestness which even bore down Jacob's dread of God. **II. THE VICTORY.** "He blest him there." What was the nature of the Divine blessing? 1. A change in the man's state. (1) Not that mere external deliverance for which Jacob first prayed. (2) An inward deliverance. Symbolized by the new name. (3) Outward token of the change. Jacob's history in the after ages purer than before. (4) Imperfection even in the new man Israel. In more than a physical sense, "Jacob halted on his thigh." Whoever spends half a lifetime in sin, must not be alarmed if traces of old habit remain. 2. A change in the man's relations. (1) Power with God. (2) Power with man. (*S. Gregory.*) *The history and mystery of Jacob's life:—***I. OF THE COMBAT ITSELF.** 1. In the general, it is one of the most famous combats recorded in Scripture; we read, indeed, in that Divine record of sundry eminent conflicts carried on after the manner of a duel. As of that combat betwixt little David and great Goliath (1 Sam. xvii. 40, &c.); but in that the match was only made betwixt man and man, there was only one mortal against another, though the one was a great giant, and the other was but, in comparison of his antagonist, a little dwarf. Here is a rare show indeed. Go along with me, I beseech you, both to see and hear this great wonder in some sense, the greatest wonder that ever was in the world, that God Himself, as will appear after, should come down from His throne in heaven to wrestle a fall with man, a poor worm (Isa. xli. 14; Psa. xxii. 6), upon his foot-stool on earth. 2. But more particularly, in the second place, what kind of combat this was, whether corporal only, or spiritual only, or both together, is our next inquiry. There be some who say that it was only spiritual by way of vision, or in way of a dream, imaginary only. So Thomas, Rupertus, and Rabbi Levi, who thinketh that Jacob's thigh might be hurt by some other means, as by the weariness of his tedious travel, or by his catching cold while he lay that cold night upon the cold ground, rather than by any real wrestling; and he further added, that Jacob dreamed of that same hurt upon his hip. How improbable this is may be easily urged. Assuredly Jacob had little either list or leisure for sleeping, much less for dreaming, while he was so struck even with a panic fear of his bloody brother. It was, therefore, a real and corporal combat, not visional or imaginary, which appears by many reasons. (1) Because it is said, Jacob rose up that night and sent his family before him, after both which he is described to be immediately engaged, even that same night he rose up in, to wrestling work (Gen. xxxii. 22-24), which must be when he was waking. (2) Jacob's valour and victory are both highly applauded even by God Himself; whereas, had both these been imaginary only, and transacted in a dream, such fancies are but a laughter to men. (3) The luxation of his loin, or lameness of his leg was undoubtedly real and corporal. Who will complain of an imaginary hurt? (4) As there is a reality in Jacob's valour, victory, and lameness, so there is no less in the change of his name from Jacob to Israel; it was not done in a dream or vision, or an imagination only. Accordingly must his wrestling be not visional but corporal.

Yet there is a third sense, to wit, that Jacob's wrestling was both corporal and spiritual, for he did certainly contend with Christ by the force of his faith as well as by the strength of his body. The prophet Hosea gives a plain testimony that Jacob won the blessing here by weeping as well as by wrestling. He wept and made supplication with his soul as well as wrestled with his body (Hos. xii. 3, 4).

II. The next part or particular of this famous history is JACOB'S VALOUR, which is conspicuously demonstrable in several circumstances. 1. It is a clear discovery hereof, if his antagonist be well considered, that he was no less than the Omnipotent Jehovah. 2. Discovery of Jacob's valour is drawn from the circumstance of time when he wrestled, as the first was from the person with whom he had his conflict. The time when was the most timorous time of all times, it was in the night time, which is accounted a time of fear. 3. Wherein Jacob's courage and valour carrieth high commendation, is, in respect of the length as well as lonesomeness of it, even all the night until the dawning of the day (Gen. xxxii. 24, 25). Though wrestling work be most wearisome work, stretching every sinew in the flesh, and every joint-bone in the body, and requiring the very utmost of a man's strength and skill. 4. The fourth circumstance, which higher illustrates Jacob's valour, is the sad posture he was now in, a lame and limping man, who had but one sound leg to stand upon while he wrestled with his adversary. As his place was a solitary and disconsolate place, so his posture was a discouraging and disadvantageous posture. 5. The fifth circumstance, which further commends Jacob's courage and valour, is the lastingness of his valour, the ever and everlasting noble temper of his mind under this wounding hurt, and under all other wonderful discouragements. III. Now come we, from Jacob's valour, thus demonstrated, unto that which was the royal wage thereof, to wit, HIS VICTORY. Though this was, secondarily, but the just reward of his right, noble resolution. Yea, Jacob's victory and prevailing over God here was symbolical, as it was a predicting sign—1. That his person should prevail over Esau. 2. That his posterity should prevail over Esau's offspring, the Edomites or Idumeans. 3. That Christ, springing from Jacob, should subdue all His enemies, that every knee should bow to Christ (Phil. ii. 10). 4. It was also a symbol or sign that every true Christian, who are Israelites indeed (John i. 47), and the right new and now Israel of God (Gal. vi. 16), should likewise conquer all their temporal and spiritual adversaries, the flesh, the world, and the devil. IV. Though God granted Jacob the victory, yet must he have something with it to humble him, to wit, HIS LUXATION OR LAMENESS, as before, that he might not be too much puffed up with the glory of his victory, nor, as it were, drunk with his success in this single combat. The conqueror here cannot come off with his conquest alone, but he must come off halting from it. He must be made sensible both of his antagonist's potency, in being lamed by him, whereby he understood him greater than himself, therefore desired he his blessing, for the lesser is blessed of the greater (Heb. vii. 7), and also of his own impotency, and to have low thoughts of himself while he came off with flying colours in the most glorious triumph. He must, even when he had overcome the great God, understand himself to be but a sorry man, otherwise he could not have been so lamed. He was, therefore, lamed that he might not ascribe the victory to his own strength, and that he might not, notwithstanding his overcoming God, be overcome by the pride of his own heart. Pride is a weed that will grow out of any ground—like mistletoe, that will grow upon any tree—but for the most part upon the best—the oak. Of all sorts of pride, that which is spiritual is most venomous, and far worse than temporal. That pride which grows out of the ground of our own graces and duties, is more poisonous than that which flows from honour, treasure, or pleasure. The holiest have their haltings, which they carry, as Jacob did his, along with them to their dying day. God hath His tedder at every man's foot, and His bridle upon all men's spirits, to rein them in from self-exaltation, that they may not mount too high by having the victory. Oh, that our former haltings may be sanctified to us, so as to work savingly in us some future humblings. Thus, holy Jacob, in this holy contention with this holy angel, by those holy weapons obtains those holy things. 1. Holy honour. 2. The holy blessing. (*C. Ness.*) *Penuel*:—I. THE CONFLICT. II. THE VICTORY. III. THE RESULTS. (*T. S. Dickson.*) *Jacob at Penuel*:—I. HOW GOD PREVAILED WITH JACOB. In regard to this Divine conflict, think of—1. Its condescension. 2. Its necessity. 3. Its success. II. HOW JACOB PREVAILED WITH GOD. 1. Jacob prevailed when he had been made to feel his own weakness. 2. Jacob prevailed, not by the exercise of natural strength, but by the purely spiritual force of trustful and earnest prayer. III. THE RESULTS THAT

FOLLOWED FROM THIS MEMORABLE CONFLICT. 1. Jacob received a new name. 2. Jacob received new spiritual power. 3. Jacob received a blessing which fully compensated for unexplained mystery. (*G. J. Allen, B.A.*) *Jacob at Peniel*:—

I. JACOB'S WRESTLING. 1. A personal contest. 2. A protracted contest. 3. A contest with an unknown person. **II. JACOB'S VICTORY.** 1. A partial victory. 2. A victory by which he obtained a better name. 3. A victory ever to be remembered. (*Homilist.*) *Human loneliness*:—Man is lonely—1. In his profoundest thoughts. 2. In his moral convictions. 3. In his greatest sorrows. 4. In his dying moments. (*Ibid.*) *The wrestling of Jacob*:—**I. JACOB'S WRESTLING.** 1. Of course I need hardly say that the wrestling of Jacob was not physical but spiritual, and that it refers to importunity in prayer, to great earnestness and perseverance in that duty. It is presumed all Christians know this much even from their cradles. Now, the time and place where this transaction occurred are worthy of notice. The time was during the night season. The place, very likely the tent of Jacob, fixed in the open country, in the spot from which the little village of Peniel, so called from this event, derives its interest. It was when all was still and hushed, and no voice was heard, perhaps, save the lowing of the cattle and the bleating of the sheep. It was on the eve of Jacob meeting his brother when the mind of Jacob was full of anxious thought and fears. 2. Consider the Infinite Being to whom Jacob addressed his prayer, and the manner or mode of His presence. God. Spiritually present to all who seek and love Him. 3. The intense earnestness of the prayer of Jacob is called a "wrestling" with God; it was so importunate, so full of feeling, and so bent upon obtaining its request. And the felt nearness of the Divine presence; the assurance of the power and willingness of the Infinite to bestow what was wanted; and of the very simple, gentle, and loving attractiveness of the Presence, drew out all that intensity of feeling and word so fully expressed in the language of the Patriarch, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." Such earnestness as here expressed, forms a striking contrast to the cold dead religious conventionalism of the age. There is great naturalness too in this earnestness of entreaty. It is what is felt oftentimes in some of our earthly affairs. For instance, let us suppose a person bent upon obtaining some particular object: say it has engaged his thoughts by night and by day, ever pressing itself upon his attention; an object of all others most desirable to be obtained. Well, let us further suppose that the moment has arrived when your wishes and hopes may be fulfilled; when he who can accomplish this is close beside you. Can you not imagine that as the person referred to becomes more and more friendly, and familiar, and endearing, that the earnestness of expectation will rise in proportion, and the determination to obtain what is longed for more and more fixed? Such too is the case with the heart in prayer with God. **II. THE RESULT OF THE PRAYER.** 1. The change of Jacob's name to Israel, a prince and a conqueror, and also a change of character. The change of character is the most important, and his altered name is the sign by which that is forestalled. Henceforth he is no longer to be known as a subtle supplanter, but as an ennobled conqueror, who has waived all intrigue and treacherous design, and fought the battle bravely, openly, and honestly. 2. To conclude, know we anything of this inner life of the soul, of this earnest and intense struggle of a praying heart, of this deep and solemn communing with the Almighty? Do we feel that He is so near us at all times in the restless, and busy, and anxious seasons of life, that we have only just to turn our hearts towards Him to realize the power and comfort of His presence? Brethren beloved, who is in reality your God and mine? Is He the God of the wrestling Jacob, drawing us into close and earnest fellowship with Himself, and inspiring us with a feeling of trust that clings to Him, that yearns after Him, and that will not let Him go until He answers our petitions? Or is it some other idol we worship—some god of this world we obey? (*W. D. Horwood.*) *Jacob's example in prayer*:—**I. IT BRINGS TO VIEW THE HUMAN SIDE OF PRAYER.** Communion with God. No true or prevalent prayer where Christ is not laid hold of. **II. GENUINE PRAYER IS ACTUAL PERSONAL CONTACT OF THE SOUL WITH GOD IN CHRIST.** **III. Note THE MEANS BY WHICH JACOB PREVAILED.** Only when he ceased to rely on his own strength, and resorted to the weapon of prayer, did he succeed. So it is ever with the Christian. **IV. Note THE REWARD OF IMPORTUNATE PRAYER.** **V. EVERY CHRISTIAN HAS POWER TO PREVAIL WITH GOD IN PRAYER.** **VI. How suggestive JACOB'S MEMORIAL NAME.** "Peniel." "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." (*J. M. Sherwood, D.D.*) *Jacob's prevailing prayer*:—**I. THE REPRESENTATIVE CHARACTER OF JACOB AT PRAYER.** 1. He represents the true Christian in that he prayed. 2. He

represents the true Christian in the characteristics of his prayer. (1) Assurance. (2) Promises pleaded. (3) Sense of unworthiness. (4) Gratitude. (5) Supplication. 3. He represents many a Christian in his anxiety. 4. He represents the judicious Christian in using all proper means that lie in his power. II. THE REPRESENTATIVE CHARACTER OF JACOB WRESTLING WITH THE ANGEL. 1. It represents the purpose of God in all His disciplinary measures. 2. It represents the means by which faith grows to its maturity. (1) Divine permission to carry out our own plans, to realize how vain they are. (2) God is often compelled to bring His child into absolute helplessness before faith will take hold of God's strength. Lessons: 1. God graciously deals with each of His children according to their circumstances and temperament. 2. Wrong-doing ever brings anxiety, weakness, failure. 3. To prevail with God, faith must rely only on Him. (*D. C. Hughes, M.A.*) *Jacob wrestling with God*.—I. THE NATURE OF ACCEPTABLE PRAYER. 1. There must be a deep sense of personal unworthiness (ver. 10). 2. We must cherish confidence in the word and the goodness of God. 3. Perseverance should distinguish our prayers. II. THE BLESSINGS WHICH BELIEVING PRAYER SECURES. 1. God's special protection. 2. The sensible enjoyment of an interest in God's love. 3. A blissful anticipation of glory. Conclusion: 1. A word to the sinner. Prayerless sinner, what will become of you? 2. A word to the saint. Encouragement. It is said "God blessed him there." He blessed him in the very place in which He had lamed him. And does not this intimate that when we are sunk the lowest in discouragement, that relief is just at hand—that the darkest hour is the prelude to the brightest day, and that holy earnest petitions overcome heaven itself, and bring down to earth the odours of immortality and the supports of Omnipotence. Oh! believer, cleave to the example of Jacob—say, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." (*W. Hodson.*) *Wrestling Jacob*.—I. THE BELIEVER IN HIS DIFFICULTY. Rest on the promises of a loving Jehovah, and go through all your trials honouring God, and experiencing patience and peace in your souls. But, moreover, you children of God, who have had trouble, and have it at this moment, do not be cast down. II. THE BELIEVER IN HIS INSTRUMENTALITY. 1. You will perceive in the conduct of Jacob, in the first place, peculiar wisdom. There was no presumption in the conduct of Jacob. He made use of every variety of means to appease the anger of Esau; and after he had made these most providential arrangements, he remained with God alone. Having made these arrangements, he did not depend on them; he flew to his great resource, his only sure instrumentality, and that which, after all, must be that on which all must rest—namely, prayer to God. 2. You will perceive that this prayer, from the few words in which it is presented to our notice, is remarkable for its earnestness. Further, we mention that this prayer is remarkable for its perseverance, its persevering earnestness—"I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." III. THE BELIEVER IN HIS BLESSING. (*H. Allen, M.A.*) *Peniel*.—I. We have here a STRIKING ILLUSTRATION OF THE LONELINESS OF ALL REAL DISTRESS. There is a certain solitariness about every man. The proverb says that "there is a skeleton in every house," and it is equally true that there is a secret closet in every heart where the soul keeps its skeleton, and to which, after sending wife and children across the brook, it retires in times of sadness and insolation. There is something in every soul that is never told to mortal, but which, as if to make up for its being withheld from others, has a strange fascination for ourselves; and in every moment of silence it is heard sounding in our secret ear. Even those nearest and dearest to us know not of these hidden things. They are kept for solitude; nay, such is some their power over us that they draw us into retirement that they may speak to us awhile. Different exceedingly in their character may those things be that are hidden thus in the secret chamber of men's hearts. They differ in different individuals, and in the same individual at different times. In the case of Jacob here, guilt and suspense were the troubles of his soul. II. But the narrative before us teaches us that in this dreary solitude OUR ONLY EFFECTUAL RESOURCE IS INCARNATE GOD. For as this mysterious one came to Jacob, so Jesus came to earth, a human brother, and, at the same time, a divine helper. And herein does He not precisely meet our need? As a man He comes, and so we need not be afraid of Him. You know the beautiful story which Homer tells in connection with the parting of Hector and Andromache. The hero was going to his last battle, and his wife accompanied him as far as the gates of the city, followed by a nurse carrying in her arms their infant child. When he was about to depart, Hector held out his hands to receive the little one, but, terrified by the burnished helmet and the waving plume, the child turned away and clung crying to the nurse's neck. In a moment, divining the

cause of the infant's alarm, the warrior took off his helmet and laid it on the ground, and then, smiling through his tears, the little fellow leaped into his father's arms. Now, similarly, Jehovah of hosts, Jehovah with the helmet on, would frighten us weak guilty ones away; but in the person of the Lord Jesus He has laid that helmet off, and now the guiltiest and the neediest are encouraged to go to His fatherly embrace, and avail themselves of His support. But while thus His humanity emboldens us to apply to Him, His divinity furnishes us with the help we need. That which I cling to for strength must be something other than myself, and something stronger than myself, otherwise it will be time as worthless as a broken reed. When in the howling hurricane wave after wave is breaking over the ship and sweeping the deck from stern to stern, it will not do for the sailor to depend upon himself; neither will it avail for him to grasp his fellow, for they may together be washed into the deep; but he lays hold of the iron bulwark, making the strength of the iron for the moment to be as his own, and is upheld. So in the surges of agony that sooner or later sweep over every man, it will not do for him to depend upon himself, or even to hold by a fellow-mortal. He needs one who while, he is a brother, is mightier than any human brother; and here in Jesus Christ, the God-man, the great necessity of his heart is met; for is the omnipotence of divinity added to the accessibility of humanity. Nor is this all. Jesus Christ as God, is omniscient as well as omnipotent. He knows, therefore, precisely what is wrong with us. III. But the narrative before us teaches us further, THAT OUR FIRST APPLICATION TO THIS DIVINE FRIEND MAY BE MET WITH SEEMING REPULSE, BUT THAT BELIEVING IMPORTUNITY WILL ULTIMATELY PREVAIL. 1. When our earnest applications to Him appear to be met with indifference, when our repeated importunity seems only to call forth repeated repulse, when in the yearning earnestness of our entreaty, our hearts feel as if they had lost all strength, even as Jacob's limb went from beneath him when the angel touched it, let us remember that His design is either to bring our faith to the birth, or by the discipline of resistance to develop it into greater strength, and let us cling to Him all the more, saying, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." 2. But it is not alone for the strengthening of our faith that the answer to our application may be deferred. Jesus may design thereby to open our eyes to our real need. For observe, though it was suspense concerning Esau that was at first oppressing Jacob, there is no mention of that in this wrestling. He has discovered that he needs something far more important than reconciliation to his elder brother. He wants to know God's name, that is, his relation to Him, and he desires a blessing from Him. Thus through the apparent denial of the minor request, he is brought to feel his need of something greater than he had thought at first of asking. Now is it not thus very frequently with God's children still? IV. I hasten to add, in the last place, that such an experience as that which we have been tracing always LEAVES ITS MARK ON THE INDIVIDUAL WHO HAS PASSED THROUGH IT, AND RENDERS MEMORABLE THE PLACE WHERE IT WAS UNDERGONE. "Jacob halted upon his thigh"—that was literal fact. But that was not the only permanent memorial of his night of wrestling which Jacob bore upon him. That was, in truth, but the corporeal indication of a spiritual result. The rocks beneath us bear the marks of the flames, to the actions of which, millenniums ago they were exposed; and in the mountain ridges of our planet we may see the record of those terrible convulsions and upheavals to which in former ages it was subjected. In like manner the spirit of a man is marked by the fires of those trials through which he has been made to pass; and we may see in the character and disposition of an individual, the indications or results of those inner struggles through which he has been brought. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Jacob alone*:—What happens to any one left alone is better worth thinking about than is anything else about him. We all live much of our lives before the world; I mean before that part of mankind which is to each of us our world. But we all live some part of our life alone. We may be utterly alone in a crowd, or even in what is called society. Anywhere, unless you are conscious of more or less sympathy, you are alone. But there are times when we are alone in body, as well as in mind. Jacob was not alone in a crowd. He was alone out of a crowd—alone literally—alone in every sense—alone with God. That which is described occurs every day to a serious and thoughtful man when he is alone. What is it? I can describe it thus. A strife between God and man, which is real but not hostile. It teaches us, if I read aright, that there is a conflict between man and God—or that there may be—which is not one of hostility, but of friendship—a conflict in which God overthrows, but only to raise us the higher. He prevails; He weakens us; He humbles; but we get the blessing. There is a seeming contradiction in the story's teaching; but the story is

true to experience. He prevails and we prevail. It is with the thought of God as with the sight of the ocean. Look at it as you see it first roll up easily upon the shore. It refreshes and it charms. But sit down and look out "alone" upon the unmeasured waste of desert water beyond. Think of the terrific might that slumbers in that vast water-power. Your mind will be held spell-bound and amazed by the overwhelming grandeur of the object. It will be paralysed. And so it is with that Almighty Power of which the ocean is the fittest symbol. The first shallow thought of God sustains and comforts the soul. It affords a standing-ground and a resting place to the reason, which is embarrassed by the problem of existence. It gives the mind a centre and point of view. It gives the explanation which man requires as a rational being. There is wanting a reason for all things that exist, and God is that reason. We go through the reasoning of first cause of laws of lawgiver. To me, and perhaps to you all, this much is clear. There must be God or nothingness: but some one may say, or think when alone—"Why, then God? and why not nothingness?" That is the wrestle. God strikes the soul. He is asked to tell what He is—"Tell me Thy name." "Wherefore is it thou askest after My name?" How crushing an answer from God to man! "But He blessed him there." This is what I have called a strife between God and man, real but not hostile. We are taught about God in our childhood. We learn afterwards to have a reason of the hope that is in us and to be able to give it. We are satisfied that God is intelligible, and, so to speak, reason, let us say, is satisfied: Revelation confirms what reason has declared. (*J. C. Coghlan, D.D.*) *Jacob at Peniel*.—After Jacob had prayed to God, a happy thought strikes him which he at once puts in execution. Anticipating the experience of Solomon, that "a brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city," he, in the style of a skilled tactician, lays siege to Esau's wrath, and directs against it train after train of gifts, which, like successive battalions pouring into a breach, might at length quite win his brother. This disposition of his peaceful battering trains having occupied him till sunset, he retires to the short rest of a general on the eve of battle. As soon as he judges that the weaker members of the camp are refreshed enough to begin their eventful march, he arises and goes from tent to tent awaking the sleepers and quickly forming them into their usual line of march, sends them over the brook in the darkness, and himself is left alone, not with the depression of a man who waits for the inevitable, but with the high spirits of intense activity, and with the return of the old complacent confidence of his own superiority to his powerful but sluggish-minded brother—a confidence regained now by the certainty he felt, at least for the time, that Esau's rage could not blaze through all the relays of gifts he had sent forward. Having in this spirit seen all his camp across the brook, he himself pauses for a moment, and looks with interest at the stream before him, and at the promised land on its southern bank. This stream, too, has an interest for him as bearing a name like his own—a name that signifies the "struggler," and was given to the mountain torrent from the pain and difficulty with which it seemed to find its way through the hills. Sitting on the bank of the stream, he sees gleaming through the darkness the foam that it churned as it writhed through the obstructing rocks, or heard through the night the roar of its torrent as it leapt downwards, tortuously finding its way towards Jordan; and Jacob says, so will I, opposed though I be, win my way by the circuitous routes of craft or by the impetuous rush of courage, into the land whither that stream is going. With compressed lips, and step as firm as when, twenty years before, he left the land, he rises to cross the brook and enter the land—he rises, and is seized in a grasp that he at once owns as formidable. But surely this silent close, as of two combatants who at once recognise one another's strength, this protracted strife does not look like the act of a depressed man, but of one whose energies have been strung to the highest pitch, and who would have borne down the champion of Esau's host had he at that hour opposed his entrance into the land which Jacob claimed as his own, and into which, as his glove, pledging himself to follow, he had thrown all that was dear to him in the world. It was no common wrestler that would have been safe to meet him in that mood. Why, then, was Jacob thus mysteriously held back while his household were quietly moving forward in the darkness? What is the meaning, purpose, and use of this opposition to his entrance? These are obvious from the state of mind Jacob was in. He was going forward to meet Esau under the impression that there was no other reason why he should not inherit the land but only his wrath, and pretty confident that by his superior talent, his mother-wit, he could make a tool of this stupid, generous brother of his. And the danger was, that if Jacob's device had succeeded, he would have been confirmed in these impressions, and have believed

that he had won the land from Esau, with God's help certainly, but still by his own indomitable pertinacity of purpose and skill in dealing with men. Jacob does not yet seem to have taken up the difference between inheriting a thing as God's gift, and inheriting it as the meed of his own prowess. To such a man God cannot give the land; Jacob cannot receive it. He is thinking only of winning it, which is not at all what God means, and which would, in fact, have annulled all the covenant, and lowered Jacob and his people to the level simply of other nations who had to win and keep their territories at their risk, and not as the blessed of God. If Jacob is then to get the land, he must take it as a gift, which he is not prepared to do. And, therefore, just as he is going to step into it, there lays hold of him, not an armed emissary of his brother, but a far more formidable antagonist—if Jacob will win the land, if it is to be a mere trial of skill, a wrestling match, it must at least be with the right person. Jacob is met with his own weapons. He has not chosen war, so no armed opposition is made; but with the naked force of his own nature, he is prepared for any man who will hold the land against him; with such tenacity, toughness, quick presence of mind, elasticity, as nature has given him, he is confident he can win and hold his own. So the real proprietor of the land strips himself for the contest, and lets him feel by the first hold he takes of him, that if the question be one of mere strength he shall never enter the land. This wrestling, therefore, was by no means actually or symbolically prayer. Jacob was not aggressive, nor did he stay behind his company to spend the night in praying for them. It was God who came and laid hold on Jacob to prevent him from entering the land in the temper he was in, and as Jacob. He was to be taught that it was not only Esau's appeased wrath, or his own skillful smoothing down of his brother's ruffled temper, that gave him entrance; but that a nameless Being, who came out upon him from the darkness, guarded the land, and that by His passport only could he find entrance. (*M. Dods, D.D.*)

Jacob and the angel.—I. JACOB PRAYING. 1. He was alone when God came out of His eternity to wrestle with him. There are some whom the Omnipresent can never find alone; He has seldom or never the opportunity of revealing Himself to them. 2. It was night. That is the time the Infinite is best revealed to us. 3. He was sunk in a deep fear. When in health and prosperity you may frame elaborate theories to demonstrate the absurdity of prayer; but let death stare you in the face, let a heavy sorrow or bereavement overtake you, and you cannot help praying. II. JACOB WRESTLING. 1. There was bodily wrestling on that memorable night. 2. There was mental wrestling. 3. It was a long struggle: lasting all night. Why? (1) Jacob wanted to be set right with his brother; he is taught that he must first be set right with his God. The moral relations must be first rectified, and they cannot be rectified but on condition that the whole moral nature of the man be stirred to its depths, completely turned upside down, and the roots of sin be mortally bruised. (2) Jacob possessed a vast, profound, capacious nature; there were in him, underlying his glaring faults, immense possibilities for good, dormant powers which required to be stimulated into activity. Now a crisis had arrived in his life. His dormant faculties were to be roused; his bias to evil was to receive a mighty check. It was a terrible conflict. He felt as if his nature was dissolving, and his whole existence becoming a shattered wreck. His sinews shrivelled under the touch of the Almighty. III. JACOB PREVAILING. He desired a blessing. God granted his request—giving him a change of nature, an elevation of character—making him a better, truer, more sincere man. This is the chiefest blessing He can bestow. (*J. C. Jones, M.A.*)

Mahanaim and Peniel.—1. The day and the night mutually act and react. A day of meeting with angels may well be followed by a night of wrestling with God. As you go on your way, through the toil and bustle of this life, remember the thousand eyes which watch you from heaven, and let speech and act testify that your heart is true to the sanctities and solemnities of being. So live and so move as those who know that they have come to an innumerable company of angels, and to God the Judge of all. Thus, when night comes, the veil which shuts out earth will be a glory to open heaven. 2. Lastly, earnestness is the condition of success. (*Dean Vaughan.*)

Certainty of retribution and possibility of reform.—It strikes a great many persons with surprise that Jacob the supplanter should have been the chosen of God. The true answer to this marvel is, that God selects men for His work on earth, not on account of their personal agreeableness, but on account of their adaptation to the work that they have to perform. Now, the object in this case was to establish a nation. There was to be brought up a great seed to Abraham. They were to be established, and out of them was to issue the moral culture of the globe—as it has. Now, although Jacob was a man of many failings and of

deep transgressions, yet with them he had a forecast, a shrewdness, a persevering wisdom, an organizing power, that pointed him out as the statesman. And so he was selected, not because in every respect his disposition was the best, but because he was the best instrument to execute the purpose which God had in view. The same thing is taking place continuously. God employs for His purposes instruments which are adapted to those purposes, although they may not be persons that are in harmony with God's holiness. The crime which he committed against his brother banished him. And now he is returning to his country; and his very first act is to assume the manners of a servant, and to bow down, recognizing the chieftainship of his brother. Such transformation fear makes. And yet, in the midst of this, he is shrewd and self-possessed. Fear, and then calmness; anguish, and then again management. This fluctuation, how extremely natural it is in a moment of suspense. For of all things in this world there is nothing so painful as suspense. And here was this man kept in this fiery state, waiting to know what should be developed; wondering if he should be bereft of his household, and if his property should be swept away, wondering if his brother would be peaceable. Doubtless there were running through his mind all these possibilities. If he is, then what? And if he is not, then what? It was this fiery swinging from one side to another that was the chastisement of the Lord indeed, But now we come to the first step of that great change which passed upon Jacob at this time—for he had reached a crisis, as I shall show, in his life's history, and in his character and disposition. See this man skulking in the shadow of his sin, and his sin breeding fear, and both of them exciting remorse in him. See how much this man had made by his wrongdoing! For he had struck at the confidence between man and man. He had undermined the very structure on which society stands. He had destroyed faith between brother and brother. It was a great crime, and greatly was he punished for it. How it takes hold of him through his wife, and through his children, and through all that he loves! And how has it been so since the beginning of the world! Hear this old patriarch saying, "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children." This was a great grief. Few words were recorded; but ah! it was a great grief. After this prayer, you will see how strangely—not surprisingly, but yet strikingly—back comes his old politic spirit again. "And he lodged there that same night, and took," &c. "Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." What it was I do not know except that it was an angel-man—the angel of the covenant—that stood in God's place, and was as God to him. That Jacob knew that it was a superior personage there can be no manner of doubt; but as to what this wrestling was—the whole mode of it—we know nothing. Neither here or in any subsequent Scripture, is there light thrown upon it. He wrestled with the man "until the breaking of the day." "And when he"—that is, the celestial personage—"saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint as he wrestled with him." It is very plain that the patriarch understood that the crisis of his life had come. He had prayed to God, and here was the answer to his prayer; and it is very plain that he felt that on his persistent faith depended his whole safety. From this hour Jacob was another man. In the strength of this vision, and in the blessing which he received in this mysterious struggle, he advanced to meet his brother. The hand of the Lord was also on him. Strangely, I probably might say unexpectedly, to Jacob, he met him; and the old boyhood affection returned. They made friends; and they parted, one going one way after the interview, and the other going the other way. But that to which attention is more especially directed is, that from this hour Jacob is nowhere recorded as falling back upon his selfish, his politic, his managing career. From this hour out there is no trace of anything in him but largeness of mind, nobleness of purpose, and beauty of character. All the dross seems to have been purged away. He had met the crisis, and had risen, and gone through it; and he had come out a changed man. And now he was indeed a prince of God, and he was the principal founder of the nation of the Israelites. Jacob went, the civilizer, over into the promised land, and there established the economy for which he had been ordained, and lived revered, a beautiful specimen of an old man. And the last scenes of his life were transcendently beautiful. In view of this narrative, which I have conducted so far, let me say: Men's sins carry with them a punishment in this life. Different sins are differently punished. The degrees of punishment are not always according to our estimate of the culpability. Many sins

against a man's body go on in the body, reproducing their penalties from year to year, and from ten years to ten years. And the ignorant crime, or the knowing crime, committed when one is yet in his minority, may repent itself and repent its bitterness and its penalty when one is hoary with age. Mere repenting of sin does not dispossess the power of all sins. There are transgressions that throw persons out of the pale of society. There are single acts, the penalties of which never fail to reassert themselves. There are single wrongs that are never healed. This great transgression that seemed in the commission without any threat and without any danger, pursued this man through all his early life, and clear down until he was an old man, and returned from his exile. And even then he was quit of it only by one of those great critical transitions which take place, or may take place, in the life of a man, without which he would have gone on, doubtless expiating still his great wrong. And yet God bore no witness. It does not need that God should bear witness against a man that has committed a sin. A man may commit sins, and he may not himself be conscious that he is sinning; at any rate, he may not be conscious of the magnitude of his sins. A man may commit sins, and the customs of society may be so low that he shall not think that he is a great sinner. The sin does not depend upon your estimate of it, or on the estimate which your fellow-men put upon it, but upon its effect upon your constitution, and the constitution of human society. Jacob had had a good time, apparently. So far as his violation between himself and his brother and his father's family was concerned, he had had twenty years of rest. And yet, as with all his abundance he came trooping back to the border to go over into the promised land and take possession of it, there, hovering, haunting the banks of the Jordan, was that old wrong. In that very hour when he could least afford to meet it, when he was most open to it, when all his possessions were in danger of being seized—worse than that, when all that his heart loved lay under the stroke of his adversary—that was the time that his old sin came back to meet him. And so it is yet. Men's sins find them out. And though you put as far as between Palestine and Assyria between you and them; though your sins slumber for years and years, they will have a resurrection on earth. I do not believe that any man commits in this world any sin against the fundamental laws of his body, or against the laws of human society, by which men are knit together in faith and love, and goes unpunished, even in this world. It does not touch the question of the other. This is a primary and lower and organized arrangement quite independent of Divine and arbitrary penalties in the life to come. It is not safe, therefore, for those who have choice in this matter to trifle with right or wrong. Finally, no man need ever despair of past misdoing who is in earnest. There is no man that is suffered to do wrong without check or hindrance. Ten thousand things stop men, interrupt them, throw them upon thoughtfulness. Ten thousand things oblige men to look back, to calculate; to look forward, to anticipate. And when these seasons from God come, if any man is in earnest to do better, there is no reason why he should not. The power of God's angel, the wrestling of God's Spirit, is not only in this far-off history of the patriarch. There is many and many a man with whom this mysterious Spirit of God wrestles; and if he be in earnest, if he will not let God's Spirit go except He bless him; if he feels that his life is in the struggle and he will be blest of God, there is no man so bad, no man so wicked, but that he may become pure, and his flesh return to him again like the flesh of a little child—as in the case of Naaman the leper. (*H. W. Beecher.*)

Loneliness and communion with God :—Here is—I. SOLITARINESS OPENING AN OPPORTUNITY for a man to go "face to face" with God. II. A CRISIS DISPOSING a man to go "face to face" with God. III. A CONSCIOUSNESS OF SIN SENDING a man "face to face" with God. IV. A SENSE OF MYSTERY Pervading a man while he is "face to face" with God. V. INTENSE REALITY CHARACTERIZING a man while he is "face to face" with God. VI. RICHEST BLESSING FOLLOWING from being "face to face" with God. 1. Elevation of his own character. 2. Reconciliation with men. (*Homilist.*)

Jacob wrestling with God :—I. GOD WRESTLES WITH MAN TILL HE HAS PREVAILED WITH HIM. 1. The Divine desire to bless. This is the foundation of all God's dealings with us. 2. But before this blessing could be given, Jacob's strength must be destroyed. 3. To destroy this, God wrestles with him apparently as an enemy. II. WE SEE THAT WHEN MAN IS THUS SUBDUED BY GOD, HE CAN PREVAIL WITH GOD. Is it not strange that the Divine Conqueror in this story should say to him who is thoroughly in His power, "Let Me go, for the day breaketh"? It seems strange, but it is not; there is a sense in which God is in the hands of the soul He has subdued. 1. Notice that there is no prevailing

with God till the spirit of resistance is destroyed. Until we yield to Him we can receive little from Him. That may explain much unprevailing prayer; the fact is it is not prayer: true prayer says "Thy will be done." 2. Then we see that we prevail with God when we only cling to Him in trustful prayer. That is the pleader that prevails. Thy covenant promises, Lord! Thy nature, which is love, and thus delights to bless! Thy mercy in Christ Jesus, which can bless the worthless; Thy fatherly relationship, which makes us trust Thy sympathy and depend on Thy resources, and which cannot cast Thy child back into the dark without a blessing! 3. Now to trustful prayer like this the delayed blessing is sure. But did God delay? We get an impression from this story (as I said) that God delays to bless and must be striven with, but did He delay, is there any sign of delay in the case of Jacob? None whatever after Jacob was subdued. III. Then, we find that **HAVING PREVAILED WITH GOD, MAN PREVAILS WITH ALL.** Prevailing with God does not mean that we persuade Him to give us what we ask, but simply that we secure His blessing: "He blessed Him there." That may be the gift, the deliverance, the supply we desire, but it may not; it may simply be power to endure—to endure cheerfully, enrichingly, and so as to glorify Him, but it involves that in some way we prevail over the trial. There is a great truth here. If we would prevail over our trials, we must first prevail with God; we may go to meet them bravely, but there will be no enrichment, no peace, no conquest, if that be all; we must prevail with heaven if we would conquer on earth. See how then we conquer! 1. In prevailing with God, Jacob prevailed over his own troubled heart. From that time he was a new creature with a new name, and I suppose in nothing was this change more apparent than in the tranquility which possessed him. 2. Jacob also prevailed over his dreaded foe. Esau came, the Esau that he feared, with his four hundred men. But what then? Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him. God's blessing turns the foe into a friend. (*C. New.*) *Jacob wrestling:—*

I. SOLITARY MUSINGS. Jacob was left alone. Before him was the river Jabbok. Beyond the river his wives and children. Still beyond them, on the march to Esau, were the presents he had sent. The servants full of wonder and fear for their master's sake. The wives and children anxious. Jacob once more alone, as many years before he was when passing the same spot (ver. 10). He would think of the past. How greatly he had been prospered. How little he had deserved. Now he feels how entirely he is in the hands of God. The disposing of his wealth is with God. It is a question whether God will own the means he has so far employed. Jacob is doubtful and perplexed. He has prayed already (vers. 9-12) and exhausted all his arguments. He can now only cast himself on the undeserved mercy of God. Night a good time for such reflections. David often meditated thus in the night watches. Jesus also spent His nights in meditation and prayer. In darkness and silence there is less to divert attention than in the daytime. **II. MIDNIGHT WRESTLING.** Jacob thus musing, becomes aware of the presence of some mysterious person. Called a man because in human form and nature. The angel of the covenant in disguise. Jacob perceives who his companion is. Seizes this mysterious personage, and declares he will not let him go unless a blessing is granted. The angel struggles to be released, doubtless intending by thus wrestling to teach that prayer should be bold, earnest, importunate, persevering. Physical wrestling a type of wrestling in spirit. The angel prevailed not. He had put forth only sufficient strength to excite resistance and earnestness, without causing discouragement to Jacob's mind. Unable to release himself, he touches and disables Jacob. Thus weakened, Jacob still clings to the angel. Will not let him go without a blessing. Jacob conquers. His name is changed. Hitherto he had been a mere supplanter by human methods, now he shall prevail on higher principles. As a "God's fighter" he shall fight God's battles with spiritual weapons. Faith, prayer, &c. **III. MORNING SUNSHINE.** "The sun rose upon him as he passed over Peniel." The brightest day in his life was that in which the sun rose upon him a man blessed of God, and acknowledged to be a prevailer. With his bodily infirmity, he was a stronger man than he had ever been before. "Clothed with might by His Spirit in the inner man," he was "strong" though "weak." He felt better able to meet Esau, a lame man, than he had felt before in the pride of strength. Strength of soul the highest form of strength. Without this how weak are the strongest (illus. Samson, Goliath). Learn: 1. Select fit times and themes for profitable meditation. 2. Our affairs should be all placed in the hands of God. 3. Saying a prayer not truly praying. Wrestling importunity. 4. The dark hour of earnest humble prayer is followed by

sunshine in the heart. (*J. C. Gray.*) *Jacob's wrestling* :—1. Then this wrestling warned and forewarned as it were Jacob that many strugglings remained for him yet in his life to be run through and passed over, which were not to discomfort him when they happened, for as here so there he would go away with victory in the end. 2. It described out the condition not only of Jacob but of all the godly also with him, namely, that they are wrestlers by calling while they live here, and have many and divers things to struggle withal and against; some outward, some inward, some carnal, some spiritual, some of one condition, some of another, which all, yet through God they shall overcome and have a joyful victory over in conclusion, if with patience they pass on and by faith lay hold upon Him ever in whom they only can vanquish, Christ Jesus. 3. It discovered the strength whereby Jacob both had and should overcome ever in his wrestlings, even by God's upholding with the one hand when He assaileth with the other, and not otherwise; which is another thing also of great profit to be noted of us, that not by any power of our own we are able to stand, and yet by Him and through Him conquerors and more than conquerors. 4. It is said that God saw how He could not prevail against Jacob, which noteth not so much strength in Jacob as mercy in God, ever kind and full of mercy. Lastly, that Jacob saith, "He will not let Him go except He bless him." It teacheth us to be strong in the Lord whensoever we are tried, and even so hearty and comfortable that we as it were compel the Lord to bless us ere He go, that is, by His merciful sweetness to comfort our hearts and to make us more and more confirmed in all virtue and obedience towards Him, yielding us our prayer as far as it may any way stand with the same; which force and violence as it were offered on our parts to the Lord He highly esteemeth and richly rewardeth evermore. (*Bp. Babington.*) *Saints wrestling for the blessing* :—The way to get the blessing is to go to the Lord for it, resolved not to take a denial, nor to part with Him even till we get it. In prosecuting this doctrine, I shall—1. Open up this way of getting the blessing. 2. I will show what it is that makes some souls so peremptory and resolute for the blessing, while others slight it. 3. I will show that this is the true way to obtain the blessing, and that they who take this way will come speed. I am, then—I. To OPEN UP THIS WAY TO OBTAIN THE BLESSING, WHICH YOU MAY TAKE UP IN THESE PARTICULARS. If we would have the blessing, then—1. We must have a lively sense of our need of it. 2. We must by faith lay hold on Christ the storehouse of blessings for it. God blesses us with all spiritual blessings in Christ. 3. We must by fervent prayer wrestle with Him for it. How did Jacob obtain it? "Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed; he wept and made supplication unto Him." 4. We must by believing the promise, keep a sure hold of the blessed Redeemer. He had said to Jacob, "I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea which cannot be numbered." And we find Jacob reminding Him of this promise (ver. 12). Now what way can we hold Him and not let Him go, but holding Him by His Word? They who hold Him by His Word, they have sure hold. 5. We must by hope wait for the blessing. "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait I say on the Lord." 6. We must leave no means untried to procure it. 7. No discouragements must cause us to faint. 8. If at any time we fall, we must resolutely recover and renew the struggle. 9. We must resolve never to give over till we get it, and so hold on. "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." This is the resolute struggle, this is the way to the blessing. Motives to urge you to this way—1. Consider the worth of the blessing. Whatever pains, and struggles, and on-waiting it may cost, it will far more than repay the expense of all. God's blessing is God's good word to the soul, but it is big with God's grace and good deeds to the man that gets it; and that is enough to make one happy for ever. 2. Consider the need you have of it. You are by nature under the curse, and unless you get the blessing, you must for ever be under the curse. 3. If you will not be at this pains for it, you will be reckoned despisers of the blessing; and that is most dangerous, and will bring on most bitter vengeance. And you will see the day you would do anything for it when you cannot get it. 4. If you will take this way you will get the blessing. II. To show what it is that makes some souls peremptory and resolute for the blessing, while others slight it. 1. Felt need engageth the soul to this course. 2. Superlative love to and esteem of Christ engageth them to this. 3. Without the blessing all is tasteless and unsatisfactory to them. 4. They see not how to set out their face in an ill world without it. They say with Moses, "If Thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence." 5. They see not how to face another world without it. III. THAT THIS IS THE TRUE WAY TO OBTAIN THE BLESSING, AND THAT THEY WHO

TAKE THIS WAY WILL COME SPEED. "And He blessed him there." Such as come to Christ for the blessing, they shall get it, if they hold on resolutely and will not be said nay. 1. We have many certain instances and examples of those who have obtained the blessing this way. Jacob in the text. The spouse (Song iii.). The woman of Canaan (Matt. xv. 22 and downwards; see also Lam. iii. 40-50 and downwards). Would you know how to get the blessing? There is a patent way, behold the footsteps of the flock, not the footsteps of lifeless formal professors, who cannot go off their own pace for all the blessings of the covenant; but the footsteps of wrestling saints, who were resolved to have the blessing cost what it would. 2. We have God's word or promise for it. "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall hath abundance." 3. It is the Lord's ordinary way to bring great things from small beginnings by degrees. 4. Consider the bountiful nature of God, who will not always flee from them that follow Him, nor offer to go away from them that will not let Him go, except He bless them. 5. None coming to Christ for the blessing ever got a refusal, but they that court it by their own indifference. 6. Our Lord allows and encourages His people to use a holy freedom and familiarity with Him, yea a holy importunity, as He teaches us (Luke xi. 8, 9). 7. As importunity is usually in all cases the way to succeed, so it has special advantages in this case, which promise success. (1) Our Lord does not free Himself of such as thus hold Him, and is not this promising? (2) Nay, our Lord commands them to keep the hold which they have gotten. "Strive," says He, "to enter in at the strait gate." And is not this promising? Use 1. This lets us see why many fall short of the blessing. They have some motions of heart towards it, and if it would fall down in their bosom with ease, they would be very glad of it. They knock at God's door for it, and if He would open at the first or second call, they would be content, but they have no heart to hang on about it, and so they even let Him go without the blessing. Use 2. I exhort you all to hold on. You that have received a blessing, wait on resolutely for more. And you that are going away mourning, take up with no comfort till you get it from Himself; and be resolute that you shall never let Him go till He bless you. (*T. Boston, D.D.*) *God's revelation to Jacob*:—1. It does not appear to be a vision, but a literal transaction. A personage, in the form of a man, really wrestled with him and permitted him to prevail so far as to gain his object. 2. Though the form of the struggle was corporeal, yet the essence and object of it were spiritual. An inspired commentator on this wrestling says, "He wept and made supplication to the angel." That for which he strove was a blessing, and he obtained it. 3. The personage with whom he strove is here called "a man," and yet in seeing Him, Jacob said, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." Hosea, in reference to his being a messenger of God to Jacob, calls him "the angel": yet he also describes the patriarch as having "power with God." Upon the whole, there can be no doubt but that it was the same Divine personage who appeared to him at Bethel and at Padan-aram, who, being in the form of God, again thought it no usurpation to appear as God. 4. What is here recorded had relation to Jacob's distress, and may be considered as an answer to his evening supplications. By his "power with God" he had "power with men": Esau and his hostile company were conquered at Peniel. 5. The change of his name from "Jacob" to "Israel" and the "blessings" which followed signified that he was no longer to be regarded as having obtained it by supplanting his brother, but as a prince of God, who had wrestled with Him for it and prevailed. It was thus that the Lord pardoned his sin and wiped away his reproach. It is observable, too, that this is the name by which his posterity are afterwards called. Finally, the whole transaction furnishes an instance of believing, importunate, and successful prayer. (*A. Fuller.*) *God's interpositions*:—Sometimes God interposes between us and a greatly-desired possession which we have been counting upon as our right and as the fair and natural consequence of our past efforts and ways. The expectation of this possession has indeed determined our movements and shaped our life for some time past, and it would not only be assigned to us by men as fairly ours, but God also has Himself seemed to encourage us to win it. Yet when it is now within sight, and when we are rising to pass the little stream which seems alone to separate us from it, we are arrested by a strong, an irresistible hand. The reason is that God wishes us to be in such a state of mind that we shall receive it as His gift, so that it becomes ours by an indefeasible title. Similarly, when advancing to a spiritual possession, such checks are not without their use. Many men look with longing to

what is eternal and spiritual, and they resolve to win this inheritance. And this resolve they often make as if its accomplishment depended solely on their own endurance. They leave almost wholly out of account that the possibility of their entering the state they long for is not decided by their readiness to pass through any ordinal, spiritual or physical, which may be required of them, but by God's willingness to give it. They act as if by taking advantage of God's promises, and by passing through certain states of mind and prescribed duties, they could, irrespective of God's present attitude towards them and constant love, win eternal happiness. In the life of such persons there must therefore come a time when their own spiritual energy seems all to collapse in that painful, utter way in which, when the body is exhausted, the muscles are suddenly found to be cramped and heavy and no longer responsive to the will. They are made to feel that a spiritual dislocation has taken place, and that their eagerness to enter life everlasting no longer stirs the active energies of the soul. In that hour the man learns the most valuable truth he can learn, that it is God who is wishing to save him, not he who must wrest a blessing from an unwilling God. Instead of any longer looking on himself as against the world, he takes his place as one who has the whole energy of God's will at his back, to give him rightful entrance into all blessedness. (*M. Dods, D.D.*)

Ver. 26. **I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me.**—*Jacob's struggle for a blessing*.—I. He was thoroughly in earnest; he wrestled till he got the blessing. II. If we wish to gain a blessing like Jacob's, we must be alone with God. It is possible to be alone with God, even in the midst of a multitude. III. Jacob's heart was hardened with a load of sin. It crushed his spirit, and was breaking his heart. He could bear it no more, and so he made supplication. He wanted to be lifted out of his weakness, and made a new man. IV. In the moment of his weakness, Jacob made a great discovery. He found that when we cannot wrestle we can cling. V. He received the blessing wrestled for as soon as he became content to accept it as God's free gift. (*W. Hay Aitken, M.A.*) *Jacob's prevailing prayer*.—I. **THE SOUL'S AGONY**. 1. The soul is absorbed in the awful loneliness of its own thought. "Jacob was left alone." So is every one in similar experiences. In times of agony, friendly sympathy seems distant and ineffectual. We are even impatient with well-meant words of kindness. Then comes a sense of powerlessness. The afflicted one has done all he can, and now can only wait. At this juncture he begins to ask himself as to the cause of his misery. Why is he thus situated? Perhaps, like Jacob, he recognizes his sorrows as the lineal descendants of some former sin; or more likely, he now perceives, as never before, the general fact of his sinfulness, his imperfections as a Christian, and his failure to enjoy religious privileges. 2. Just here the soul is arrested by God's presence. Abstracted from the world, because grief has made him indifferent to worldly thoughts, the Christian can now see God and feel His power. We can imagine Jacob, in his conflict of emotion, standing in the darkness by the brook Jabbok, lost in thought, when suddenly a heavy hand is laid upon his shoulder. He turns to find a mysterious Presence of terrible reality and power. That Presence he speedily recognizes as God. So now every storm-racked heart is introduced by conscience to its God. 3. In such times of trial, the soul at first finds God a seeming foe. Jacob at first was obliged to defend himself against his mysterious adversary. Who can tell what fearful surmises came over him as he wrestled in the dark with his terrible opponent? Can this be Esau? No; this is a superhuman strength. Can this be God? It surely is none else; but why does He meet me thus? God hedges men in to bring them to His feet, to show them themselves, to prevent prosperity from injuring them, very likely to prepare them for it, to purify them from remaining sin, frequently to fit them for some great work. We must pass through the furnace before we are what we should be. II. **THE RELIEF OF THE SOUL**. 1. The narrative discloses the human means of securing this relief, namely, prayer. 2. The narrative sets before us the Divine methods of giving relief to the soul. (1) Development of character. (2) Knowledge of God. (3) Confidence in God. 3. The narrative indicates the safeguard of the soul in this secured relief. Jacob, though his troubles were now passed, yet halted on his thigh, and doubtless limped through life. He carried from that place of conflict and triumph a reminder of his dependence. He had then, ever after, a sense of his weakness, and could say with Paul, "When I am weak, then am I strong." There is danger, after meeting God face to face and securing His favour, of undue elation. Even Paul, with all his saintliness, needed a thorn

in the flesh, lest he be exalted above measure. We may forget that every successful struggle with sin or attainment in piety is due solely to the Divine help. For this reason, doubtless, God has established a universal law in life. We cannot pass through a terrible experience like Jacob's without bearing the scars of battle. (*A. P. Foster.*) *Jacob's powerful prayer*:—1. It was a prayer that by living faith took firm hold upon God. He came to God, not as one far off, but close at hand; not merely on the throne, but present in all the affairs of daily life. He comes to Him as the God of his fathers, the God of the covenant. He at once lays hold of the Divine faithfulness. As much as any one thing, we need to-day this sense of God as ever present to be a restraining power in business life. Like the patriarch, every believing soul must draw nigh to God, reverently, it is true, but not timidly or distrustfully. The command is to "come boldly to a throne of grace." We must come not as though we more than half questioned whether there is any God, or, if there be, whether He cares anything about us, and will hear our prayer; but with all the heart believing "that He is, and is the Rewarder of those that diligently seek Him." 2. Jacob did not offer a hasty prayer for safety merely in general terms, and then go about his worldly business with all the intensity of his nature. His need was urgent, was deeply felt; and he found time enough to press it before God. The whole night was none too long for his business with God. 3. Wrestling, Jacob came to a point where he was powerless. All he could do was to hold fast to God. God never takes from any of His children their power to do this. Every other refuge may be swept away, but they can cling still. 4. Jacob's prayer was direct and simple. He asked for just what he wanted, then stopped. (*The Study.*) *Importunate prayer*:—I. THE OBJECTS OF JACOB'S PRAYER; or, the blessings implored. It need not be disguised that one of these was the preservation of his own life, and the safety of his family and substance. It would be doing Jacob injustice, however, to deny that higher objects than the preservation of himself, and of his family and substance, occupied his thoughts and prayers on this critical occasion. The very circumstances in which he was placed were calculated to call his sins to remembrance; just as his sons were reminded of their unnatural and criminal conduct towards Joseph, by being thereby involved in difficulties in Egypt many long years after their sin had been committed. Jacob being reminded of the falsehood and deceit by which he had provoked the anger and vengeance of his brother, would humbly confess his sin and earnestly pray for the salvation of his soul, whatever might be the fate of his body at this time. Knowing that the souls of his family were as precious as his own, and remembering the relation in which he stood to them, and the duty that he owed them, he would be very importunate in prayer for their salvation also, though they should fall by the sword of Esau. But he would not despair of their preservation. He would remember the covenant of God with his father Abraham, and the promise that He would make of him a great nation, and that in his seed, which is Christ, all the families of the earth would be blessed. He would pray that he and his family might live to be witnesses for God in a world lying in wickedness, and might introduce the spiritual seed, in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed. II. THE MANNER IN WHICH THE DUTY SHOULD BE PERFORMED. 1. Jacob sought retirement for devotion. 2. Jacob spent a long time in prayer. 3. We must implore lawful things, and employ proper arguments to attain them. 4. We ought to be earnest and persevering in prayer. 5. We should pray in faith and hope. III. THE ANSWER WHICH JACOB OBTAINED TO HIS PRAYERS. God blessed him there. He obtained a gracious answer. (*R. Smith, D.D.*) *Importunity in prayer*:—I. EXPLAIN THIS HOLY WRESTLING IN PRAYER. Wrestling implies some resistance to be overcome. Some of the chief obstructions which must be overcome are—1. A sense of guilt weighing the soul. 2. A frowning Providence discouraging the mind. 3. Unbelieving thoughts and inward temptations. 4. Coldness and slothfulness of the heart. 5. Discouragement through Divine delays. II. THE REASONABLENESS OF IMPORTUNITY IN PRAYING. 1. It strengthens in our minds a sense of God's glory. 2. Our unworthiness vindicates it. 3. The inestimable value of the blessings to be obtained requires it. III. ITS ADVANTAGES. 1. It prepares for blessings in many cases: it is itself the actual possession of them. 2. It has the promises of success. 3. Memorable examples confirm its worth. IV. IMPROVEMENT. 1. How many have cause to mourn their lack of this spirit! 2. Its absence is one cause of the low state of religion. 3. As you would persevere in prayer, be watchful and circumspect, observe the course of Providence, be much in intercession for others. (*Dr. J. Wetherspoon.*) "Now":—Canon Wilberforce tells a pathetic story illustrating the force of this

little word "now." It was of a miner who, hearing the gospel preached, determined that, if the promised blessing of immediate salvation were indeed true, he would not leave the presence of the minister who was declaring it until assured of its possession by himself. He waited, consequently, after the meeting to speak with the minister, and, in his untutored way, said, "Didn't ye say I could have the blessin' now?" "Yes, my friend." "Then pray with me, for I'm not goin' awa' wi'out it." And they did pray, these two men, wrestling in prayer until midnight, like Jacob at Penuel, until the wrestling miner heard silent words of comfort and cheer, even as Jacob heard the angel's announcement, "As a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." "I've got it now!" cried the miner, his face reflecting the joy within; "I've got it now!" The next day a terrible accident occurred at the mines—one of those accidents which so frequently shock us with their horror merely in the reading of them. The same minister was called to the scene, and among the men, dead and dying, was the quivering, almost breathless body of this man, who only the night before, big and brawny, came to him to know if salvation could really be had now for the asking. There was but a fleeting moment of recognition between the two, ere the miner's soul took flight, but in that moment he had time to say, in response to the minister's sympathy, "Oh, I don't mind, for I've got it—I've got it—it's mine!" Then the name of this poor man went into the bald list of "killed." There was no note made of the royal inheritance to which he had but a few hours before come into possession, and all by his believing grip of the word "now."

Grip:—This is what every Christian ought to have, and what many a one lacks. There is a certain inspiration in the very thought of the clenched hand, with its tense muscle and unyielding grasp. It signifies not only strength, but purpose; not only earnestness, but endurance. It is the symbol of a necessary and important element of a Christian's success. It typifies consecrated self-control, that mastery which every true child of Christ has in some degree over his own sinful nature, and which, having secured by the Holy Spirit's help, he maintains by the aid of the same blessed agency. It typifies, too, that hold which he has upon Christ Himself, that tenacious, yet reverent, clinging of spirit which imparts to his prayers the temper of Jacob's words, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." It typifies also that benevolent, yet authoritative influence which he seeks to gain, and usually succeeds in gaining, over his more sorely tempted fellows; the drunkard, for instance, who is rapidly losing confidence in himself without yet finding it in God, and who needs the protection of some sturdy, masterful soul who has no personal fear of his temptation, and has the power and the will to stand by him through everything to cheer and uphold, and by God's grace to save. Grip is the holding fast and not letting go, in spiritual as in material life. It is tenacity of holy purpose, renewal of effort after moral failure, cheerfulness in the teeth of discouragement, hopefulness for others, no matter how low they may have sunk, and unfaltering faith in the truth that God reigns, can save to the uttermost, and somehow will bring out all things aright for His own. What wonder that he who has it is a healthy, useful Christian! He may be timid by nature, weak in body, and humble in place, but if he illustrate what a true Christian grip is upon himself and his little world, men learn to marvel at him. Something of God's own Almighty power is visible in him. What he does succeeds, and in blessing others he is doubly blessed himself.

The Prayer-meeting at Jabbok:—Events drive Jacob's mind back on the past, which has been a series of wrestlings with his nearest neighbour, the gain of which has been wealth, but the loss that, in most important senses, he is "left alone." Jacob is one of those men who, wild among their fellows, are tame and best when "alone." The world condemns the man who is crafty as one of its own children when among men, but afterwards goes to the prayer-meeting. The world, however, would not be better pleased with him if he did not go, and the man, in that case, very likely would be a wilder man. There are three way-side prayer-meetings in Jacob's journeyings so far. Where God tells him that "the world has been too much with him" of late—Bethel, Mahanaim, Jabbok. Jacob is redeemed from the world by the prayer-meeting. How do we use the opportunities which God gives when He throws open to us the hallowed gates of the lonely hour? Do we enter with thanksgiving and betake ourselves to prayer, "the flight of the lonely man to the only God"? "There wrestled," &c. Again and again the heavenly world enters into controversy with Jacob, and breaks the spell of this world. At Bethel he saw angels, at Mahanaim he met angels, but at Jabbok one of them stayed to minister to the man who wrestled with the old self and needed help. "I can do all things through Christ,

that strengtheneth me." When we make a vow, we lay hold on the angel of the covenant. If we forget our vow, we let the angel go. A little shell-fish can cling to the rock, despite the Atlantic, because of a tiny vacuum in the shell. Our emptiness is our strength with God. Jacob in the world is "somebody," but at the prayer-meeting "nobody" but broken, sinewless Jacob. Our wrestling must be with "pleading, not with contradiction." He blessed him there. The blessing, in brief, was the power to look at the world and himself from a cleaner heart through a cleaner eye. The place was Penueel, the face of God, and he was Israel, a prince, from that time. No religious meeting or exercise will have done us good unless it exalt us, and make the world—wife, children, home, friends, business—look lovelier and more sacred. (*T. M. Rces.*) *Boldness in prayer exemplified*:—There is a wide difference between striving against God and striving with God. Some men strive against God by their sins, and they must be conquered by His power; but Jacob strove with God. Jehovah Himself gave strength and determination to his servant, for the express purpose that he might, as a prince, have power and prevail. It is one of the most delightful evidences of Divine condescension, that He is willing to be conquered by human prayer and importunities. 1. Who was that personage that appeared to Jacob, and wrestled with him? The narrative calls him a man; but all interpreters are agreed, that by this is meant some one in the form of a man. Was it, then, a created angel? or, was it God Himself? We think the latter; because, though He is called an angel, Jacob paid Him Divine homage. Again, because the inspired prophet, referring to this event, says that Jacob had power with God. And again, because Jacob himself said, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." Once more, because the patriarch appeals to Him in our text for a blessing, which he could hardly look for from any being but God. There is another point to which I would direct your attention, viz., that this angel was not merely God, but God the Son, who in this, and in many other instances, anticipated His Incarnation, by appearing in the form and fashion of a man. With whom should Jacob wrestle to obtain pardon for his sin, and deliverance from its just consequences, but with the appointed Mediator, who should make atonement, and then enter into the heaven of heavens, there to appear in the presence of God for us? 2. What was this wrestling? Was it spiritual, or corporeal, or both? There are a few interpreters, and but a few, who think it was purely spiritual; and that there was no bodily conflict at all, but that it was illusive and imaginary. It is said distinctly, "There wrestled a Man with him"; and that Man, when the conflict had lasted long, says, "Let me go, for the day breaketh." Finally, he touched Jacob's thigh upon the sinew that shrank, so that he went halting to the end of his days. All these are strong marks of reality, which go far to prove that the outward form of this conflict was corporeal. Yet, beyond all question, it was connected with a mental and spiritual wrestling with God in prayer. The outward was a sign and picture of the inward strife; and Jacob to this day is an image of every saint who prevails with God by the holy boldness, earnest opportunity, and untiring perseverance of His supplications. 3. Why did this wrestling take place? what was its great end? With respect to Jacob himself, it signified that he should overcome the hatred of his brother Esau; for what has he to fear from man, who, as a prince, hath power with God? With respect to ourselves, and to the Church generally, we may consider this scene as descriptive pictorially, not of Jacob's condition only, but of all the saints with him. They are all wrestlers, by their very calling; wrestlers with affliction, with temptation, with outward and with inward, with carnal and with spiritual enemies: yet, in the strength of God, they shall all overcome. Wrestlers with God; that is, men of prayer. Now, we take our text as exemplifying to us this one subject, boldness in prayer: "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." Now, there are two reflections that, in a manner, force themselves upon our notice. One is, that God never violently withdraws Himself from a praying man. His trial of our faith and importunity never stretch beyond this, "Let me go, if Thou canst consent"; and, even when the trial proceeds so far, it is only done to provoke a refusal. It was obviously not the Divine intention to send Jacob away unblessed, but to elicit this proof of his determination. The other reflection is consequent upon it; namely, that when God withdraws from any man, it is always with his own consent. He must be willing to give up the point before he loses his advantage. No man can fail to obtain everything that he really needs, and everything that God has promised, unless he himself voluntarily draws back and yields; otherwise, God consents to be overcome by prayer. This is the great

comfort of every sinner, and of every saint. I. Consider WHAT KIND OF BOLDNESS IT IS THAT GOD APPROVES, NEGATIVELY AND POSITIVELY. 1. God does not approve the boldness which is grounded on self-righteous principles: it must, therefore, be connected with a deep sense of guilt and unworthiness (ver. 10). 2. God does not approve that boldness which loses sight of His own awful majesty and holiness. Boldness must be associated with reverence and godly fear, to be acceptable. What! can God's condescension and love give an unworthy creature the smallest ground to forget his own unworthiness, and the infinitude of Him with whom he has to do? On the contrary, it should deepen his sense of his own meanness, and increase his adoration. But let us come more particularly to the question. 1. God approves that boldness which surmounts all the doubts and fears adapted to obstruct our freedom of access to Him. There are improper fears, and a sinful diffidence opposed to the exercise of prayer. When, for instance, a sense of guilt and unworthiness leads us to suspect that God will not hear us, will not forgive; this is a sign of faint-heartedness, not of humility. It is a sentiment directly contrary to His revealed will. Now, Jacob might have been restrained by similar considerations. He might have thought of all his sins. 2. God approves that boldness in prayer which is evinced by the largeness of its desires. He is not honoured by feeble desires and limited supplications. His promises are most ample, and various in the benefits which they convey. 3. God approves that boldness which is importunate, and will take no denial. It is often necessary that a blessing be withheld for a season, in order that its full value may be realized. Moreover, this is an important test of sincerity. Coldness and languor are repulsed and betrayed. Genuine devotion believes the word, and will not consent to go empty away. Formality is satisfied without the blessing, when conscience is appeased by the performance of the duty. The true worshipper cannot rest in outward services if the blessing be not given. II. Let us take notice of one or two CONSIDERATIONS WHICH NOT MERELY JUSTIFY THIS BOLDNESS, BUT GO FAR TO PROVE IT INDISPENSABLE. 1. The urgency of our wants. The fervency of prayer should be regulated by our condition. It is evident that the secret of Jacob's importunity was the pressing circumstances in which he felt himself to be placed. His was a kind of desperation, inspired by the extremity of his danger. 2. The importance of the blessing. We plead not merely for well-being, we plead for life; life, not of the body, but of the soul. If we do not prevail we are lost. 3. The absolute certainty of its prevalence. There will be timidity in asking, wherever there exists a doubt of obtaining. Thine own word is my warrant, when I answer, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." In conclusion, the subject is adapted to impress upon our minds these two points of instruction: the quality of prayer, and the power of prayer. 1. Boldness is an essential characteristic of prayer. This may be made clear by barely mentioning the defects and infirmities to which it is opposed. Can there be sincerity and acceptableness where there is a want of sensibility and zeal, where low views are entertained of the kindness and grace of God, and where the suppliant is ready to withdraw from the mercy-seat without the blessing, at the least discouragement or delay? 2. Observe exemplified the power of prayer. "I said not unto the seed of Jacob, seek ye Me in vain!" (*D. Katterns.*) *The characteristic of true prayer:*—Now that Jacob found himself once more in Esau's power, he trembled to think of the consequences. There were two considerations which must have intensified his agony of mind. 1. That he had brought these difficulties upon himself. Conscience now accused him of his crime with the same vehemence as if it had been committed only yesterday. Ah! this is a solemn fact in connection with certain sins which we rashly perpetrate! Painful indeed was Jacob's reflection now upon the past. Had he conducted himself as a straightforward man in his youth, he might have avoided his present trouble. How he wished he could have commenced life again! Even in old age men are doomed to possess the sins of their youth, to reap the inevitable consequences of early aberrations. 2. That others beside himself shared in the impending danger. He is now the head of a family; he has wives and children whom he passionately loves; they are in danger of being put to death on the morrow by his furious brother; and his conscience reproaches him with being the cause of their misery. Surely this was the keenest pang of all—the bitterest ingredient in his cup of bitterness. Such is human life. Say not that children are never punished for the transgressions of their parents; reason not concerning the injustice of such an arrangement; the hard fact continually stares us in the face, and warns us at every step to beware, to take heed to ourselves, to be prudent in our conduct, not only for

our own sake, but also for the sake of others, whom we may unwittingly injure. "And Jacob was left alone." It is when you are alone with the powers of nature—powers whose existence speaks of a higher Power, which sustains them all—that the light of Heaven is most likely to flash upon your soul. It was when banished to the isle of Patmos that John saw the glorious visions recorded in the Book of Revelation; it was when imprisoned in Bedford goal that Bunyan dreamed his Pilgrim's Progress; it was when shut up in total darkness that Milton sang his Paradise Lost. We are taught here that—I. WHEN WE TRULY PRAY, WE BECOME CONSCIOUS OF THE PRESENCE OF A PERSONAL GOD. It is stated that "there wrestled a man with Jacob until the breaking of the day." God is not an abstract idea of the mind; is not the natural powers by which we are surrounded; for He has a personal existence. God is a person, and as such, men in all ages have desired to know Him; to commune with Him, to call upon Him in distress. It is when we pray, however, that this fact forces itself most vividly upon our minds. It may be said, therefore, that true prayer can never be uttered where the presence of a personal God does not inspire the soul. You must feel, like Jacob, that there is a Person with you, standing at your side, listening to your cry; for otherwise it will not be prayer, but a form—it will not be an outpouring of the heart, but a meaningless performance. II. WHEN WE TRULY PRAY, WE BECOME CONSCIOUS OF A STRUGGLE TO OVERCOME DIFFICULTIES. The experience of formidable opposition in drawing near to God is by no means uncommon. The repelling power with which Jacob struggled on this occasion, has been encountered by almost every suppliant at the throne of grace. Indeed, our Lord seemed anxious to prepare the minds of His disciples to expect it. "And He spake a parable unto them for this end, that men ought always to pray and not to faint." But our Lord prepared His disciples to expect difficulties in prayer by other means than parables—by His dealings with some who sought temporal favours at His hands. While He sojourned in the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, a woman of Canaan came to Him, crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." Passing on with perfect unconcern, He feigned not to hear her; for He answered her not a word. She then cried all the more, "Have mercy on me," so that His disciples felt annoyed, and besought Him to send her away. Thus when we encounter difficulties in prayer, when we feel as if God did not hear us, it is because God wishes to test our faith, and by testing to strengthen it. Consequently, not only do we enjoy God's blessing with greater relish when it comes, but we are also made stronger for His service. III. WHEN WE TRULY PRAY, WE BECOME CONSCIOUS OF A CHANGE IN OURSELVES, AS A TOKEN OF SUCCESS. It may be that when we are apparently most unsuccessful, we are really most successful. We do not obtain the very thing we seek at the time, but the spiritual strength we acquire in the effort may be infinitely more important than the thing itself. It always happens thus when true, fervent, earnest prayer is sent up from the heart to God; when there is a mighty struggle to obtain a blessing from above, there comes over the soul a change for the better, a visible improvement, a closer resemblance to God's image. Jacob carried in his body ever after a memorial of the wrestling of that night; for "he halted on his thigh." We are reminded here of a beautiful story, told of the celebrated John Elias, the prince of Welsh orators. He addressed on one occasion a meeting presided over by the late Marquis of Anglesey. The marquis, as you know, was lame, having lost a limb in the famous battle of Waterloo. Referring, therefore, to that circumstance, the speaker thrilled his audience by this striking remark, "We have a president here this evening, whose very step as he walks reminds you of his bravery!" So Jacob "halted on his thigh." His limping gait kept in remembrance his wonderful victory with God. A man of prayer is well known as such; there are certain marks which reveal his character; his public performances bear the impress of his private wrestlings. In this transforming, elevating, and invigorating influence of prayer lies the secret of a godly man's strength. (*D. Rowlands, B.A.*) *Earnest prayer:*—When a person told a story in a heartless way, Demosthenes said, "I don't believe you." But when the person then repeated the assertion with great fervour, Demosthenes replied, "Now I do believe you." Sincerity and earnestness are ever urgent. The prophetess at Delphos would not go into the temple once when Alexander wished to consult the oracle. He then forced her to go, when she said, "My son, thou art invincible"; a remark which led him to believe he should always conquer in war. Luther was so earnest in his prayers that it used to be said, "He will not be denied." When Scotland was in danger of becoming Popish, John Knox prayed most nightly for its preservation in the true faith. "Give me Scotland," he

pleaded, "or I die"; and his prayers have been answered. Epaphras "laboured fervently in prayer." Christ, "being in an agony, prayed the more fervently."

Ver. 28. And He said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. —*Jacob the prince*:—Some surprise may be felt at first at the term prince being applied to the patriarch Jacob; for whatever good qualities distinguish his character, we hardly regard him as possessing princely ones. He has the quiet virtues of resignation, meekness and caution, but we hardly attribute to him that spirit and mettle, that vigorous temper and fire, which belong to the princely character. Yet when we consider Jacob we find that he had virtues which lie at the foundation of the royal and grand form of human character. I. His patience was a princely virtue. How patiently he bore the long delays in Laban's service! the plots of his sons, Simeon and Levi! We sometimes think of patience as the virtue of the weak, the sufferer, the inferior. Yet a great prime minister of England, when asked what was the most important virtue for a prime minister, gave this answer, "Patience is the first, patience is the second, patience is the third." II. Hopefulness was another of Jacob's regal virtues. He looked forward with trust and confidence to the future; he believed firmly in God's promises. His was a religious spirit; the religious mind is sustained by hope. "I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord," he says in his last address, when he summed up the purpose of his life. He had waited, but never ceased to hope; the Divine reward had always been before him. III. But it was in prayer specially that Jacob showed his princely character. What a nobility is attributed to prayer in this episode of Jacob's life! What a description the text gives us of the royal attributes of prayer—that it sets in motion the sovereign agency which settles all human events! (*J. B. Mozley, D.D.*) *Jacob's twofold name and nature*:—I. The very twofold name of Jacob and of Israel is but the symbol of the blending of contradictions in Jacob's character. A strange paradox—the hero of faith, and the quick, sharp-witted schemer. II. The character of Jacob is a form which is to be found among the Gentiles no less than among the Jews. There are in our days prudential vices, marrying what would otherwise be worthy of all praise. And that which makes them most formidable is that they are the cleaving, besetting temptations of the religious temperament. 1. Untruthfulness—the want of perfect sincerity and frankness. 2. Thinking much of ease and comfort, and shrinking from hardship and danger. III. The religious temperament, with all its faults, may pass into the the matured holiness of him who is not religious only, but godly. How the work is to be done "thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter," when thou too hast wrestled with the angel and hast become a prince with God. (*Dean Plumptre.*) *Jacob's new name*:—I. EVERY SOUL NEEDS THE NEW NAME. II. EVERY ONE MAY HAVE THE NEW NAME. III. EVERY ONE MUST SECURE THE NEW NAME AS JACOB DID. 1. By repentance. 2. By faith. (*T. J. Holmes.*) *The new man*:—I. THE SYMBOL OF THE NEW LIFE. He was no longer to be called Jacob, but Israel. In this change of name was intimated an entire change of character. He was sent back in recollection over the years to the time when he had been a wicked man; and then he was sent forward in anticipation across the years, under the command that he should begin a fresh career. From that night onward, he was to leave off his worldly cunning, and surrender his craft. He must become a new man, and, above all, a true man. His early and continuous sins might now be forgiven; but he must lead an altered life. II. THE REACH TO WHICH THIS NEW LIFE EXTENDS. 1. When once a believer is truly in Christ, his standing with God is entirely changed. Every barrier is broken down. God's displeasure is over, and man's enmity is ended. 2. Not only in state but in character is the true believer a new man. If he be in Christ, he will grow assuredly to resemble Christ. 3. The new creation of a believer in Christ extends even to his experience, as well as to his state and character. (1) Confidence. (2) Freedom. (3) Contentment. (*C. S. Robinson, D.D.*) *Israel; or, Jacob at Peniel*:—I. THAT GOD MANIFESTS HIMSELF FOR THE COMFORT AND PROTECTION OF THOSE WHO TRUST IN HIM ACCORDING TO THEIR NEED (2 Kings vi. 17; Psa. xli. 1; Acts xxvii. 23, 24). II. WHAT TOWARDS A GUILTY CONSCIENCE MAKES OF US ALL. III. THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF PRAYER. Mark: 1. The kind forbearance and long-suffering patience of God. 2. The purpose of God concerning us. (*A. F. Joscelyne, B.A.*) *Power with God*:—I. WHAT THIS POWER CANNOT BE. 1. Cannot be physical force. 2. Cannot be mental energy. 3. Cannot be magical. 4. Cannot be meritorious. 5. Cannot be independent. II. WHENCE THIS POWER PRO-

CELEBS. 1. It arises from the Lord's nature. His goodness and tenderness are excited by the sight of our sorrow and weakness. 2. It comes out of God's promise (Isa. xliii. 26). 3. It springs out of the relationships of grace. 4. It grows out of the Lord's previous acts. Each blessing draws on another, like links of a chain. III. HOW CAN IT BE EXERCISED. 1. There must be a deep sense of weakness (2 Cor. xii. 10). 2. There must be simple faith in the goodness of the Lord (John xiv. 12). 3. There must be earnest obedience to His will (John ix. 31). 4. There must be fixed resolve (ver. 26). 5. With this must be blended importunity (ver. 24). 6. The whole heart must be poured out (Hosea. xii. 4). 7. Increased weakness must not make us cease (Isa. xxxiii. 23). IV. TO WHAT USE THIS POWER MAY BE TURNED. 1. For ourselves. (1) For our own deliverance from special trial. (2) An honourable preferment. (3) Our future comfort, strength, and growth, when, like Jacob, we are called to successive trials. 2. For others. Jacob's wives and children were preserved, and Esau's heart was softened. If we had more power with God, we should have a happier influence among our relatives. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Power with God*.—What is power with God? Knowledge of God in Christ, as revealed in the Scriptures, forms the basis of all power with God. I. HOW DID JACOB OBTAIN THIS KNOWLEDGE OF GOD? In two ways—1. By the instrumentality of pious parents. Isaac and Rebecca were the most Godly couple of the Old Testament families. They taught Jacob the first principles of, and the parental character of God; His wisdom, love, and power. 2. By a direct revelation of God's loving kindness to him in a time of great distress. II. POWER WITH GOD IS THE RIGHT APPLICATION OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN CHRIST AT THE RIGHT TIME, IN THE USE OF RIGHT MEANS TO ACCOMPLISH THE RIGHT END. 1. A crisis in the life of Jacob had arrived. A fearful episode in his life is revealed in the words, "And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother," &c. (Gen. xxxii. 3, 4, 5, 6). Jacob wisely flies to God in prayer. In this crisis he makes a right application of his knowledge. 2. Jacob uses successful means to appease his brother's wrath. Knowledge of God in the Covenant of Grace by Jesus Christ, contains the knowledge of man. The greater includes the less. 3. Jacob uses the right means to secure the blessing of God. Power with God is knowledge of God applied by faith until the end is accomplished. (J. Brewster.) *The proper design and influence of prayer*.—Both the letter and spirit of the text suggest this general observation: I. THAT IT IS THE DESIGN OF PRAYER TO MOVE GOD TO BESTOW MERCY. This will appear if we consider—1. That prayer properly and essentially consists in pleading. Though it may be divided into distinct parts or branches, yet all these ultimately unite and centre in supplication. In adoration, confession, petition, and thanksgiving, we ultimately plead for Divine mercy. 2. It appears from the prayers of good men, which are recorded in scripture, that they meant to move God to grant their petitions. 3. The friends of God are urged to pray with fervency and importunity, in order to make the Divine compassion. 4. That the prayers of good men have actually prevailed upon God to grant great and signal favours. II. But now some may be ready to ask, HOW CAN THIS BE? How can prayer have the least influence to move the heart of God, who is of one mind, and with whom there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning? 1. Here we ought to consider, in the first place, that the prayers of good men are proper reasons why an infinitely wise and good being should grant their requests. 2. We ought to consider, in the next place, that though God formed all his purposes from eternity, yet he formed them in the view of all the pious petitions which should ever be presented to Him, and gave to these petitions all the weight that they deserved, in fixing his determinations. 3. This leads us, in the last place, to consider pious prayers as the proper means of bringing about the events with which they are connected in the Divine purpose. Though God is able to work without means, yet He has been pleased to adopt means into His plan of operation. III. IMPROVEMENT. 1. If it be the design of prayer to move God to bestow temporal and spiritual favours, then there is a propriety in praying for others, as well as for ourselves. 2. We are led to conclude from what has been said upon this subject, that we have as fair an opportunity of obtaining Divine favours, as if God were to form His determinations at the time we present our petitions. For God has determined, from eternity, to hear every prayer that ought to be heard. 3. We learn the propriety of praying for future, as well as for present blessings. 4. It appears from what has been said, that saints are in a safe and happy condition. They enjoy the benefit of the prayers of all the people of God. 5. This subject may remind sinners of what they have to fear from the prayers of saints. Their united supplications for the

honour of God, the accomplishment of His designs, and the overthrow of all His incorrigible enemies, forebode terrible and eternal evils to impenitent sinners. 6. Since prayer has such a prevailing influence upon the heart of the Deity, saints have great encouragement to abound in this duty. They are formed for this devout and holy exercise. Having become the children of God, they possess the spirit of adoption, which is the spirit of grace and supplication. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *What is our name?*—He is asking us to-day as He asked Jacob, "What is thy name?" For when God asks, "What is thy name?" He means, "What is it that lies behind the name, that is really thee?" And Jacob had grace and honesty at last to own up and say, "Oh, unknown wrestler! my name is trick and quirk and cunning. My name is Jacob. My name is craft, my name is cunning." He owned up at last: "I am of the earth, earthy. My name is Jacob—Supplanter." My brother, what is your name? After bearing a Christian profession; after, it may be, being an office-bearer in God's house for twenty or forty years, the great God with whom we have to do comes in mercy to-day simply because perhaps we are soon to get to heaven, and we need a lot to make us ready; we need a lot yet to make us ready. God has to come to you this morning with my lips, and says: "What is thy name?" If you tell the truth you will say: "My name is Jacob." You will say, "My name is money, my name is cent. per cent., my name is profit—my very name is that, O God. My name is moderation and religion. O God, dost Thou ask my name? My name is lust. Right down at bottom that wriggling thing is me. My name is lust, uncleanness, vileness. I have kept it in; I have veneered it over; but I admit to-day that, that is me. This is the one thing in me. It is my name." "What is thy name? What is at bottom in us, that is us? What is it?" How few of us can say honestly, "My name, O God, is religion; my name is settled principle; my name is candour, openness, honesty, sincerity. My name is singleness of heart, childlike simplicity." What is our name? I cannot give all the names. It is not the actual Johns and Roberts that were named over us here in baptism. Jacob's name was a name of significance; and God gives us all a significant name, and He is asking us to-day, "What is your name? What is it?" Oh, let us be honest and tell Him. I know mine. You could stand up in this church, and in one sentence could tell this meeting what is your prevailing characteristic. Young girl, young woman, you can stand up before God and say, "My name is frivolity. That is my prevailing characteristic. I come to church on Sunday, but the thing that engrosses and consumes me is a ball and a dance and the theatre. That is my name. That sets my whole soul abounding and a-pulsing." With some of us, our whole creed is just a determination not to yield ourselves utterly unto God, but to keep on the safe side. What is your name? Ananias is the name for some, and Sapphira is the true name for others. It was not a nice name. It may be that Jacob's swarthy cheek got a little swarthier even in the darkness, as he said, "Supplanter is my name. I am a wrestler, I depend on cunning, I call on God even occasionally, to help my cunning. I use religion for a cloak for my cunning." My name, in Thy sight, and with shame I confess it, my name is double-tongue, or facing-both-ways. (*J. McNeill.*)

The new name.—I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE EVENT. It will occur to our recollection that, after the intimation of Esau's approach, Jacob had almost immediately addressed himself to the duty of prayer, and that he had earnestly sought deliverance from the threatening danger; but he had as yet received no favourable answer. He remained still in suspense, and in the anxious exercise of faith upon the promise of his Divine protector. His previous experience seems to have consecrated to him the shades of night. It was during the night that God appeared to him at Bethel. It was in a dream at night that he received the instruction to depart from Syria. A degree of obscurity hangs over the passage, from the difficulty of affixing a meaning satisfactorily to the word which we translate wrestled, and which implies intense occupation and effort; yet upon the whole, the general statement seems to render it unequivocal, that on this occasion a bodily struggle did actually take place. It was, however, at the same time, a contest in which the chief interest lay in the spiritual blessing to be obtained. The external effort for victory was evidently in Jacob's mind intimately associated with the deliverance that he was then seeking by prayer. And with the external wrestling to detain this nocturnal visitant, Jacob still continued the ardent pleading of his soul for the indulgence of his request. Jacob evidently regarded them as being one and the same. And the prophet Hosea confirms this view of the case when he tells us (in chap. xii.) that "Jacob had power over the angel and prevailed"; that "he wept and made suppli-

cation unto him"; a passage which brings the spiritual object prominently forward, and excludes the idea of a contention of mere muscular strength. Probably the appearance of a human form, on these occasions of revelation, was at this time new to Jacob. It appears, however, to have given him a peculiar encouragement. Where was the created frame that would not instantly crumble into its original nothingness, if, for one instant, it was placed in the attitude of resistance against Him who is "a consuming fire?" But the terrors of the Godhead were veiled in humanity. It was a man that appeared to Jacob. The sequel of the history ascertains, beyond a doubt, the Divine character of the person who appeared to Jacob. II. THE DOCTRINE WHICH WE MAY GATHER FROM IT. Viewed in this light, the doctrine which this event inculcates on the Church of God is—the permitted prevalence of the prayer of man with God, through the mystery of the incarnation of His eternal Son. III. THE DUTIES WHICH THIS EVENT INCULCATES. 1. It teaches gratitude. It becomes us to be thankful. It is indeed an unspeakable mercy that God has vouchsafed to provide so graciously for the approach of our guilty race to Himself. 2. A second duty inculcated by this event is humility. If you know yourselves you will be ashamed of the history of your closets; and many an humbling memento will teach you that if ever you prevailed at the throne of God, it was not because you were worthy, but because that throne was the throne of grace. 3. Observe, thirdly, the duty which this passage inculcates of seeking God earnestly. It is vain to offer to God that listless, heartless service, which too frequently constitutes the whole of a Christian's devotions. 4. Learn, fourthly, the duty of persevering importunity in prayer. 5. But, lastly, a word is due to those who have never yet thought seriously of prayer. How energetically a case like this speaks to you. (*E. Craig.*) *Jacob and Israel*:—Before this time, he had been Jacob, the worker with wiles, who supplanted his brother, and met his foes with duplicity and astuteness like their own. He had been mainly of the earth, earthy. But that solemn hour had led him into the presence chamber, the old craft had been mortally wounded, he had seen some glimpse of God as his friend, whose presence was not "awful," as he had thought it long ago, nor enigmatical and threatening, as he had at first deemed it that night, but the fountain of blessing, and the one thing needful. A man who has once learned that lesson, though imperfectly, has passed into a purer region, and left behind him his old crookednesses. He has learned to pray, not as before, prayers for mere deliverance from Esau and the like, but his whole being has gone out in yearning for the continual nearness of his mysterious antagonist—friend. So, though still the old nature remains, its power is broken, and he is a new creature. Therefore he needs a new name, and gets it from Him who can name men, because He sees the heart's depths, and because He has the right over them. To impose a name is the sign of authority, possession, insight into character. The change of name indicates a new epoch in a life, or a transformation of the inner man. The meaning of "Israel" is "He (who) strives with God"; and the reason for its being conferred is more accurately given by the Revised version, which translates, "For thou hast striven with God and with men," than in the Authorized rendering. His victory with God involved the certainty of his power with men. All his life he had been trying to get the advantage of them, and to conquer them, not by spear and sword, but by his brains. But now the true way to true sway among men is opened to him. All men are the servants of the servant and the friend of God. He who has the ear of the emperor is master of many men. Jacob is not always called Israel in his subsequent history. His new name was a name of character and of spiritual standing, and that might fluctuate, and the old self resume its power; so he is still called by the former appellation, just as, at certain points in his life, the apostle forfeits the right to be "Peter," and has to hear from Christ's lips the old name, the use of which is more poignant than many reproachful words—"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you." But in the last death-bed scene, when the patriarch lifted himself in his bed, and with prophetic dignity pronounced his parting benediction on Joseph's sons, the new name re-appears with solemn pathos. That name was transmitted to his descendants, and has passed over to the company of believing men, who have been overcome by God, and have prevailed with God. It is a charter and a promise. It is a stringent reminder of duty and a lofty ideal. A true Christian is an "Israel." His office is to wrestle with God. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Power in prayer*:—Jacob, though a man, a single man, a travelling man, a tired man, yea, though a worm, that is easily crushed and trodden under foot, and no man (*Isa. xli. 14*), yet in private prayer he is so potent that he overcomes the Omnipotent

God; he is so mighty, that he overcomes the Almighty. (*Thomas Brooks.*) *Successful importunity*:—A stern father has been conquered by a tear in the eye of his daughter. An unwilling heart has relented and bestowed an alms at the sight of the disappointment caused by a refusal. Sorrow constrains to pity. When importunity takes the hand of grief, and the two go together to the gate of mercy, it opens of its own accord. Sincerity, earnestness, perseverance, confidence, and expectancy are all potent instruments of power with God. *God yields to importunity*:—How often have I seen a little child throw its arms around its father's neck, and win, by kisses and importunities and tears, what had else been refused. Who has not yielded to importunity, even when a dumb animal looked up in our face with suppliant eyes for food? Is God less pitiful than we? (*T. Guthrie.*) *A praying prince*:—In a certain town (says the Rev. Mr. Finney), there had been no revival for many years; the church was nearly run out, the youth were all unconverted, and desolation reigned unbroken. There lived in a retired part of the town an aged man, a blacksmith by trade, and of so stammering a tongue that it was painful to hear him speak. On one Friday, as he was at work in his shop alone, his mind became greatly exercised about the state of the church, and of the impenitent. His agony became so great that he was induced to lay aside his work, lock the shop door, and spend the afternoon in prayer. He prevailed, and on the Sabbath called in the minister and desired him to appoint a conference meeting. After some hesitation, the minister consented, observing, however, that he feared but few would attend. He appointed it the same evening, at a large private house. When evening came, more assembled than could be accommodated in the house. All were silent for a time, until one sinner broke out in tears, and said, if any one could pray, he begged him to pray for him. Another followed, and another, and still another, until it was found that persons from every quarter of the town were under deep convictions. And what was remarkable, was that they all dated their conviction at the hour when the old man was praying in his shop. A powerful revival followed. Then this old stammering man prevailed, and as a prince, had power with God. *Power with God*:—The mightiest man on earth is the man who has most power with God. For God is almighty, and man is omnipotent for the accomplishment of His purpose when he has the promise of all needed help from the Most High. The hiding of the power which determines the destiny of nations is not in the cabinets of kings or the heavy battalions of war, but in the closets of praying men, who have been raised by faith to the exalted rank of princes with God. The conflict which gained the greatest victory for Scotland, and gave her such freedom and intelligence as she enjoys to-day, did not originate in Holyrood Palace, nor was it waged upon the high places of the field, but in the solitary chamber of the man who prayed all night, crying in the agony and desperation of faith, "Give me Scotland or I die." (*D. March, D.D.*) *The conflict and its result*:—I. THE CONFLICT, AND—II. ITS RESULT. "Thou hast power with God," said He who had wrestled the whole night with Jacob. Unequal conflict! God against man! Unheard of, incredible result! The man overcomes! Jacob now learnt with whom he had had to do—not with a foe, but with his best Friend. How is the soul astonished, when at the end of the darkest paths, in which it was inclined to think that God had in wrath forgotten to be merciful, and to say, "Is His mercy clean gone for ever?" it perceives in these very paths the most striking condescension of the Lord, and the greatest kindness in a guidance which seemed only to aim at its destruction. Then indeed a wonderful and glorious morning dawns. He wrestled with God. God, therefore, seemed in some respects not to be for him, but against him. God seemed not to be for him; for why was it otherwise with him with regard to Esau than it had been with regard to Laban? Why did fear obtain such possession of his mind without his being able to defend himself against it? Why did it not depart at his humble prayer and thanksgiving? If God intended to do him good, why did He expose him to so much danger—and he at the same time so defenceless? If He loved him, why did He ask him to let Him go? And why did He put him so entirely to shame? The Lord, however, seemed to be entirely against Jacob; against him with words; for He must have said bitter things to him, otherwise why did he weep, as Hosea informs us? He must have reproached, reproved, rejected, and threatened him; otherwise why did he entreat Him? It did not rest in mere words: actions are added to them. He increases Jacob's distress by wrestling with him, and that so violently that Jacob, according to the expression of Hosea, is obliged to resist with all his might. He chooses for this purpose the night, a season the most appalling

of all; and the period when Jacob's distress had, besides that, reached a terrific height, and when his fear was great. By the dislocation of his thigh He deprived him of all strength, and rendered it impossible for him to continue the conflict, although the ceasing from it was equally impossible. He caused him pain. He casts him, as it were, defenceless before his enemy by making escape impracticable. Jacob therefore found it necessary to defend himself, and to strive against his adversary, be He who He might. And the Lord bears him witness that he had struggled with God and had prevailed. With God? How wonderful! What!—does God act in such a manner with men? Does He so degrade Himself as to wrestle with a man—as man against man? It is not credible! Not credible? Thou shalt see still greater and more unaccountable things than these. How wilt thou believe the latter if the former are incredible to thee? Go to Bethlehem; there thou wilt find Him lying in a manger as a little needy infant. Go to Jerusalem; there thou wilt see Him in the hands of the wicked, who nail Him to the cross; there thou wilt behold Him crucified between two malefactors, hear Him complain of being forsaken of God, see Him die, and witness His interment. What sayest thou to these astonishing mysteries? If thou canst not believe the less, how will it be with the greater? Jacob wrestled with God first with the exertion of all his powers, in the most determined struggle, as long as he felt any power in himself; but this only served to convince him that we do not gain the prize by our own efforts and that the kingdom of peace is not taken by violence. This mode of wrestling was rendered impracticable to him since he was deprived of the requisite power for it by the dislocation of his thigh. The conflict was now obliged to be continued in an entirely different manner—that is, by a passive conduct which the circumstances pointed out. The paralyzed combatant had no alternative than that of casting himself into the arms of Him who had thus disabled him, and, instead of exerting himself, to let himself be carried; in other words—instead of caring for himself, to cast his burden upon the Lord—to believe, and to turn from the law to the gospel. But why did God enter into such a conflict with Jacob? 1. Because it pleased Him. 2. To give a particular proof of His condescension, how minutely He concerns Himself about His people. 3. It serves also as a representation to others of the ways by which the Lord may lead them in a similar manner to Jacob. It is true the Lord will scarcely think it needful to enter into a bodily conflict with any one, although He is able, and really does, exercise His children by temporal occurrences. There are instances in which, from the time the individual was converted to God success no longer attends him, but sicknesses or misfortunes befall himself or his family; nay, it may even be the case that he himself is deprived of his natural ability to take charge of his affairs, and they fall into confusion, however much he may exert himself and however cautiously he may act, so that even in natural things he is put to shame. Generally speaking, those to whom the Lord is willing to manifest Himself more intimately, as He did to Jacob, experience many trials and much adversity for a period; and at length an Esau stands in their way who threatens them with destruction—nay, not only an Esau, but the Lord Himself. They are brought low in themselves that the Lord may be magnified. They desire to be holy, strong, righteous, wise, believing, and good; they pray and labour as much as possible; but instead of advancing forward they go back. They increasingly exert themselves like Jacob, but only dislocate their limbs the more. Whatever they lay hold of eludes their grasp; what they seek they do not obtain. Jesus makes sinners of them without mercy, and their sin appears extremely sinful to them by means of the commandment, however much they may moan and groan on account of it. At length their very hip is dislocated; they can no longer maintain their former footing, and nothing is left them but to yield themselves to the Son of God at discretion, and creep, as chickens, under His expanded wings. O glorious result, but highly disagreeable path to nature, to which nothing is left, and to which nothing ought to be left! Here it is manifest that the mystery of godliness is great. But what was the result of the conflict? It is described in the unparalleled words, "Thou hast had power with God, and hast prevailed." Jacob, therefore, gained the victory over God; nay, he gained it of necessity. And why? God could not strive with him as the Almighty, or as the Holy One, because He had bound His own hands by His truth and by His promise, "I will do thee good." God had rendered it impossible for Him to strive with Jacob in such a manner as would have resulted in his ruin. This would have been at complete variance with His truth, the thoughts of peace He had towards him, and with the whole contents of the covenant of grace, as well as the spiritual espousals of the Lord with His

Church. He could, therefore, only strive against him in love, and do him no further injury than the glory of God and Jacob's salvation necessarily required. Under these circumstances, therefore, Jacob could not fail to succeed. He saves sinners and justifies the ungodly. Now, since He has said this Himself, He cannot treat those who are sinners and ungodly in any other manner. "As a prince thou hast had power with God." Wherein consisted his princely conduct? He was sincere, and did not wish to appear before God better than he really was. He confessed his sins by frankly owning that he was afraid. He believed the word which the Lord had spoken. (*D. C. Krummacher.*) *Jacob at Peniel; or, the interpretation of life*:—I. Jacob had at Peniel the mystery of his past life interpreted to him. His miseries and hardships were in consequence of his mingling fraud and treachery with his Divinely-ordered destiny. Had he never fallen into crooked ways, he had never halted on his thigh. II. Jacob had at Peniel the secret of true life interpreted to him. An attitude of supplication and submission, rather than resistance. Human ends are best achieved by Divine assistance. III. Jacob at Peniel had the highest type of human life revealed to him. He feels himself brought into more immediate personal relations with God at Peniel, than when visited by the Angels of God at Bethel. So higher subjects occupy his thoughts. And his desires are now elevated and enlarged. (*W. Roberts.*) *The changed name*:—There is one result of this change of name, which is familiar to us all, and will continue to the end of time: the descendants of the patriarch Jacob became known as the Children of Israel. My text, in this connection, shows the origin of the change. Jacob was a man of prayer. It was good for him to draw near to God; and surely God drew near to him this memorable night. In the likeness of a man He approached, "and wrestled with Jacob until the breaking of the day." It was an age of figures and emblems; things physical were used to denote things spiritual; and doubtless, in this midnight conflict, Jacob's prayerfulness was tried. And how does he stand the test? The Divine wrestler prevailed not against him—Jacob's faith was not weakened by the protraction of the struggle. Here is a model for us—a model of closeness of communion, of unwavering confidence, of pious importunity in prayer. And if a model, what an encouragement! The change of name. Observe his first name—Jacob. This is a word which conveys no favourable omen; it means "supplanter"—"one taking hold of the heel"—"a layer of snares." It suggests a very faulty character. A man who is ready to descend to petty shifts and crafty stratagems, in order to gain some personal advantage, can never be ranked with the loftiest of his fellows. Jacob, the supplanter does not show to advantage besides Daniel, or beside his own son, Joseph. But now observe his second name Israel. What a difference of meaning—"a prince of God." The difference between the two names is immense; so that it is difficult to imagine how both could belong to one man. For here is a prince of loftiest creation—other titles are bestowed by earthly sovereigns, but this by the King of kings. 1. It is a title implying the loftiest service. Some royal commissions are of doubtful dignity, but this is given by One "glorious in holiness." 2. It implies the loftiest communion. A prince has access to the throne at times when others are debarred. A "prince of God" is one who holds intimate fellowship with Jehovah. 3. It implies, also, the loftiest influence. All ranks look up to the prince. So, O Israel, shall all people look up to thee. And why this change? It was the reward of faith in God; "as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." The blessing Isaac gave him, he got by fraud; but this which God gives him, he got by faith. Brother, what is your first name? What does God call you in your unregenerate state? Names that you might well blush to bear; names that your natural pride can hardly tolerate to listen to; names which often perhaps awake your anger and your enmity! Listen! for it is God that speaks. He calls you names of complaint, of reproach, of threatening. He calls you unmindful, unjust, ungrateful; calls you foolish, depraved, corrupt; earthly, sensual, devilish; a child of wrath and heir of perdition. These, and such as these, are the names you bear. And, O my brother! these names are more than names—they denote facts; they express realities! What complacency can you have, then, in your degenerate state? how bear to reflect on the being that you are? One might fancy that Jacob never thought on the meaning of his first name without being ashamed! and can you think of the names that belong to you without burning shame? But is it not possible to change your name? Must you always go about with the brand on your brow? Read this sacred book and see! Here I find the record of not a few whose names God changed. And the change—

O how marvellous! They were sinners against God—now they are called Saints of God. They were condemned—but are now justified; pronounced guilty—but are now declared righteous. They were once rebels—they are now subjects, servants, friends. “They are called God’s people, that were not God’s people; and those beloved, that were not beloved.” Nay, brethren, there are dearer titles still—titles which admit them into God’s family, and permit them to share His glory. And it is no mockery to say that these are given to the same persons who once bore those hard and repellent names. The monarch’s sword has been laid on the shoulder—or rather, instead of the sword, the “golden sceptre” of Divine favour; and the name has been declared changed. Down, child of wrath—Rise, child of God! Down, heir of perdition—Rise, heir of heaven! It is this that has moved the wonder and fired the praise of multitudes gone before us. “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God.” “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” How has this change been brought about? By faith in God! Taking Him at His word—meeting Him as He approaches—laying hold of His strength—and resolving not to let Him go until He bless you! (*F. Tucker, B.A.*) *Love the true interpreter*:—There is no such thing as interpreting the will of God unless we have in us the spirit of children. What is the spirit of children? Love—confidence. If a man comes to the interpretation of adverse or of fortunate events in the spirit of pride, he will never know their meaning. God locks up His best blessings, but gives to every man a key wherewith to open the lock. One man takes his key, and goes up to the lock and tries to unlock it; but his key will not fit; it will not go in, because it is pride that he has been trying to unlock with. Another man says, “Let me try my key.” He takes vanity; but he finds that vanity will not unlock the door of Divine Providence and reveal the secrets that are within. Another man comes up with the key of wilful selfishness. His key is three times as big as the keyhole, and he can’t get in. They all fail to unlock the door, and go away. By and by another man comes. He puts his key to the lock, it slides in; there is not a ward that it does not touch; the bolt slides back without a sound, and the door swings open. He knows the secret. He comes in the spirit of love, obedience, and resignation, and to him God’s will is revealed. Pride could not open the door; vanity could not open it; selfishness could not open it: love could open it. (*H. W. Beecher.*) *Power of young men*:—Ah! young men, what power you have! I remember reading in a fairy-tale that a whole city was in one night changed into stone. There stood a war horse, with nostrils distended, caparisoned for the battle. There stood the warrior, with his stone hand on the cold mane of that petrified horse. All is still, lifeless, death-like, silent. Then the trumpet’s blast is heard ringing through the clear atmosphere; the warrior leaps upon his steed; the horse utters the war-neigh, and starts forth to battle; and the warrior, with his lance in rest, rides on to victory. Now, young men, put the trumpet to your lips, blow a blast that shall wake the dead stocks and stones, and on, on—upward to victory over all evil habits and evil influences surrounding you. (*J. B. Gough.*) *Prevailing prayer*:—A little more than two centuries ago a thoroughly devoted English minister was full of anxiety in view of the dangers that threatened many of the seamen who belonged to his parish. They were about to engage in a fearful battle with the French, and be exposed to all the perils of the fight. His heart yearning over them, he calls together his people, and appoints a day of fasting and prayer, that the shield of the Almighty might be thrown before them in the day of battle. It is said the good man wrestled in prayer as in an agony, that the seamen might be preserved in the hour of danger. When the battle was over, it was found that John Flavel too had wrestled with the angel; that he was a prince with God, and had prevailed. His prayers were a wall of defence round about those for whom he pleaded. Not a single sailor from Dartmouth was lost, though many of them were in the hottest of the fight. If the real history of many a soldier in our fearful civil war were written, it would doubtless be found that he came forth unscathed because defended by the believing prayers of a Christian wife, mother, or sister.

Ver. 29. *Tell me, I pray Thee, Thy name.*—*The great question*:—This is the question of all questions. For the name of God denotes His nature and His essence, the sum of all His properties and attributes. I. It is a question worth the asking. There is a despair of religious knowledge in the world, as though in God’s rich universe, theology, which is the science of God Himself, were the one field in

which no harvest could be reaped, no service of sacred knowledge gained. II. The knowledge of God is the one thing needful. He who seeks to do the work of a Paley in presenting Christian evidences in a sense conformable to the intellectual state of thoughtful men, as the shadows are folding themselves about this wearied century—above all, he who cultivates and disciplines his spirituality until it has become the central fact of his being—it is he who offers in a right and reverent spirit the prayer of Jacob at Peniel, "Tell me, I pray Thee, Thy name." III. It is necessary not only to ask the great question of the Divine nature, but to ask it in a right spirit. Jacob acted as though there were no other way of asking the question aright than by prayer; he must also ask it at the cost of personal suffering. IV. What is the answer when it comes? Jacob's question was asked, but was not answered; or, rather, it was answered not directly and in so many words, but effectually: "He blessed him there." It is not knowledge that God gives to striving souls, but blessing. He stills your doubtings; He helps you to trust Him. You go forth no longer as Jacob, the supplanter, mean, earthly, temporal, but in the power of a Divine enthusiasm, as an Israel, a prince with God. (*J. E. C. Welldon, M.A.*) *Inquiry and reply*:—The Lord had asked Jacob how he was called, not as if He did not know it, but in order to give him a name more in accordance with his present state of grace. Jacob, meanwhile, feels emboldened to ask his antagonist His name. It may be that he was desirous of knowing how the Lord ought properly to be called. He was usually called "Elohim"—the Most High. God Himself had said to Abraham, "I am the El Shaddai, the Almighty or All-sufficient God." He was also called simply El, the Strong One. But these appellations no longer satisfied the patriarch after his recent experience. They all expressed something of the Divine glory, but none of them the whole of it. There was probably an ardour in his soul, which would gladly have poured itself out in hymns of praise, but for which he could not find words. But Jacob doubtless was not anxious merely about the name when he said, "Tell me, I pray Thee, Thy name." I think he meant to say by it, "Lord, how shall I call Thee? I know not what to think, much less to say. Such a condescension as that which Thou hast shown to me, who am but dust, is more than my heart could have remotely anticipated. I know and confess that Thou, O Lord! art wonderful and gracious. It was Thou who madest me competent to all this, and yet commendest me, as if I, a poor timid creature, had done it of myself. Thou, who art the Holy One, sufferest Thyself to be embraced by my unholy arms; Thou, who art Almighty, to be overcome by one so weak as I! This is too much, this is too wonderful and too lofty; I cannot comprehend it. Tell me, what is Thy name? What shall I say of Thee? for I know not. Who, indeed, can know how he ought to bless, praise, exalt, and extol Thee as he ought, when he learns and is conscious of what Thou doest to Thy children?" If it had been said to Jacob, thus filled with God, "This that the Lord hath now done unto thee is something very trifling compared with that which He is willing to do for thee. He has, in this instance, assumed the human form only for a short time; but in the fullness of time He will really be born of a woman, and not spend merely a few hours, but three-and-thirty years, upon earth; suffer in body and soul the most extreme anguish; and even die for Israel that they may live. And the people will not meet Him, as thou hast done, with prayers and tears, but with great wrath and bitter fury will they do Him all conceivable injury; whilst He, from love, will bear it as a lamb." If the patriarch could then have been told these things—which were not fitted, however, for that period—"Oh," he would have exclaimed, by God's grace, "I can believe it! I can believe it! What can be too much for Him to perform?" Had he been told that He would be called Love, he would have exclaimed, "That is His true name!" And who can say what an insight Jacob may have obtained into the mystery of salvation during this event, and of which he uttered many things in his parting blessing? At least, Jesus says of Abraham, "He saw my day, and was glad." But "tell me, I pray Thee, Thy name. Reveal Thyself more intimately to my soul." Such a desire is very laudable. Christ declares that "this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." Paul found so much comprised in the knowledge of Jesus Christ that he regarded everything else in comparison with it as loss and dung. Moses also once experienced such a strong desire that he prayed, saying, "If I have now found grace in Thy sight, I beseech Thee show me Thy glory." And the Lord really granted him his request, as far as was possible. Who would not long for such an acquaintance, and pray, "Make Thyself known to me;

cause Thy face to shine upon me; make me acquainted with Thee!" especially since we have the promise, "Thou shalt know the Lord"? Certainly this is a pearl worthy of the whole of our poor property; a treasure for the sake of which we may well sell everything in order to obtain it. But it is only in the light of God that we see light. Blessed are the eyes which see what ye see. "Flesh and blood has not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven." The Lord does all things well in due time, in general, as well as in particular—He only knows also the proper manner; and hence we must be content to be told, "my hour is not yet come." Jacob's question was also fully answered; eternity, however, is destined for its further elucidation. Israel thought he might then become acquainted with the whole mystery of redemption; but a couple of centuries must elapse ere it was fully made known. Israel was obliged to learn to wait—to see the promises afar off, and to be satisfied with it. He was satisfied, and held his peace. (*D. C. Krummacher.*)

The search after God:—In this experience there seem to be three things—a request, a denial, and a compensation. 1. *THE REQUEST* here, as Jacob urges it, is this: "Tell me, I pray Thee, Thy name." 1. The manner is bold and abrupt. It appears strange, sometimes, as we note the real prayers on record in the Bible, to find them so short, so sharp, so resolute in utterance. "Master, carest Thou not that we perish!"—"Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom!"—"Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me!"—"Lord, save me, I perish!" It is an old Reformer's saying: "Prayer is the Christian's gun-shot. As then the bullet out of a gun, so prayers out of the mouth, can go no further than they are carried. If they be put out faintly, they cannot fly far. If they be hollow-hearted, then they will not pierce much. Only the fervent, active devotion hits the mark, and pierceth the walls of heaven, though, like those of Gaza, made of brass and iron." 2. But what does this request of Jacob's mean? Indeed, it seems quite fair to retort the question of the angel. Jacob asked to know the name of the Being he had been wrestling with. Most surely, we are not left to imagine he still remained in ignorance who his antagonist was. You have already learned, from the change in Jacob's own name, that names in those days meant character—indicated personality. And when this wearied man girds up his remaining force for a new petition, he is simply pressing the old answerless question of the human soul: Who is God—and What is God? 3. The order of experience in this heart-history is of special value, and must be noted also. It follows success and not failure. It best becomes, therefore, the symbol of prayer founded on encouragement. It suggests to us a rewarded soul standing on the vantage-ground of a previous welcome, and stretching out its hand for a yet more advanced disclosure of love. II. *THE DENIAL.* It seems to be the settled determination of the Divine will to hold in a holy and unbroken reserve the heights and depths of His character and being. Enough only is revealed for us to be sure He is our friend and our well-wisher. It cannot be called an unwholesome question, this in our text, even though it never meets an earthly answer. It stimulates the soul. Even a reverent curiosity about God is better than a dead apathy. III. *THE COMPENSATION.* "And He blessed him there." There is something surpassingly beautiful in this quiet statement. The mystery remains unrelieved, but the affection pays for it. Just as a loving mother grants every wish of her little one, until a serious mistake is pressed as a petition. Then she declines with a smile, and compensates with a kiss, so that the child is glad to be disappointed. And that is exactly the delicate figure of the Scripture: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you," saith the Lord. But now you press the inquiry—Is there any answer to the old question—does not this same Being, who is to judge us at the last, as He made us in the beginning, elude our every search—oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat—has He no word to speak to me? Yes—I answer; there are two disclosures at least in this experience of compensation that give relief. They are always made. They are here, as elsewhere, in the story of Jacob. One of these is a clear revelation of the right of human petition. The other is a new repetition of Divine confidence. (*C. S. Robinson, D.D.*)

The secret revealed to wrestling Jacob:—I. Jacob in that hour felt *THE DARK SECRET AND MYSTERY OF EXISTENCE.* 1. The contrast observable between this and a former revelation made to Jacob's soul. Twenty years before he had seen in vision a ladder reared against the sky, and angels ascending and descending on it. Exceedingly remarkable. Immediately after his transgression, when leaving his father's home, a banished man, to be a wanderer for many years, this first meeting took place. Fresh from his sin, God met him in tenderness and forgiveness. After twenty years God met him again; but this second intercourse was of a

very different character. It was no longer God the Forgiver, God the Protector, God the covenanting Love, that met Jacob; but God the Awful, the Unnameable, whose breath blasts, at whose touch the flesh of the mortal shrinks and shrivels up.

2. Again I remark, that the end and aim of Jacob's struggle was to know the name of God. "Tell me, I pray Thee, Thy name." In the Hebrew history are discernible three periods distinctly marked, in which names and words bore very different characters. These three, it has been observed by acute philologists, correspond to the periods in which the nation bore the three different appellations of Hebrews, Israelites, Jews. In the first of these periods, names meant truths, and words were the symbols of realities. The characteristics of the names given then were simplicity and sincerity. They were drawn from a few simple sources: either from some characteristic of the individual, as Jacob, the supplanter, or Moses, drawn from the water; or from the idea of family, as Ben-jamin, the son of my right hand; or from the conception of the tribe or nation, then gradually consolidating itself; or, lastly, from the religious idea of God. But in this case not the highest notion of God—not Jah or Jehovah, but simply the safer and simpler idea of Deity. The second period begins about the time of the departure from Egypt, and it is characterized by unabated simplicity, with the addition of sublimer thought and feeling more intensely religious. The heart of the nation was big with mighty and new religious truth—and the feelings with which the national heart was swelling found vent in the names which were given abundantly. God, under His name Jah, the noblest assemblage of spiritual truths yet conceived, became the adjunct to names of places and persons. Oshea's name is changed into Je-hoshua. The third period was at its zenith in the time of Christ—words had lost their meaning, and shared the hollow unreal state of all things. A man's name might be Judas, and still he might be a traitor. Yet in this period, exactly in proportion as the solemnity of the idea was gone, reverence was scrupulously paid to the corpse-like word which remained and had once enclosed it. In that hollow, artificial age, the Jew would wipe his pen before he ventured to write the Name—he would leave out the vowels of the sacred Jehovah, and substitute those of the less sacred Elohim. In that kind of age, too, men bow to the name of Jesus, often just in that proportion in which they have ceased to recognize His true grandeur and majesty of character. In such an age it would be indeed preposterous to spend the strength upon an inquiry such as this—"Tell me Thy name?" Jehovah, Jove, or Lord—what matter? But Jacob did not live in this third period, when names meant nothing; nor did he live in the second, when words contained the deepest truth the nation is ever destined to receive. But he lived in the first age, when men are sincere, and truthful, and earnest, and names exhibit character. To tell Jacob the name of God was to reveal to him what God is and who.

3. This desire of Jacob was not the one we should naturally have expected on such an occasion. He is alone—his past fault is coming retributively on a guilty conscience—he dreads the meeting with his brother. His soul is agonized with that, and that we naturally expect will be the subject and the burden of his prayer. No such thing! Not a word about Esau—not a word about personal danger at all. All that is banished completely for the time, and deeper thoughts are grappling with his soul. To get safe through to-morrow? No, no, no! To be blessed by God—to know Him, and what He is—that is the battle of Jacob's soul from sunset till the dawn of day. And this is our struggle—the struggle.

II. THE REVELATION OF THE MYSTERY. 1. It was revealed by awe. Very significantly are we told that the Divine antagonist seemed as it were anxious to depart as the day was about to dawn; and that Jacob held Him more convulsively fast, as if aware that the daylight was likely to rob him of his anticipated blessing; in which there seems concealed a very deep truth. God is approached more nearly in that which is indefinite than in that which is definite and distinct. He is felt in awe, and wonder and worship, rather than in clear conceptions.

2. Again, this revelation was made in an unsyllabled blessing. Jacob requested two things. He asked for a blessing—and he prayed to know the name of God. God gave him the blessing. "He blessed him there," but refused to tell His name. "Wherefore dost thou ask after My name?" In this, too, seems to lie a most important truth. Names have a power, a strange power, of hiding God. Speech has been bitterly defined as the art of hiding thought. Well, that sarcastic definition has in it a truth. The Eternal Word is the revealer of God's thought; and every true word of man is originally the expression of a thought; but by degrees the word hides the thought. Language is valuable for the things of this life; but for the things of the other world, it is an encumbrance almost as much as an assistance. Lastly, the effect

of this revelation was to change Jacob's character. His name was changed from Jacob to Israel, because himself was an altered man. Hitherto there had been something subtle in his character—a certain cunning and craft—a want of breadth, as if he had no firm footing upon reality. The forgiveness of God twenty years before had not altered this. He remained Jacob, the subtle supplanter still. For, indeed, a man whose religion is chiefly the sense of forgiveness, does not thereby rise into integrity or firmness of character—a certain tenderness of character may very easily go along with a great deal of subtlety. Jacob was tender and devout, and grateful for God's pardon, and only half honest still. But this half-insincere man is brought into contact with the awful God, and his subtlety falls from him. He becomes real at once. Every insincere habit of mind shrivels in the face of God. One clear, true glance into the depths of Being, and the whole man is altered. The name changes because the character has changed. No longer Jacob the supplanter, but Israel the Prince of God—the champion of the Lord, who had fought with God and conquered; and who, henceforth, will fight for God and be His true loyal soldier: a larger, more unselfish name—a larger and more unselfish man—honest and true at last. No man becomes honest till he has got face to face with God. (*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*) **Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after My name?**—God's revelation of Himself to Jacob:—This answer of the Being—“Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after My name?”—what does it mean? So far as I can judge, it is the same reply that was given long afterward to the wise and learned Moses—“When I speak to the people, who shall I say hath sent me? What is Thy name?” “I am that I am. This shalt thou say, I AM hath sent me unto you”; that is, as I think, “I am, the nameless One, the One who refuses to be named, whose being transcends all description.” The highest revelation of God must consist of two sides—the apprehensible, the inapprehensible. God must be the apprehensible and inapprehensible God. Throughout the Bible He is introduced generally with the definition and distinction of a high man; He talks, acts, feels before us as plainly as any character in the history, and we have the satisfaction of the clearest knowledge. But were this all, it would not have been God, and would have ended in the rankest idolatry. So in this singular tale of Jacob—so far back—for the first time, I think, is there a revelation of the infinite, unspeakable God, manifested so simply in the fact that He refuses to be or cannot be revealed. “Wherefore?” “I am.” (*A. G. Mercer, D.D.*) **He blessed him there.**—*Blessing from God*:—God blessed Jacob at Penuel because he asked to be blessed, and his desire for it constituted at once his worthiness and his capacity. He began the blessing by the agony of prayer, and he completed it with the discipline of sorrow. 1. Life being itself a blessing, and to one who believes in God and hopes from Him the greatest of all blessings, God makes it a yet greater blessing by ordaining for it a fixed plan. 2. God does not expect perfect characters to fulfil His purposes. He chooses the fittest instruments He can find for His purest purpose, and trains them and bears with them until their work is done. 3. God uses circumstances as His angels and voices to us, and He has special epochs and crises in which He visits our souls and lives. 4. The perfection of youth is eagerness without impetuosity; the perfection of old age is wisdom without cynicism, and a faith in the purpose of God which deepens and widens with the years. (*Bishop Thorold.*) *Fulness of blessing*:—1. Evil conduct will, sooner or later, bring trouble to those guilty of it. 2. We may meet with trouble in the way God bids us go. 3. The memory of former wrong-doing robs us of comfort and hope under new trials. 4. God will help us if we repent, confess, seek pardon, and call for His aid. **I. THERE IS A FULNESS OF BLESSING IN GOD TO MEET OUR NEEDS BEYOND ALL WE HAVE EVER REALIZED.** We can have blessings spiritual, moral, mental, physical, secular, personal, family, national. **II. GOD IS WILLING AND WAITING TO BESTOW ALL WE NEED OUT OF THAT FULNESS.** We see this from—1. The nature of God. “God is love.” 2. The promises. 3. Past dealings. **III. THE MEANS BY WHICH THE BLESSING BECOMES OURS IS EARNEST, FERVENT PRAYER.** This the key that opens the treasure, the channel that conducts the water to my soul, the hand that grasps the blessing. (*J. Marsden, B.A.*) *Blessed by God*:—1. **WHAT WAS JACOB'S BLESSING IN THAT PLACE?** 1. He was saved from a great peril—Esau's attack. 2. He was forgiven a great wrong—supplanting. 3. He was able to feel that a great breach was healed (Gen. xxxiii. 4). 4. He had won a new name and rank (ver. 28). He was knighted on the spot, made a prince on the field. 5. He was now under a fresh anointing: he was a superior man ever after. “The angel redeemed him from all evil” (Gen. xlviii. 16). **II. WHAT WAS THE PLACE?** “He

blessed him there." 1. A place of great trial (vers. 6, 7). 2. A place of humble confession. "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast showed to Thy servant" (ver. 10). 3. A place of pleading (vers. 11, 12). "There wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day" (ver. 24). 4. A place of communion. "I have seen God face to face" (ver. 30). 5. A place of conscious weakness. "As he passed over Peniel, the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh." III. ARE THERE OTHER SUCH PLACES? 1. Before the earth was created the Lord blessed His chosen people in Christ Jesus (Eph. i. 3, 4). 2. At the Cross the tomb, and the throne of Jesus. 3. In the heavenly places. 4. At conversion (Psa. xxxii. 1, 2). 5. In times of stripping, humbling, chastening, pleading, &c. (James i. 12). 6. In times of prompt obedience (Psa. i. 1). 7. At the ordinances (Acts viii. 39; Luke xxiv. 30, 31). IV. IS THIS SUCH A PLACE? Yes, if you are—1. Willing to give up sin. 2. Willing to have Jesus for your all in all. 3. Willing to resign yourself to the Father's will. 4. Willing to serve God in His own way. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Lessons*:—1. God's blessing on His saints unites their hearts unto Him to seek His praise. 2. Saints ascribe all their blessings to the face or favour of God. 3. Gracious souls desire that exaltations of God be monumental and perpetual. 4. God's face-discoveries have been in measure to sight towards His saints of old. 5. God's sensible discoveries of Himself have been dangerous to the life of His saints (Dan. viii. 27). 6. God's appearance, visible in grace, hath been to the preservation of humbled souls (ver. 30). 7. God giveth a pass to His servants in their way after He hath tried them. (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Jacob's blessing*:—This blessing wherewith Christ here blessed Jacob was a Divine blessing containing all other blessings within its bowels. It was that blessing of the throne which comprehended in it the blessings of the footstool. Jacob had got already a great store of footstool mercies—much wealth, wives and children, &c. These worldly blessings would not (and indeed could not) content him. He tugs hard still, and must have some better mercy than these, even the throne mercy, to wit, peace with God; well knowing that this would bring peace with his brother, and all other good things; as Job saith, "Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee" (Job xxii. 21). He knew that his power to prevail with Emmanuel Himself would fill him with power to prevail with Esau. (*Christopher Ness.*) *Blessing sought and found*:—It was with a young man a day of seeking, and he entered a little sanctuary and heard a sermon from "Look unto Me, and be ye saved." He obeyed the Lord's command, and "He blessed him there." Soon after he made a profession of his faith before many witnesses, declaring his consecration to the Lord, and "He blessed him there." Anon he began to labour for the Lord in little rooms, among a few people, and "He blessed him there." His opportunities enlarged, and by faith he ventured upon daring things for the Lord's sake, and "He blessed him there." A household grew about him, and together with his loving wife he tried to train his children in the fear of the Lord, and "He blessed him there." Then came sharp and frequent trial, and he was in pain and anguish, but the Lord "blessed him there." This is that man's experience all along, from the day of his conversion to this hour: up hill and down dale his path has been a varied one, but every part of his pilgrimage he can praise the Lord, for "He blessed him there." *Blessed by God*:—I have here (said Mr. Fuller) two religious characters, who were intimately acquainted in early life. Providence favoured one of them with a tide of prosperity. The other, fearing for his friend, lest his heart should be overcharged with the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches, one day asked him if he did not find prosperity a snare to him. He paused and answered, "I am not conscious that I do, for I enjoy God in all things." Some years afterwards his affairs took another turn; he lost, if not the whole, yet the far greater part of what he had once gained, and by this disaster was greatly reduced. His old friend, being one day in his company, renewed his question, whether he did not find what had lately befallen him to be too much for him. Again he paused and answered, "I am not conscious that I do, for now I enjoy all things in God." This was truly a life of faith. To him it was as true as to Jacob—"He blessed him there." (*Arvine's Anecdotes.*) *The present blessing*:—It is a common temptation to men to think that if their circumstances were different they could become religious, put forth all its fruits, enjoy all its blessings; but with things as they are they can hope for little. By this miserable temptation thousands are deluded, life is wasted, souls are lost. What I wish to show is that the realization of salvation and the maintenance of a holy life are possible to us anywhere, everywhere, if we have the true

disposition of heart. Goodness is never a question of the outer world; it is always a question of the inner world. Now, in nature climate determines everything respecting the animals which live, the flowers which grow; the character of the climate, not the nature of the soil, or the conformation of the ground. It is from difference of climate that tropical life differs so much from arctic, and both these from the life of temperate regions. It is climate, and climate alone, that causes the orange and vine to blossom, and the olive to flourish in the south, but denies them to the north of Europe. It is climate, and climate alone, that enables the forest tree to grow on the plain, but not on the mountain top: that causes wheat and barley to flourish on the mainland of Scotland, but not on the steppes of Siberia. Not the quality of the ground, or the form of the ground, but the climate; the products of the landscape are determined not by the soil itself, or by what is below the soil, but by what is outside it, above it, beyond it. But human character is not governed by circumstance as the landscape is determined by climate. The supreme distinction of man, the characteristic that marks him out from the mere physical universe, is that there is in him a self-energy, an inner freedom, a fundamental liberty and strength of soul, by which he triumphs over the unfriendliest conditions in pursuit of his ideal. How Demosthenes, in spite of his stammering, became an orator; how Huber, in his love of science, triumphed over his blindness; how Beethoven created splendid music despite his deafness! It is the same in the moral life of man; victory is from within, no matter what may be the state of things without. The patriarch struggling with the angel until he overcame is the picture of man's ability to overcome all difficulties in the way of the highest life, to realize purity and peace and uttermost salvation. And so we constantly see men getting goodness and exemplifying goodness in circumstances which seem altogether to forbid moral excellence. We see here how mistaken men are in fancying that they cannot give themselves to God and live for Him just where they find themselves. And yet that is a common mistake. Thousands to-day are waiting for the propitious hour, the fitting place, the convenient season. 1. "I cannot serve God in this home," says one. If their parents and friends had been religious, if their training had been otherwise, it would have been otherwise with them. Now, believe it, God can bless and keep you there. There was "some good thing in the house of Jeroboam," the most unlikely house in Israel. Abijah was there, a God-fearing and a God-favoured youth. Some little while ago I noticed in a field quite a vast growth of fungi—yellow, purple, black, spotted, no end of toad-stools and devil's snuff-boxes—and right in the middle of the ghastly, pestilent, poisonous growth there was a single mushroom, white and fragrant, a veritable pearl of the field. So Abijah stood in the house of Jeroboam. 2. "I cannot serve God in this neighbourhood," says another. Ours is a bad neighbourhood, say they, and nobody can live in it and be what they ought to be. Have you never thought how wonderfully God preserved the primitive Christians in such cities as Rome and Ephesus and Corinth, full of atheism, idolatry, sensuality, as they were? 3. "I cannot serve God in this calling," says another. They feel their business is unfriendly to religious life, that their business relations are so. The tailor says, We are a loose set; the shoemaker feels as if all his comrades were infidels; the horse-dealer wants to know how he is going to keep a conscience; the collier, the soldier, the sailor, feel how difficult it is with their vocation to serve God. Do not spend your life sighing for another and more helpful calling; God can bless you where you are; He can give you grace to resist the special temptations of your lot; in slippery places He can make you to stand, in dark places He can make you to shine. 4. "I cannot serve God in this situation," says another. The domestic servant feels this sometimes. She lives where there is not a thought of religion, and it seems incredible that she could keep her soul alive there. Seek God's blessing now. That was a strange place where Jacob wrestled with the angel, on the wild heath beneath the stars; but he was resolute for the blessing, and he got it. Are you earnest for the blessing as he was? (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *Deliverance from affliction*:—Be not earnest, in time of affliction, to use inordinate means to speed deliverance. Jacob was too nimble in bending his knees for his father's blessing. It cost him twenty years' exile and a shrunk sinew before he obtained it fully from the angel. Stay God's time, and mercy will ripen more kindly. It is no wisdom to break prison unadvisedly; our troubles will end more auspiciously when angels are sent from heaven to open the iron gate, as they did to Peter, and led him to the house of prayer. When God intends a salvation, the shackles will fall off easily, and the gates will fly open at night; and you shall be like them that

dreamt, when God turns your captivity like streams in the south. (*J. Lee.*) *Power of wrestling prayer*:—"There's nae gude dune, John, till ye get to the close grips." So said "Jeems," the doorkeeper of Broughton Place Church, Edinburgh, to the immortal Dr. John Brown, the author of "Rab and His Friends." Old Jeems got into a marvellous nearness with God in prayer, and conversed with Him as he would with his "ain father." (*Dr. Cuyler.*) **The name of that place Peniel.**—*Peniel*:—This world possesses many uncommonly glorious places. The natural man finds those the most remarkable where Nature manifests herself in peculiar splendour and majesty, where lofty mountains yield delightful prospects, and smiling plains exhibit the blessings of heaven; where majestic rivers roll along, or the wide ocean expands itself like an eternity before the eye which seeks in vain its limit. The scientific man lingers with pleasure on the monuments of ancient and modern art; he gazes with admiration at the enormous dome which ancient times reared heavenwards, or is ravished with the productions of the painter or the statuary, which animate, as it were, the lifeless canvas and the solid marble. He admires the magnificence and beauty of princely palaces, and lingers astonished at the works of art. The historian loses himself in reflection when visiting the scene of former important events, when coming in sight of ancient Rome with all its reminiscences; or when upon a field where memorable battles have been fought. Who at this present period does not think with admiration of Wittenberg and its royal chapel, of the Wartburg, of Zurich and Geneva, and of the names of Luther, Zuinglius, and Calvin, because they remind us of a multiplicity of events connected with them? The Christian has also his memorable spots and places in the world; Bethlehem, Capernaum, Jerusalem, Calvary, and the Mount of Olives, are these remarkable spots. Formerly they were personally visited by the piously superstitious pilgrim, whilst his heart, perhaps, was far from God. His bodily eye saw the remarkable places, whilst the eye of his spirit remained closed against the wonders which there took place for the salvation of sinners. His feet wandered in what is called the Holy Land, where Abraham once sojourned; which the Son of God touched with His sacred feet, and even with His face; which He bedewed with His tears, His bloody sweat, and His atoning blood; in which His lifeless body slumbered three days, and where He again rose to heaven from whence He had come down. There the foot of many a pilgrim wanders, whilst it is not given him to walk in the steps of faithful Abraham, and to know the way of peace—nay, whilst rejecting the Son of God, by thinking to render his own works effectual as an atonement for his sins. These places are Peniels to believers, revelations of the glory of God, since His faith and love find the pastures of eternal life in that which there took place. And has not every Christian his particular Peniels in which God revealed Himself to him in an especial manner?—his closet, a sermon, a book, a company, a solitary hour, and the like, which continue ever memorable to him. Jacob called this remarkable place Peniel—not as a memorial of himself, nor of that which he had there performed and accomplished; but of that which he had apprehended and experienced of God, and of the gracious benefit bestowed upon him. (*D. C. Krummacher.*)

Vers. 31, 32. **And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.**—*Defeats in life*:—I. FROM THE GREAT CONFLICT WITH SIN NONE COME OFF WITHOUT MANY A SCAR. We may wrestle and prevail, but there will be touches of the enemy, which will leave their long and bitter memories. The way to heaven is made of falling down and rising up again. The battle is no steady, onward fight, but rallies and retreats, retreats and rallies. II. The reason of our defeats is that the OLD SIN OF THE CHARACTER CONTINUES, AND CONTINUES WITH UNABATED FORCE, IN THE HEART OF A CHILD OF GOD. There are two ways in which sin breaks out and gains an advantage over a believer. 1. A new temptation suddenly presents itself. 2. The old habit of sin recurs—recurs, indeed, sevenfold, but still the same sin. III. ALL SIN IN A BELIEVER MUST ARISE FROM A REDUCTION OF GRACE. This is the result of grieving the Holy Ghost by a careless omission of prayer or other means of grace. There was an inward defeat before there was an outward and apparent one. IV. DEFEAT IS NOT FINAL. It is not the end of the campaign; it is but one event in the war. It may even be converted into a positive good to the soul, for God can and will overrule guilt to gain; he allows each defeat to teach us repentance and humility. (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*) *Lessons*:—1. The sun-rising may be in special mercy unto tempted persons, as well as good to all. 2. Holy conquerors in temptation may go out halters. 3. Halting is no evil while it

tends to humbling Jacob and his seed (ver. 31). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Lessons* :— 1. God's visible actions to his saints have been apt to be mistaken by men. 2. Jacob's children have been forward to turn God's spiritual intentions to carnal interpretations (ver. 32). (*Ibid.*) *Memorials of conflict* :—In these bodies of ours there is often perpetuated the recollection of some former sin, and the wrestle for pardon which grew out of it. You remember that during the awful fight with Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation, Bunyan tells us that Christian, despite of all he could do, was wounded in his head, his hand, and his foot. Few men there are, whose early life has been profligate, who do not even to this day bear in their persons most recognizable pains, and perplexing inabilities, and mortifying memorials of the sorrowful past. Repentance brings pardon, but never restores the ravages of sin. In the child's story, we were taught that it was easy to draw the nails that numbered our faults from the tree-trunk that recorded them; but the scars remained for ever. More often, however, this memorial of conflict takes the form of constitutional weakness, or besetting sin. An early inadvertence, a youthful vice, a wild habit, an impulsive act of criminal evil, from the guilt of which the penitent man has been restored by the pardoning mercy of God, has yet proved to be of sufficient moral force to leave behind it a permanent mark. The wound healed, but it is only cicatrized over; it can never be less than a centre of solicitude, tender and sensitive to exposure. Always after this that soul has one insecure, one vulnerable point to be watched. There are men to-day who, just because they once swore an oath, have to put up special guards against profanity. There are men who once read a page of a vile book that have never got over the tendency to impurity it bred in their souls. We may definitely conclude, from wide observation, that no wickedness has ever been committed which has, in the end, left the man where it found him. God may forgive much; but the devil's service fixes its own memorial on the soul. One of its natural sinews of strength has been shrunken, and now it betrays itself by the limp. Two lessons will follow just here. One is this :—Let every person, young and growing beware of all vice, and be on the alert against even early sin. You may be called upon to carry its stigmas with you to the great day of your death. You may be a weaker man all the days and years you live afterwards, just because of one seemingly trifling indulgence. This body of ours is a wonderful thing. It is the most beautiful object in the world. When the artists searched the universe for the curve of absolute beauty, they found it in the maiden's shoulder; when they wanted the colour of absolute purity, they found it in the infant's cheek. But this body may be deformed, disfigured, ruined, by sin. Be careful about that! The other lesson is one of consideration for others. When we see a man with a personal mutilation, every instinct of courteous life bids us hesitate to causelessly wound his feelings. When the weakness is mental or moral, the appeal is yet more direct and overwhelming to our thoughtfulness and care. He who would heedlessly disregard a sign of weakness or old exposure like this is more unthinking and more ungenerous even than he who would drink wine in the presence of one who had been a drunkard, or rattle dice in a reformed gambler's ear. The silent plea of feebleness ought to be simply irresistible to every noble mind. It seems to say plaintively, like the suffering Job: "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me!" We must use our Christian freedom cautiously, lest with our indulgence we should injure one for whom Christ died. (*C. S. Robinson, D.D.*) *The anomalies of Jacob's character* :—Jacob is to me the most difficult character in the Bible history. He looks so worldly, shrewd, and even unscrupulous, that it is hard to reconcile ourselves to him. I feel the justice of the sneers about him, and sometimes it seems humbling that this should be one of the patriarchs, even in that rude time. But if all were on one side, it would be easy, however painful, to judge of him. It is his singular contradictions, with his visions of angels, &c., that make it hard. He cheats his brother; and behold him just afterward with his consecration, his awful sense of God's presence, and hear his simple vow! Behold Jacob so shrewd to Laban, so calculating and successful! Behold him returning; see the shrinking of his guilty and timid heart; and then at night see this scene of wrestling! We are all of us mixtures of earth and heaven, but I know of none like this. On the one hand I see Jacob sometimes so merely a Jew that he seems the father of Jewish guile, fear, unscrupulousness, and thrift. On the other I see him sometimes not only as the deeply faithful lover in his youth, the most tender father, but as an elevated, majestic man of faith, who believed in high things, who valued them, and who left on record such words of lowliness and penitence for his faults, in such genuine tones, that the

purest and most repentant hearts take them up from age to age and repeat them as their own: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant"; "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been," &c. Nay, I see him sometimes as so purely an inspired Hebrew, that he seems the father of the visions of Hebrew prophets, the father of the Psalms, and the father of the deepest spiritual insights of the Bible. How wonderful! The shame and sorrow and shock of such contradictions is a common tale. Alas, that we, who are linked in some qualities, at some moments, with the highest, purest, in the fellowship of Christ, should so blaspheme ourselves, should descend from angels' food to prey on garbage—that heavenly-fashioned hearts should go into business and society and do mean things, and be worldly Jacobs, and forget, and live our low lives, while we have in solemn moments our visions and wrestlings! This is not merely for reproach, but for hope. Awful contradiction as man is, Christ believed in the power of the better part. (*A. G. Mercer, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XXXIII.

VERS. 1-16. And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him.—*The reconciliation of Jacob and Esau*:—I. IT ILLUSTRATES THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE CHARACTERS OF THE TWO BROTHERS. 1. Esau was generous and forgiving. 2. In Jacob there are traces of his old subtlety. II. IT ILLUSTRATES THE POWER OF HUMAN FORGIVENESS. III. IT ILLUSTRATES THE TYRANNY OF OLD SINS. All was forgiven, but there was no longer any confidence. So the effects of past sin remain. IV. IT ILLUSTRATES THE POWER OF GODLINESS. Jacob's humility before his brother was but a sign of his humility before God. His satisfaction to Esau is a sign also of his reconciliation with God. (*T. H. Leale.*) *The brothers reconciled*:—I. A RECONCILIATION AFTER A LONG SEPARATION. II. A MOST DESIRABLE RECONCILIATION. 1. Because of the happiness of their aged parents. 2. On account of their own families. 3. On account of their own spiritual well-being. III. A RECONCILIATION WHICH BROUGHT TO SIGHT THE BEST TRAITS OF THEIR CHARACTER. 1. Prayerfulness. 2. Humility. 3. Disinterestedness. (*Homilist.*) *Forgiveness of injuries*:—1. The most obvious motive to forgive is the pleasure of forgiving and the pain of resenting. Therefore, as the apostle says, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, we may say, Forgive, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Forgive while forgiveness is worth having; forgive while there remains enough of life for the renewal of kindness; forgive while you have something else to bestow on repentance than lingering looks and faltering words. And what does this solemn Christian injunction of forgiving do but eradicate from the mind the most painful and most unquiet of all passions? What wretchedness to clamour out for ever, "I will pursue, I will overtake; my right hand shall dash in pieces mine enemy"; to sacrifice all the quiet happiness of life, to sicken on the bosom of joy, still, after the lapse of years, to feel, to see, and to suffer with the freshness of yesterday; and in the midst of blessings to exclaim, All this availeth me nothing while Mordecai, the Jew, sitteth at the king's gate. 2. Are we sure, too, that the cause of our resentment is just? Have we collected the most ample evidence? Have we examined it with the closest attention? Have we subjected it to impartial revision? Have we suspected our passions? Have we questioned our self-love? 3. Men are so far, generally, from being ashamed of not forgiving injuries, that they often glory in revenge; they believe it to be united with courage and with watchful, dignified pride. Yet, after all, what talents or what virtue can an unforgiving disposition possibly imply? Who is most likely longest to retain the sense of injured dignity? He who has given no pledge to his fellow-creatures that he is good and amiable? who does not feel that he is invulnerable? who is least fortified by a long tenor of just intentions and wise actions? What man who had ever trodden one step in the paths of religion would vex the sunshine of his existence with all the inquietudes of resentment? would ingraft upon his life the labour of hating, and hover year after year

over expiring injuries? Who is there that bears about him a heart of flesh that would put away a brother or a friend who knelt to him for mercy? 4. Other men, who have no desire to be thought magnanimous because they revenge, are still apprehensive of being considered as timid if they forgive and resent to maintain a character for spirit; but it is certainly extremely possible to combine temperate resistance to present injustice with a tendency to forgive what is past; to be firm in the maintenance of just rights while we abstain from any greater injury to our enemies than is necessary to maintain them, and hold ourselves ready for forgiveness when they are maintained. (*Sydney Smith, M.A.*) *Needless fears*:—Now think, brethren, what a revulsion of feeling there would be in Jacob's heart. He would think, "Have I been all these years vexing myself for this!" Here was the thing, so happy and pleasant and kindly when it came, that had many a time broken his night's rest at Haran just to think of it; that had been a dull gnawing at his heart, making him uneasy and restless in cheerful company; that had been the drop of gall in every cup he tasted—all these years! And one thing we may be almost sure of: that in all his picturing out of this dreaded meeting, thinking of it as coming in twenty sad ways, if there was one thing he never pictured out, it would be just the meeting as it actually came! The thing you expect is, in this world, the last thing that is likely to befall you. 1. How needless are our fears! In how many cases we conjure up things to vex and alarm us! For one-and-twenty years Jacob had kept himself unhappy through the fear of a meeting which, when it came, proved one of the happiest things that ever befell him in all his life. Now, have not you many a time looked forward with great anxiety to something that was coming, and then, when it came, found that all your anxiety had been perfectly needless? We all have it in our power to make ourselves miserable if we look far into the years before us and calculate their probabilities of evil, and steadily anticipate the worst. It is not expedient to calculate too far ahead. Oh that we had all more faith, Christian friends, in God's sure promise made to every true Christian, that as the day, so shall the strength be! We have all known the anticipated ills of life—the danger that looked so big, the duty that looked so arduous, the entanglement that we could not see our way through—prove to have been nothing more than spectres on the horizon; and when at length we reached them, all their difficulty had vanished into air, leaving us to think how foolish we had been for having so needlessly set up phantoms to disturb our quiet. I remember well how a good and able man, who died not long ago, told me many times of his fears as to what he would do in a certain contingency which both he and I thought was quite sure to come sooner or later. I know that the anticipation of it cost him some of the most anxious hours of a very anxious, though useful, life. But his fears proved just as vain as Jacob's in the prospect of meeting Esau. He was taken from this world before what he dreaded had cast its most distant shadow. God, in His own way, delivered that man from the event he had feared. Some people are of an anxious, despondent temperament, ready rather to anticipate evil than to look for good. But all of us, brethren, need more faith in God. How comprehensive a prayer that is, asking so much for time and for eternity, "Lord, increase our faith!" We bear a far heavier burden than we need bear. If we had the faith which we ought to have, and which the Holy Spirit is ready to work in us, we should cast all our care on God, who careth for us. 2. In those seasons of anxiety and foreboding which, through our weak faith and our remaining sinfulness, will come to us all, we should remember what Jacob did, and where Jacob found relief. He turned to God in prayer. He went and told God all his fear, and asked deliverance from God. And not once, but many times; through a long night of terrible alarm and apprehension he wrestled in urgent prayer. And see what he got by it. He got relief of heart, certainly: of that we are sure. Perhaps he got more. We cannot say how far those prayers went to turn Esau's heart, and to make him meet Jacob in that kindly spirit. When we are overwhelmed, fearful, perplexed, anxious, let us go to God, and humbly and earnestly tell Him all we are thinking and fearing, and ask Him to deliver us and comfort us. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me." If ever there were words confirmed by the experience of Christian people, you have them here. Perhaps our prayer may cause the trouble we bear or we dread to go away. Perhaps the stroke that seemed sure to fall may be withheld; perhaps the hope that seemed sure to be blighted may be fulfilled after all: perhaps the blessing that seemed sure to be taken away from us may be spared us yet. Perhaps, through our prayer, it may be with us as it was with Jacob: when we come up to the time, the trial, the duty, we

feared, we may find that there is nothing about it to be afraid of. But our prayer may be answered in a way that is better and happier still. It may please God to allow all that we feared to befall us. It may please Him to disappoint the hope, to frustrate the work, to continue the long disease, to bring the beloved one down to the grave; but with all that to resign our heart, to make us humble and content, to sanctify the trial to work in us a patience, a faith, a humility, a charity, a sympathy, that are worth, a thousand times over, all worldly happiness and success. Oh what an attainment it is, which Christians sometimes reach, to feel, if only for a little while, that our whole heart's wish is that our blessed Saviour's will be done and His glory be advanced; and that, as for us, we are content to go where He leads us, and to do and bear what He sends, sure that the way by which He leads us is the right way, and that it will bring us to our home at last! And prayer will bring us to this, if anything will. Do not, with the gnawing anxiety at your heart, sit sullenly and try to bear your burden alone. Go with a lowly heart and roll your burden on the strong arm of God Almighty! Oh how it will lighten your heart to tell Him, simply, all your fears! You will come back, like Jacob, from your Saviour's footstool, calmed and cheered. And even if the stroke should fall, even if we come out of our trial somewhat stricken and subdued, not quite the people we were—as Jacob came lamed from that long night of prevailing prayer—we shall be thankful and content if the stroke be sanctified to us: as he (we may be sure) would never murmur as he halted on through life. One word to prevent misapprehension. All this peace and hope is spoken only to Christian people. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked," or to any who have no part in Christ. We can speak no comfort to such in their fears. There is too good reason for that dull foreboding of evil they bear through life. Their fears are not needless. (*A. K. H. Boyd, D.D.*)

The brothers reconciled.—I. THE APPROACH OF THE BROTHERS. 1. Of Esau. At the head of four hundred armed men. Probably at the first meditating revenge, or to make a great display of his power. But Jacob was a man of prayer. Had often asked God to guard and keep him. Had the night before this meeting so mightily prevailed in prayer that his name had been altered. In answer to the prayers of Jacob, the revengeful feelings of Esau depart. As he draws nigh, Esau feels his heart drawn out in love towards his brother. 2. Of Jacob. Full of hope and confidence. Lame, and yet strong. He is now the prevailer. The sun shining upon him, and, better still, God lifts upon him the light of His countenance. He had sent forward the present, and now places himself in advance of all the rest. He—the prevailer—does not fear to meet the first storm of his brother's rage. II. RECONCILIATION OF THE BROTHERS. Esau, the offended and injured, instead of taking vengeance on Jacob, having his heart softened by the grace of God, runs towards Jacob. Does not proudly wait for Jacob to approach, and then upbraid him for his past conduct. Ran towards him. Then spoke not a single word. Could not. Too full of joy at once more meeting his long-lost brother. They throw themselves in one another's arms. The kiss of reconciliation. Tears of joy, gratitude. Tears too, it may be, of penitence on both sides. Each needed to be forgiven by the other. Each had done wrong. Jacob, in that he had deprived his brother of the birthright and the blessing; and Esau, in that he had left his father's house, and harboured wrong feelings against his brother, and been the cause of his long exile. Persons offended with each other have often much need of each other's forgiveness. The pardon should be on both sides. He who forgives should also seek forgiveness. III. THE CONDUCT OF THE BROTHERS. 1. Of Jacob. He entreats Esau to accept his present. Will take no denial. Thus shows the sincerity of his affection. Is unwilling that Esau should at all go out of his way to guard him. Has sufficient trust in God alone. 2. Of Esau. At length, to please his brother, accepts the present he makes. It is often as kind to accept as to make a present. He kindly received the wives and children of Jacob. Goes on the way before Jacob to make the way clear. Acts as his brother's guide and vanguard. Shows his forgiveness by deeds as well as by words. Without practical kindness words are "sounding brass," &c. Learn: 1. In all angry partings, remember that a future meeting will come. 2. God can still the raging of the fiercest storm of passion and revenge. 3. The reconciliation of brethren, a fit and beautiful sight. 4. We have all sinned against God, and need His forgiveness. 5. By causing Esau to forgive his brother, God shows how ready He is to forgive us. 6. Our elder Brother, Jesus, has obtained a full pardon for us. (*J. C. Gray.*)

The contrast.—Reposing, therefore, with confidence on the promised protection of his God, Jacob crossed the brook at sunrise, and, rejoining

his family, went calmly on his way. A short time appears to have brought on the crisis of his trial: "Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men." It is not difficult to conceive the rush of contending feelings that would agitate his breast when the hostile party came in sight; nor to imagine to what a height the tumult of his thoughts would increase as the two bands approached each other. Grace does not make us stoics. It controls and regulates the natural affections by subordinating them to higher principles; but men of the warmest piety, while they are preserved from an exuberant and inordinate indulgence of the affections, are generally possessed of the most tender and benevolent spirit. Excessive natural affection is a common, and in no respects a sublimated, feeling. But the leading point on which I wish at this time to fix your attention is the manifest superiority of character discoverable in Jacob when compared with his elder brother—a superiority evidently not arising from superior intellect or other natural advantages, but originating in his religious principles and habits. A fair and unprejudiced examination of the case before us will show that the godly man, the faithful servant of God through Jesus Christ, has a superiority of character to other men, both in principle and in practice. 1. He possesses a superiority of principle. To examine this more closely—(1) The first idea included in this conviction is the sense of demerit. "Gracious dealing" implies undeserved kindness on the part of God, and, consequently, defect and demerit on the part of His creature. And where such convictions dwell, it is impossible but that the individual must view the actions and thoughts of any one day of his life with abhorrence, and the dealings of God with him, from first to last, as characterized only by grace and long-suffering mercy. (2) Such a conviction includes the idea of a review of God's mercies to the soul. "God has dealt graciously with me." (3) But to the lively recollection in the Christian's mind of God's merciful dealings with him we must add the grateful acknowledgment of them. The undeserved kindness of God throughout a whole life, manifested in an infinite variety of necessities and trials, cannot pass in review before the mind without emotion. (4) This is an habitual feeling. It is not a cold philosophical speculation. It is not a rational deduction that because God is great and we are less than nothing, therefore we, of course, must be indebted to Him, and therefore we are; but it is the emotional, affectionate consciousness of obligation. And it will be invariably found that this is the character of true piety; that there is this living and influential sense of the mercy of God; and that this it is, especially, which, coming into play continually as the leading principle of action, does make its possessor a far superior character to those who are merely left to have their conduct regulated by the operation of natural principles and affections. This will become more evident as we proceed to notice—2. The superiority of the religious man's conduct as originating in this principle. A principle so powerful could not be in action without producing very manifest results. Nor is it; for the man who truly believes the redemption of the gospel "lives no longer to himself, but unto Him who died for him." We do not say that there is no virtue among men without the influence of revealed religion. All the virtues of the natural character are of a much lower origin. They are spurious and defective in the motive and principle from which they spring. They are frequently constitutional. Taken, however, at their highest point, such manifestations of virtuous principle are fleeting and uncertain. Let us notice, by way of illustration, the two instances of moral virtue which arise out of the present event of Jacob's life—those of content and liberality. (1) Content. There are many persons who are tolerably satisfied with their condition. They are not always repining or envying. They are at rest, because they do not think; because they are well assured that they cannot alter them if they would; and they call this content. "I have enough." But how different is all this from that Christian content which originates, not in carelessness or sensual indifference, but in a calm, extended, fair, and manly view of the whole circumstances of the case. "Yea, God hath dealt graciously with me, and I have enough." This indicates no listless inattention to the real state of things, no reckless indifference, no resolute insusceptibility; but it is peace in the midst of, and in the calm contemplation of, every vicissitude. (2) Again, if we look to the virtue of liberality, as it is exhibited in Jacob, it differs from the liberality of the men of the world. Let us now endeavour to draw some plain practical instructions from the whole. 1. In the first place, it will be evident where we must look for the spring of superior virtue; not in the spontaneous emotions of a man's own heart, not in the strong stimulus of occasional circumstances, not in the influence

of human opinion, not in the rewarded efforts of heroic resolution, but in the right appreciation of a dying Saviour's love. All other principles will fail in their own time and way. 2. Observe, this contrast of the character of Esau and Jacob will enable men of excellent moral habits to discriminate between the virtue of habit and the virtue of principle. 3. This subject speaks with peculiar force to the covetous man. True Christianity imparts, in a high degree, the graces of content and liberality. A greedy pursuit of gain is utterly inconsistent with the self-denying spirit of the gospel. This alone ought to be felt as a cutting rebuke for the love of money. (*E. Craig.*)

The reconciliation:—I. **THE FRIENDLY MEETING.** II. **THE PRUDENT SEPARATION.** Perhaps Jacob was still a little afraid of the impetuosity of his brother. But the deepest reason why Jacob politely declined Esau's offer of help and companionship was, we may well believe, a religious one. He saw that the aims which Esau would have in view and the habits of Esau's life would not suit what he (Jacob) wished to keep in mind and do. Besides, he felt that God intended him to keep apart from his brother, and to train his family in the special knowledge of the covenant with Abraham, and of all the promises which God had given. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" III. **THE MEMORIAL OF GRATITUDE.** Implying—1. **Thankfulness.** God had enriched, guided, defended, comforted him. 2. **Faith.** Jacob would trust and worship God. 3. **Hope.** God, who had blessed him hitherto, would help him now and in his further career. (*W. S. Smith, B.D.*)

Needlessness of anxiety:—The present was quite unnecessary; the plan useless. God "appeased" Esau, as He had already appeased Laban. Thus it is He ever delights to rebuke our poor, coward, unbelieving hearts, and put to flight all our fears. Instead of the dreaded sword of Esau, Jacob meets his embrace and kiss; instead of strife and conflict, they mingle their tears. Such are God's ways. Who would not trust Him? Who would not honour Him with the heart's fullest confidence? Why is it that, notwithstanding all the sweet evidence of His faithfulness to those who put their trust in Him, we are so ready, on every fresh occasion, to doubt and hesitate? The answer is simple, we are not sufficiently acquainted with God. "Acquaint now thyself with Him and be at peace" (*Job xxii. 21*). This is true, whether in reference to the unconverted sinner or to the child of God. The true knowledge of God, real acquaintance with Him, is life and peace. (*C. H. M.*)

Lessons:—1. God's promise falls not short in making men yield to His saints. 2. Where God moveth, even wicked men will make speed and run to show kindness to His servants. 3. The hardest hearts melt in affection when God toucheth them. 4. When men please God, enemies are made friends to them (*Prov. xvi. 7*). 5. Where greatest danger is feared, God turns it to greatest love. 6. It is natural for brethren, good and bad, to melt in tears upon providential turns and meetings (*ver. 4*). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*)

Lessons:—1. Brotherly respect unto brethren will work kind inquisition after their relations. 2. Love makes queries to know such relations as are to be beloved. 3. Truth, piety, and humility become all the answers to be made unto queries of love by God's servants. 4. Children are to be acknowledged the fruit of God's mercy and goodness to His (*Psa. cxxvii. 3*). 5. The anger of enraged men is turned into love and tenderness best by self-denying submission. The reed overcomes the wind by yielding; the oaks fall by resisting (*ver. 5*). 6. It becometh family relations to keep order designed by their head. 7. Orderly approach and submission is the way to gain acceptance with great men. 8. Providence works by motions of creatures to turn hearts from fury to love (*vers. 6, 7*). (*Ibid.*)

The reconciliation of Esau and Jacob:—1. Brotherly love is a precious thing; let it be guarded well. Be just, and true, and kind to one another; and let a spirit of forbearance and forgiveness prevail. 2. We see here a striking example of prayer. Wrong as Jacob had been before, he was right in this. 3. Jacob sets us an example also of wisdom and prudence. He prayed; yet he used all the means in his power. 4. The very word reconciliation cannot but remind us of the great reconciliation—that between the sinner and God. If God, in answer to prayer, disposed Esau to be reconciled to his brother, surely He Himself will not refuse pardon, reconciliation, and acceptance to one who has offended Him. 5. God will give His Holy Spirit to those that ask Him; and in this office, among others, as the spirit of peace. He will help those of one family to live together in peace, to bear and forbear, to love as brethren. Nay, more: He can, by the same mighty influence, create a new heart in those who have as yet been far from Him. (*F. Bourdillon.*)

Vers. 9, 11. **I have enough.**—Contentment from two points of view:—I. **HERE**

IS AN UNGODLY MAN WHO HAS ENOUGH (ver. 9). Esau. Unconverted men are sometimes contented with their lot in this life. 1. It is not always or often so: they are mostly a dissatisfied company. 2. It is sometimes so: as in the case of Esau. This may arise from—(1) A want of energy. (2) A naturally easy disposition, readily pleased. (3) Utter recklessness, which only considers present pleasure. 3. It has some good points about it. (1) As preventing greed, and the oppression which comes of it. (2) As often promoting a good-natured liberality, and the disposition to "live and let live." 4. Yet it has its evil side. (1) It leads men to boast of their wealth or acquirements, who would not do so if they were craving for more. (2) It tends to breed a contempt for spiritual riches. (3) It may thus be a sign of having one's portion in this life. II. HERE IS A GODLY MAN WHO HAS ENOUGH (ver. 11). Jacob. 1. It is a pity that this is not true of every Christian man. 2. It is delightful to have enough. Contentment surpasses riches. 3. It is pleasant to have somewhat to spare for the poor (Eph. iv. 28). 4. It is blessed to have all this through our God. Jacob said, "God hath dealt graciously with me, and I have enough." 5. It is best of all to have all things. In the margin we read that Jacob said, "I have all things." "All things are yours" (1 Cor. iii. 22). (1) All that the believer needs is promised in the covenant. (2) All things in providence work together for his good. (3) In having God for his portion he has more than all. Thus he has enough of strength and grace. Enough in Christ, in the Word, and in the Spirit. Enough in God's love, power and faithfulness, and an immeasurable supply in God Himself, whose name is "God All-sufficient." The child of God should be ashamed of discontent, since even a common sinner may be free from it. He should be heartily satisfied; for he has all things, and what more can he desire? "O rest in the Lord" (Psa. xxxvii. 7). (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Lessons*:—1. Natural affection will urge to inquire of the outward state of brethren as well as of relations. 2. Modesty in nature will expostulate about brethren's offers of love rather than covetously take them. 3. Providential occurrences of good pretended may occasion natural men to inquire about them. 4. Humble souls as under providence they do seek favour with men by presents, so they profess it (ver. 8). 5. It is possible for natural men to have a kind of sufficiency and content in their possessions. 6. Nature may desire others to keep their own, as it is contented with its portion. 7. Nature is apt to think earthly possessions enough without God (ver. 9). 8. Ingenuity and grace is not only liberal, but urgent to have fruits of love accepted. 9. Acceptance of loving presents is a token of acceptance of persons. 10. It is just cause of importunity in pressing pacifying presents when God's face is seen in reconciled adversaries. 11. Unexpected love from displeased ones engageth to press kindness on them (ver. 10). 12. Presents of gracious souls from God to men are blessings. 13. Grace is importunate with man as well as with God to win Him. 14. God's gracious respects to saints causeth them so to respect their brethren. 15. God's Jacobs, gracious souls, they have not only enough, but all in the grace of God. 16. The all-sufficiency which God giveth His saints makes them so pressing kindness to others. 17. Nature is overcome by the importunity of grace to accept an outward blessing. 18. Brotherly conference is the way of winning upon men of bad spirits. All this between Jacob and Esau is by loving parley. (G. Hughes, B.D.) *Christian contentment*:—A poor Christian woman, who was breaking her fast upon a crust and a cup of water, exclaimed, "What! all this and Christ too!" (C. H. Spurgeon.) A Puritan preacher asking a blessing on a herding and potatoes, said, "Lord, we thank Thee that Thou hast ransacked sea and land to find food for Thy children." (Ibid.) *Angelic content*:—The great cry with everybody is, "Get on! get on!" just as if the world were travelling post. How astonished these people will be, if they arrive in heaven, to find the angels, who are much wiser than they, laying no schemes to be made archangels! (Maxims for Meditation.) *Content from a quiet mind*:—Is not the bee as well contented with feeding on the dew, or sucking from a flower, as the ox that grazeth on the mountains? Contentment lies within a man, in the heart; and the way to be comfortable is not by having our barrels filled, but our minds quieted. The contented man (saith Seneca) is the happy man. . . . Discontent robs a man of the power to enjoy what he possesses. A drop or two of vinegar will sour a whole glass of wine. (T. Watson.) *Contentment of the unregenerate*:—As a typical instance of the contentment of some unregenerate persons, note the following: "A captain of a whale-ship told one of the wretched natives of Greenland that he sincerely pitied the miserable life to which he was condemned. 'Miserable!' exclaimed the savage. 'I have always had a fish-bone through my nose, and plenty of train-oil to drink:

what more could I desire? " (C. H. Spurgeon.) *I have enough*:—1. The first man who ever said so. 2. What even non-spiritual men may say. Should not Christians say more? 3. Property should be a heart-store. 4. "Enough" can never be true of spiritual blessings. 5. The evils of avaricious grasping. 6. We must not be avaricious, even on the plea that it is for others. 7. Christianity should be proved by contentment. Examples of Christ and Paul. (J. Parker, D.D.)

Ver. 13. The children are tender.—*Gently! gently!*—I. LET US VIEW JACOB AS AN EXAMPLE TO US. Tender consideration for the young and feeble. 1. How we may overdrive. (1) Puzzling them with deep and controversial points of doctrine, and condemning them because they are not quite correct in their opinions (Rom. xiv. 1). (2) Setting up a standard of experience, and frowning at them because they have not felt all the sorrows or ecstasies which we have known. (3) Requiring a high degree of faith, courage, patience, and other graces which in their case can only be tender buds. (4) Fault-finding and never commending. 2. Why we should not overdrive the lambs. (1) Common humanity forbids. (2) Our own experience when we were young should teach us better. (3) We may again become weak, and need great forbearance. (4) We love them too well to be hard with them. (5) Jesus thinks so much of them that we cannot worry them. (6) The Holy Spirit dwells in them, and we must be gentle towards the faintest beginning of His work. (7) We should be doing Satan's work if we did overburden them. (8) We should thus prove ourselves to have little wisdom and less grace. If we kill the lambs now, where shall we get our sheep from next year? (9) We dare not bear the responsibility of offending these little ones, for terrible woes are pronounced on those who do them wrong. (10) We remember how tender Jesus is: and this brings us to our second point. II. LET US VIEW JACOB AS A PICTURE OF OUR LORD JESUS. See His portrait in Isaiah xl. 11. 1. The weak have a special place in His love. 2. He will not have it that any of them should die. 3. Therefore He never overdrives one of them. 4. But He suits His pace to their feebleness, "I will lead on softly" (Gen. xxxiii. 15). "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." Has He not thus been very tender to us? "Thy gentleness hath made me great" (Psa. xviii. 35). Let us not fret and worry as though He were an exactor. We are not driven by Jehu, but led by Jesus. Let us rest in His love. At the same time let us not be slower than need be. Towards others let us be tenderness itself, for we are to love our neighbour as ourselves. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Jacob's precaution*:—The angels of peace and of love seem to hover over the charm of the preceding scene; and the heart lingers with delight in contemplating the noble emulation of generosity and confidence. But is not this harmony too soon disturbed? Does not again a spirit of suspicion and reserve overshadow the mind of Jacob? Is he incapable of rising to the natural purity of his disinterested brother? Or does his keen intellect teach him how imprudent it would be unguardedly to rely upon the fallacious calmness of a passionate mind? Admitted even, that Jacob's apprehensions were, in this respect, exaggerated, his precaution was the result of a deep insight into Esau's character; the most insignificant circumstance might recall to his memory the events of the past; his rage might be re-kindled; and, though perhaps later bewailing his rashness, he might, by his superiority, be misled to deeds of cruel revenge. When, therefore, Esau wished to accompany Jacob, for protection, through the regions with which his excursions had made him familiar, the latter cautiously declined the offer; he refused even the garrison or guard which Esau proposed to leave him; but he promised, of his own accord, to visit him in his home in Seir; for he knew, that the sacred rights of hospitality would there protect him, even against an outbreak of passion. But though the objections of Jacob may have been as many evasions, they were not untruths; he could certainly not, without great danger, follow with his encumbered caravan, the march of Esau; and the latter seemed to acknowledge the justness of the remark; but he opposed the second offer with the simple question: "Wherefore do I thus find grace in the sight of my lord?" He invented no fictitious pretext; he thus almost exposed himself to the danger of arousing his brother's suspicion; but he had banished deceit from his heart; and he preferred risk to falsehood. (M. M. Kalisch, Ph.D.) *Sympathy for the feeble*:—The Lord chooses under-shepherds for His flock among men subject to weakness and infirmity, that they may have a fellow-feeling for the feeble. Selah Merrill, in his "East of the Jordan," describes the movement of an Arab tribe, and says, "The flocks of sheep and goats were mostly driven by small children. Sometimes there were flocks of lambs and kids driven by children not much older relatively than the

lambs and kids themselves. Some of the men had in their arms two, three, four, or a whole armful of kids and lambs that were too young to walk; and among some cooking utensils there was a large saucepan, and in it was a pair of small kids that were too young for the journey." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Gentle dealing for the feeble*:—When a candle is newly lighted and needs to be moved, it must be carried at a slow pace or it will be extinguished. A fire which is almost expiring may be revived by a gentle brentb, but it will be blown out if the bellows are plied at their full force. You can drown a little plant by watering it too much, and destroy a lovely flower by exposing it to too much sun. (*Ibid.*) *Gentleness and strength go together*:—Nothing is so strong as gentleness; nothing so gentle as real strength. (*Francis de Sales.*) *Tenderness of manner*:—Even in our manner there should be tenderness. A truly kind act may be so performed as to cause as much grief as joy. We have heard of one who would throw a penny at a beggar and thus hurt him while relieving him. A heart full of love has a mode of its own by which its gifts are enhanced in value. There is enough misery in the world without our carelessly adding to it. Some persons are morbidly sensitive, and this is wrong on their part; but when we are aware of their failing we must be the more careful lest we cause them needless pain. A gouty man will cry out if we walk with heavy footstep across the room. Do we censure him for this? No, we pity him, and tread softly. Let us do the same for the sensitive. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The weakest first*:—At the Stockwell Orphanage the usual rule of walking is—little boys first. In this way the younger children cannot be overdriven or left behind, and moreover all the boys can see before them, whereas by the usual practice of putting the tall fellows first the view in front is shut out from all but the few who lead the way. Let the Church have great care for the weaker brethren, and shape her action with a constant reference to them. A strong Christian might do a thousand things lawfully if he only thought of himself, but he will not do one of them because he wishes to act expediently, and would not grieve his brother, or cause him to stumble.

Ver. 17. Jacob journeyed to Succoth.—*Lessons*:—1. Providence in love carrieth on his own after removing of blocks from their way. 2. The movings and journeyings of his own, providence guides, as of the wicked, but with distinction. 3. Esau under providence may be carried to Seir, strong mountains, but Jacob to Succoth, a poor cottage and a booth. 4. Under providence it concerns good householders to build shelters, for themselves, families, and cattle. 5. Such common works of saints are recorded as pleasing unto God. 6. Jacob's seed are careful to keep booth-providences in remembrance. Name of place sheweth this. (*G. Hughes, D.D.*)

Ver. 18. And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, . . . and pitched his tent before the city.—*Jacob's mistake*:—God had not said, Go to Shechem; but, "I am the God of Bethel." Bethel, rather than Shechem, was his appointed goal. But alas! we are all too ready to fall short of God's schemes for our elevation and blessedness. And so Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem. But he did worse; he pitched his tent before the city—as Lot did, when he pitched his tent before Sodom. What took him there? Was it that Rachel persuaded him that a little society would be a pleasant relief to the monotony and seclusion of the camp life? Was it that his children urged him to it against his better mind? Was it some idea of obtaining eligible alliances for his children among the children of the land? Whatever may have been his reason, there stands the sad and solemn fact that Jacob pitched his tent before the city. Are not many Christians doing so still? They live on the edge of the world, just on the borderland; far enough away to justify a religious profession, yet near enough to run into it for sweets. They send their children to fashionable schools, that they may acquire the false venter of the world, and past muster in its drawing rooms. They remove into the fashionable quarters of a town; and adopt a certain style; and throw themselves into the swim of all manner of worldly engagements—that they may get in with "society." They choose their church, their pastimes, their friendships, on the sole principle of doing as others do; and of forming good alliances for their children. What is all this but pitching their tents towards Shechem? "But what are we to do?" say they; "our children must have society; they cannot be recluses, or be for ever shut up in our homes." But why need we cater for them by rushing into the world? Are there not plenty of innocent pastimes,

on which worldliness has never breathed its withering breath? Are there not enough elements in the bright social intercourse of the family circle; in the play of imagination and wholesome merriment; in games of skill; in the charms of books; in the recital of travel and adventure; in the witchery of wholesome songs and music; and even in the revelations of modern popular science—to beguile the hours of long winter evenings, without calling in the aid of worldly society, whose brightest hours leave a sense of vacuity and thirst, to say nothing of a positive sting? The most earnest religion does not debar us from many sports: the swift movement of the skater over the frozen lake; the evening row; the exhilarating climb: or from the culture of the faculties of art; and music; and imagination; of science and poesy. Surely, in all these there is enough to brighten Christian homes, without grieving the Holy Spirit, or lowering their tone. But if parents and guardians will insist on something more exciting and stimulating than these, they must reckon on being called upon to pay the price. They may have the dice-box, the theatre, the dance, if they will; but they must learn, by sad experience, the bitter cost. He needs a long spoon who sups with the devil. The fact is, it is much easier to give these things than to arouse oneself to provide something better. The something better needs time and thought; and staying at home from religious meetings, to give it effect: but the ultimate benefit will more than repay the self-denial. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Shechem*.—I. RELIGIOUS REVIVAL. II. FAMILY TRIALS. (*T. S. Dickson.*)

Vers. 19, 20. And he bought a parcel of a field.—*Jacob's faith and piety*.—**I. HIS FAITH.** He bought a parcel of ground as a pledge of his faith in the future possession of that country by his posterity (ver. 19). This purchase of a portion of land, concerning which God had promised Abraham that it should be his, showed Jacob's deep conviction that the promise was renewed to him and to his seed. **II. HIS PIETY.** This was an evidence of his faith. He gave himself up entirely to God, and this inward feeling was expressed outwardly by acts of obedience and devotion. His piety is seen—1. In an act of worship. "He erected there an altar." This was in keeping with his vow (*Gen. xxviii. 21*). 2. In the use of blessings already given. He called the altar "El-Elohe-Israel" (ver. 20). He now uses his own new name, Israel, for the first time, in association with the name of God. He uses that name which signifies the Mighty One, who was now his covenant God. He lives up to his privilege, uses all that God had given. He had vowed that he would take the Lord to be his God. 3. In the peace he enjoyed. He arrived in peace at his journey's end (ver. 18). (*T. H. Leale.*) *Lessons*.—1. Jacob and his seed desire to usurp nothing but what they buy from the world. 2. God's pilgrims mind no great purchase below, but only a place for a tent: a little place. 3. It is lawful for Jacob to deal with Canaanites in just exchanges (ver. 19). 4. Saints would not have a house but that God should dwell in it. 5. Succeeding saints repair religion and the means of the exercise of it, set up by progenitors. 6. Altar-worship, or worship by Christ, is that which saints have ever practised. 7. True religion is terminated in the Almighty God. 8. Religious worship is the true memorial of God's making His Church truly Israel (ver. 20). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) **He erected there an altar.**—*The family altar*.—By calling this altar "El-Elohe-Israel," or God the God of Israel, it was virtually saying, "I erect this altar for the worship of my family, to the God with whom I have prevailed in supplication, and who has proved Himself the hearer of my prayer." Such an altar should there be in every household; and, without further special reference to our text, I proceed to the subject I have chosen for this occasion, namely, that of family worship. 1. We may remark, first, that it is clearly the duty of every family to maintain such worship. 2. We may pass on, therefore, in the second place, to the advantages of family worship. Among its lesser benefits, we may remark in passing that, rightly conducted, it makes a profitable impression upon those out of the family, who may chance to witness it. Family worship is also of unspeakable advantage in maintaining all the other institutions of our holy religion. We can hardly enumerate the advantages of family worship to the household itself. That it draws down the blessing of God upon the domestic circle needs no proof, for we have for our encouragement, not only the general promises made to prayer, but the special assurance that "where two or three are gathered together in Christ's name, He will be with them"; and we have farther, the evidence of actual experience. If we value the salvation of our loved ones we shall not neglect this means of securing it. The restraining influence of domestic worship upon all the annoyances

and disturbers of domestic peace is most powerful and valuable. Who can kneel down and pray daily before his family against a sin which he habitually commits? How can the inmates of a dwelling cherish unkind feelings towards each other while united in common prayer? 3. We may next notice the manner in which family devotions may best be performed. 4. Our last point will be to notice the objections and difficulties which are commonly opposed to the duty. One may reply, that all these arguments and statements may be very good and true, but that he makes no profession of religion, and it would be improper, therefore, for him to set up family worship. Why so? Is it wrong for him to pray in secret, or in the house of God, or to give his children religious instruction? And why any more so to pray in the family? (*W. H. Lewis, D.D.*) *Jacob's thankfulness after deliverance*:—See the practice of faithful men, ever when God hath been merciful to them, and delivered them out of danger. Now Jacob buildeth an altar in the true thankfulness of his soul unto God for this great mercy and deliverance of him from his brother Esau. And he calleth it the mighty God of Israel: giving to the sign the name of the thing which it signified, which is usual in the Scripture. Thus would God it might kindle some heat in our hearts and consciences, to consider ourselves, the dangers we have been in in our days, the dangers of the land wherein we inhabit. The dangers of wife, children, and friends, and now our safety and deliverance from all our fears. For this hath the Lord done for us, and whatsoever it is in our eyes, surely it is wonderful even through the world. But where now are our altars? That is, where are our thanks and most grateful songs for our deliverance? We have found mercy as Jacob did; yea, for more, for greater Esaus have come against us, than did against him, not with four hundred men, but many thousands, to captivate us for ever as their slaves when they had slain their fill. And yet we live, and by God only who hath strangely revenged us upon them that would thus have eaten us up. That is, as I say again, we give not thanks for the custom of our time, as he did after the manner of his. At the first peradventure we did, but it was soon at an end. Now are we fallen into a deep sleep again, and both God and His mercy is forgotten. Our danger also, as if it had never been. But in the Lord I beseech you, let us awake again, look upon Jacob here what he doth, and every man and woman follow his example. Build God an altar, not in earth with lime and stone, but in your heart of most kind and thankful remembrance for all His mercies to the land, to our dread sovereign, to ourselves, our souls and bodies, to our wives and children, to our neighbours and friends, and infinite ways that we cannot name. Bless His majesty for them, and let not the remembrance die, till you die yourself. A thankful heart is all that the Lord seeketh, and it is all that indeed we can do to Him. (*Bp. Babington.*)

CHAPTER XXXIV.

VERS. 1-5. *Dinah the daughter of Leah . . . went out to see.*—*Dinah's inglorious march*:—I. SHE CAME. II. SHE SAW. III. SHE WAS CONQUERED. (*J. Henry Burn, B.D.*) *Dinah's dishonour*:—I. THAT THERE IS GREAT DANGER IN A VAIN CURIOSITY OF SEEING THE WORLD. Dinah was curious to know the ways and customs of the surrounding people. This led to a careless intimacy, which ended in accomplishing her ruin. She ought not to have wandered beyond parental control and supervision, nor disregarded the duty of separation from an idolatrous people, and their manners and habits. "Evil communications corrupt good manners." The inhabitants of that country were to the family of Jacob what the present world is to the Christian. It is dangerous to the interests of the soul to indulge in the vain curiosity of knowing the evil ways of the world. What is called "seeing life" may prove, in many cases, to be but tasting death. Familiarity blunts the sense of things sinful, and increases the danger of temptation. II. THAT SOME SENTIMENT OF VIRTUE MAY REMAIN IN THOSE ADDICTED TO THE WORST SOCIAL VICES. Shechem, we are told, "loved the damsel, and spake kindly unto the damsel." He was willing to make honourable amends, as far as could be, by an offer of marriage. In this he was generous and noble, for lust commonly ends in loathing. Amnon abhors Tamar as before he loved her. But this man desires to cover his fault by marriage, and promises love

and fidelity. He had many of the vices of the great and powerful, but was not without some remains of virtue. The conduct of this heathen man is a rebuke to many who dwell in Christian lands. III. THAT INCREASING TROUBLES MAY FALL TO THE LOT OF GOOD MEN. Jacob now suffered one of the most dreadful calamities that can fall upon a household—the disgrace and ruin of his daughter. When he heard of it he “held his peace,” as if stunned by the blow (ver. 5). (*T. H. Leale.*) *Dinah's curiosity*:—As her mother Leah, so she hath a fault in her eyes, which was curiosity. She will needs see, and be seen; and whilst she doth vainly see, she is seen lustfully. It is not enough for us to look to our own thoughts, except we beware of the provocations of others. If we once wander out of the lists that God hath set us in our callings, there is nothing but danger. Her eyes were guilty of the temptation; only to see is an insufficient variant to draw us into places of spiritual hazard. If Shechem had seen her busy at home, his love had been free from outrage; now the lightness of her presence gave encouragement to his inordinate desires. Immodesty of behaviour makes way to lust, and gives life unto wicked hopes. (*Bishop Hall.*) *The eyes a source of danger*:—By those windows of the eyes and ears sin and death often enter. See to the cinque ports if ye would keep out the enemy. Shut up the five windows if ye would have the house, the heart, full of light, saith the Arabian proverb. (*J. Trapp.*) *Lessons*:—1. Sad occurrences may be ordered to saints while they sit by God's altar. Worship is not without trial. 2. Religious care of God misplaced doth not exempt parents and children from sad temptations. Jacob worshipped by Shalem, not at Bethel. 3. Mothers' sins Providence may hit in daughters' miscarriages. 4. The children of saints, and specially daughters, may be occasion of great affliction to parents. 5. Wilfulness and wantonness urge on young souls to their own mischief, and grief of parents. 6. Unruly appetites to know the fashions and vain courses of others bring many souls into grievous snares. 7. Vain sights and spectacles in revels and wanton garbs may occasion loss of purity (ver. 1). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. Great men's children are not usually the best; but vile and debauched. So Shechem the son of a prince. 2. Sons of great men are apt to think they may sin by authority; being not restrained. 3. It is a dangerous thing for an innocent damsel to come under the eye of lascivious men. 4. Lustful sight of beauty moveth hearts to take hold of opportunities to enjoy it. 5. Lust holds fast of its prey, will certainly close with it, humble, and afflict it (ver. 2). 6. Lust layeth out the very soul of man upon its prey desired. 7. Unclean love is the usual fruit of violent and injurious lust. 8. Lust will speak to the heart of any whom it may tempt unto unclean enjoyment (ver. 3). 9. Brutish lust cannot deny the parents' right in ordering children unto marriage. 10. Lust itself will desire God's ordinance of marriage for its own vile ends (ver. 4). (*Ibid.*) *Lessons*:—1. Sad tidings of children's miscarriages and miseries may be brought to gracious parents. 2. Reports and hearing of evil, especially in dear children, strikes deep, through ears, to the hearts of parents. 3. Shechem's violence upon Dinah, or of wicked men upon the daughters of the Church, is very sad. 4. Such evils may befall relations while they are honestly employed, and think not of it. 5. Silence in grieving, considering, and bearing such providences, becometh saints. 6. Silence of grieved spirits may well be broken off, when such are present whom they may consult for ease (ver. 5). (*Ibid.*) *Dinah's fall*:—It is a startling announcement; but it contains nothing more than might have been expected. Poor girl! a moth fluttering about a flame! A foolish fish nibbling at the bait! Was she lonely, being the only girl? Did she want to show off some piece of jewellery or dress? Did she long for more admiration, or fascinating society, than she could find at home? Was there a secret drawing to the young men of the place? She went along a path that seemed to her girlish fancy ever so much more attractive than the dull routine of home. She took no heed of the warnings that may have been addressed to her. And it all ended—as it has ended in thousands of cases since—in misery, ruin, and unutterable disgrace. She was kindly received. The world will always give a hearty welcome to those who bear a Christian name. Perhaps there is a sense of relief in feeling that it cannot be so bad after all, since Christians do not hesitate to take part with it. The welcome and “well-done” of worldly men should always put us on our guard. “What evil thing have I done,” said a shrewd observer, “that yonder worldling speaks so well of me?” She fascinated the young prince, and fell. It is the old, old story, which is ever new. On the one hand—rank, and wealth, and unbridled appetite; on the other—beauty, weakness, and dallying with temptation. But to whom was her fall due? To Shechem? Yes.

To herself? Yes. But also to Jacob. He must for ever reproach himself for his daughter's murdered innocence. But of what use were his reproaches, when the deed was done; and the honour of his house was gone; and his name stank among the inhabitants of the land? Would that some Christian parents, reading these words, might take warning as to the end of a pathway on which they are encouraging their children to tread! To stay now may save them tears of blood, and years of fruitless agony. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Caution to young people*:—It is natural to suppose that the younger branches of the family, hearing everything that was going on among the youth of the place, would think it hard if they must not go amongst them. Whether the sons formed acquaintances among the Shechemites, we know not; but Dinah on a certain occasion must needs "go out to see the daughters of the land." She wished no doubt to be acquainted with them, to see and be seen of them, and to do as they did. It might not be to a ball, nor a card party; but I presume it was to some merrymaking of this kind: and though the daughters of the land were her professed companions, yet the sons of the land must have assembled with them, else how came Shechem there? Young people, if you have any regard for your parents, or for yourselves, beware of such parties! The consequence was what might have been expected. Shechem was the son of the "prince of the country," and men of rank and opulence are apt to think themselves entitled to do anything which their inclinations prompt them to. The young woman was inexperienced, and unused to company of this kind; she therefore fell an easy prey to the seducer. But could Dinah have gone without the consent or connivance of her parents, at least one of them? We should think she could not. I fear Leah was not clear in this matter. (*A. Fuller.*) *Caution to parents*:—If Jacob had not settled at Shechem, Dinah would not have been dishonoured, and the violence of his sons would not have been exhibited. We constantly see Christians getting into deep sorrow and trouble through their own unfaithfulness; and then, instead of judging themselves, they begin to look at circumstances, and to cast upon them the blame. How often do we see Christian parents, for instance, in keen anguish of soul about the wildness, unsubduedness, and worldliness of their children; and, all the while, they have mainly to blame themselves for not walking faithfully before God in reference to their family. Thus was it with Jacob. He was on low moral ground at Shechem; and, inasmuch as he lacked that refined sensibility which would have led him to detect the low ground, God, in very faithfulness, used his circumstances to chastise him. "God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." This is a principle flowing out of God's moral government—a principle, from the application of which none can possibly escape; and it is a positive mercy to the children of God that they are obliged to reap the fruits of their errors. It is a mercy to be taught, in any way, the bitterness of departing from, or stopping short of, the living God. We must learn that this is not our rest; for, blessed be God, He would not give us a polluted rest. He would ever have us resting in and with Himself. (*C. H. M.*) *Dinah*:—Inferences hence are various. 1. The most pious and faithful families may have most fearful mischiefs befall them, as Jacob's had here and elsewhere, and David's many afterwards. The worst miscarriages, through Satan's malice, may happen in the best families. 2. The second inference is, such foul miscarriages fall not out in such godly families but usually there is some sin or other therein, which justly vindicates God's righteousness in permitting such severe judgments to befall them. And it is apparent too in Jacob's case, when this first miscarriage in his house came upon him. It was now some seven or eight years since the Lord brought him back from Haran or Padan-aram, yet had he not all this time thought of paying that vow which he made to God when he was going thither (*Gen. xxviii. 20, &c.*) 3. The third inference is, all needless gaddings abroad are of dangerous consequence to young people, who are unfit to be wholly at their own finding; especially the weaker sex, which may prove strong enough to provoke, but over-weak to resist a temptation. 4. The fourth inference is, if this mischievous miscarriage happened to Jacob's house through the indulgence of the mother in too much cockering her dear and only daughter, this sounds a loud alarm to all over-fond mothers, whose over-strong affections will probably bring over-strong afflictions. And where they do love too much, they may possibly grieve too much; as Leah here, who might read her sin writ upon her punishment. (*C. Ness.*) *Dinah*:—Not without reason had Dinah been mentioned previously among the children of Leah (*xxx. 21*); she was intended to be the first cause of her father's sorrow. An interval of six or eight years elapsed between the departure from Mesopotamia and the event

here narrated; Dinah had become a blooming maiden; she had reached that age when Oriental virgins attain the full charm of their beauty. During that long sojourn in Shechem, she formed friendships with the daughters of the natives, and had entered with them into social intercourse. Was this conduct culpable? Was it an offence deserving punishment? It almost appears that it was regarded as such; for she became both an object of violence and the cause of massacre; and, in Biblical history, there exists no misfortune without corresponding guilt. Dinah had preserved in her mind the vocation of her family; she did not comprehend that a perfect separation was indispensable from idolatrous tribes, whose moral reformation could not be expected, whose pernicious example could only infect the Hebrews, and whose doom was sealed on account of their iniquity. She paid the full penalty of her carelessness. She suffered the fate which Sarah and Rebekah encountered in the land of Pharaoh and of Abimelech; she was seen and taken by the son of the prince; but no angel guarded her innocence; no Divine vision shielded her from disgrace; and she fell a victim to Shechem's passion. She did not require that immediate protection which her ancestors had enjoyed; she was a maiden, no wife; her father possessed a piece of land within which he was safe; and she belonged to a numerous family well capable of defending their rights. But Shechem was neither licentious nor frivolous; though he had been ensnared by passion, his heart was not debased, and he was ready to make the only reparation which the circumstances permitted; he loved Dinah; his soul clung to her, and he spoke to her heart; he endeavoured to secure her affection, and wished to make her his legitimate wife; he therefore asked his father to treat for him, and to solicit the consent of her family. (*M. M. Kalisch, Ph.D.*)

Vers. 6-31. They slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house.—*The punishment of Dinah's dishonour*:—I. IT WAS PROMPTED BY A FEELING OF VENGEANCE AGAINST THE DOER OF A GROSS MORAL WRONG. II. IT WAS A GRIEVOUS SIN. 1. Unjust and cruel. The punishment was far in excess of the fault, and the innocent were made to suffer with the guilty. 2. It was committed under the hypocritical pretence of religion. 3. It was perilous to the true interests of the kingdom of God (ver. 30). (*T. H. Leale.*) *Sinful policy*:—The execution of this project was marked—1. By the vilest hypocrisy. They pretended to have scruples of conscience about connecting themselves with persons who were uncircumcised. 2. By the grossest profaneness. They knew that if the Shechemites were persuaded to submit to circumcision it would be a mere form, leaving them as to their relation to God just where they were before. They propose that the males should receive the seal of God's holy covenant, not in order to obtain any spiritual benefit, but solely with a view to carnal gratification. 3. It was conceived in the spirit of the most savage cruelty. What amazing depravity does it argue, first to form such a horrid purpose, and then to cover it with the cloak of religion. (*W. Bush.*) *Sin begets sin*:—Alas, how one sin leads to another, and like flames of fire, spreads desolation in every direction! Dissipation leads to seduction; seduction produces wrath; wrath thirsts for revenge; the thirst of revenge has recourse to treachery; treachery issues in murder; and murder is followed by lawless depredation! Were we to trace the history of illicit commerce between the sexes, we should find it, more perhaps than any other sin, terminating in blood. We may read this warning truth not only in the life of David and his family, but in what is constantly occurring in our own times. The murder of the innocent offspring by the hand of the mother, or of the mother by the hand of the seducer; or of the seducer by the hand of a brother, or a supplanted rival—are events which too frequently fall under our notice. Nor is this all, even in the present world. Murder seldom escapes detection: a public execution therefore may be expected to close the tragical process! (*A. Fuller.*) *Lessons*:—1. Sad news of misery on relations calling for help may take men off from their employments. 2. Grief is a duty for evil done to, or by, any of our relations. 3. Anger against sin committed is but due, if it be expressed orderly. 4. Men, though in the Church, are apt to be transported in wrath beyond bounds. 5. Uncleanness acted is the greatest folly that can be expressed (Prov. vii. 22). 6. Pollution of any members in the Church of God is an aggravated folly. 7. Jacob's daughter to be defiled; it is a sad and grievous reproach. 8. The law of God expressly forbids such unclean actings. Therefore are they exceeding sinful in the Church (ver. 7). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. Sinful indulgent parents cover the foul enormities of rebellious children with

fair pretences. 2. Wicked offenders love to be silent as to the confession of their villanies. 3. Lustful love is given out with the very soul, and may continue after violence done, the object abiding. 4. Injurious, violent men may entreat compliance with the afflicted and oppressed ones. 5. Marriage may be desired by wicked adulterers to hide their uncleanness (ver. 8). 6. General overtures of kindness may be made by wicked men of power for their special ends. 7. The world have desired affinity with the Church of God upon design (ver. 9). 8. Worldly powers may court the pilgrim Church to sit down with them for their own advantage. 9. Territories of princes are opened to the sons of the Church to engage them to evil. 10. Free trade, commerce, and possessions, are the baits wherewith worldly powers allure God's servants unto their lusts. 11. Kingdoms and all will lust, part with all, to enjoy its pleasure (ver. 10). So Herod (Mark vi. 22, 23). (*Ibid.*)

Lessons:—1. Lustful men may crouch to such as they have offended to get favour from them. 2. Lust is willing to buy out favour where it hath provoked (ver. 11). 3. Lust maketh men profuse and prodigal to have their pleasure, though to their own undoing. 4. Lustful creatures would buy out their offences, though not confess or bemoan them. 5. Lust agreeth to give men their demands that it may enjoy its own. 6. Lust acquiesceth only in the enjoyment of its desired evil (ver. 12). (*Ibid.*)

Lessons:—1. Overflowing sorrows may cause wise and good fathers to entrust young children too much with great affairs. 2. Management of such great affairs wants good success usually, because acted by such hands. 3. Brethren under fathers may have a right as to disposing their sisters, wherein they may give counsel. 4. The sons of Jacob may be guileful, though he be plain. 5. Corruption and thoughts of revenge may move the sons of the Church to deal deceitfully (ver. 13). 6. The children of the Church cannot do justly what God forbids them. 7. It is unlawful for Church members to mingle themselves in marriages with God's enemies (1 Cor. vii. 39). 8. It is a reproach unto the Church to act contrary to God's ordinances. 9. The sons of the Church may urge God's truths to wicked purposes (ver. 14). 10. Visible professors in the Church may wickedly offer God's sacraments to be vilified by men. 11. Church-members may possibly err in annexing God's seals to men's covenants. 12. Hypocrisy makes religion a cloak to iniquity. 13. Foolish men may consent to what God forbids for their wicked ends (ver. 15). 14. Marriages between the Church and God's enemies hypocrites may admit upon design. 15. Wickedness may persuade men of the Church to become one people with the world (ver. 16). 16. Hypocrisy seems resolute to take its course where its conditions are refused. 17. Subtily suggests men's denials and departure to make adversaries follow after them (ver. 17). (*Ibid.*)

Lessons:—1. Sinful lust maketh like father like son. 2. Lust is pleased with the hardest terms for self-enjoyment. 3. Lust makes men yield to their own ruin without deliberation. The greatest evil seemeth good (ver. 18). (*Ibid.*)

Lessons:—1. Childish fools hasten to the stocks and slaughter, and consider it not. 2. Lust needs no spurs, but hastes all it may to enjoy its pleasure. 3. Lust made honourable in persons, becomes most exemplary to lead others into the snare (ver. 19). (*Ibid.*)

Lessons:—1. Lustful rulers bring all under them into evils with themselves. 2. Judicatures, or gates of cities, are perverted and seduced by wicked rulers; they are made places to plead for lust. 3. Evil rulers use their tongues and speeches to deceive their people (ver. 20). 4. Lust will commend any by whom it may be gratified, though it find the contrary. 5. Self-seeking princes will persuade people to anything for their own ends. 6. Wicked powers pretend lawful affinity to be made when they aim at sinful lust (ver. 21). 7. Lustful rulers do not only submit to hard conditions themselves, but press them on their people. 8. Lust is content to symbolize in the hardest duty external of religion, to enjoy its desire. 9. Lust desires to unite with any people who gratify its desires (ver. 22). 10. Pretence of gain, and spoil, and advantage, is a fit bait to bring seduced souls to consent to lust. 11. Rulers in sin will never leave until they bring their people to consent with them to evil (ver. 23). (*Ibid.*)

Lessons:—1. Wicked people easily yield to wicked rulers to gratify their lusts. 2. It is usual for all to follow the example of rulers to sin. 3. Universal consent in evil is permitted where universal destruction is intended (ver. 24). (*Ibid.*)

Lessons:—1. Treachery and cruelty watch their season exactly to effect their designs. 2. Guileful cruelty hath its method first to weaken men and then to kill them. 3. Anger and revenge ordered under Providence may make two prevail against thousands. 4. Corrupt nature meditates revenge to vindicate injury done unto relations. 5. Revenge goeth armed with instruments of cruelty to execute its designs. 6. Cruelty,

uncontrolled by God, goeth out with security and confidence to ruin cities. 7. Bloody revenge spareth none that either have provoked, or may resist it. 8. God sometimes suffers ruin to befall subjects when they comply with rulers' sins (ver. 25). 9. Exemplary destruction for rapes God orders upon father and son, sometimes even by wicked hands. 10. Ordinances of God abused to men's base ends, are made means to their own destruction. 11. Revenge is not quiet until it obtain its mark and carry back its desire (ver. 26). 12. A few revengeful spirits are apt to gather many unto them. 13. Bloody minds are covetous as cruel, set upon spoil. 14. Injury and provocation is usually urged by oppressing spoilers as just ground for their actings (ver. 27). 15. Rapine of goods God sometimes orders to avenge ravishing of innocents. 16. Unsatiableness is covetous revenge when it comes to spoil at its will (ver. 28). 17. Revenge spareth neither sex nor age under its power. 18. Wealth within doors, as without the sword, takes up when it hath commission (ver. 29). (*Ibid.*) *Lessons*:—1. Gracious parents are justly angry with the sins of ungracious children, and should express it. 2. The chiefest leaders into sin should chiefly be set upon in angry reproof. 3. Sins of wicked children cannot but trouble and vex the spirits of gracious parents. 4. Horrid enormities of sons may bring all vexation and trouble upon parents. 5. Sin, wherever it is, makes an ill savour, a filthy stink. 6. Children's sins often make their parents stink in the nostrils of men. 7. Notorious crimes in the members of the Church make the best of men stink in the world. 8. Guilt in persons, families, and Church, giveth just cause to fear dangers from God's hand. 9. Little strength in the arm of flesh is an occasion of fear to saints in respect of great enemies. 10. The combination of the wicked against the Church, provoked by its members, is a just ground for fear. 11. The strokes of the wicked unto death may be terrible unto God's servants. 12. Destruction, usually sought by the wicked to the whole Church, may terrify the members of it. 13. Fear of danger may arise, under the promise of God's protection, when souls obey not God (ver. 30). 14. Outrageous spirits, though sons, regard not the honour of parents or God in their returns and replies to them. 15. Revenge seeks to justify outrage by pretence of sin, though men are not called to it. 16. Stupration of innocents hath exemplary returns of judgment from God. 17. Crimes of Church members are recorded for the Church's instruction (ver. 31). (*Ibid.*) The second mischief and miscarriage in Jacob's house was the massacre made upon the city Shechem, wherein Dinah had been deflowered, by his two sons, Simeon and Levi. This followed the first mischief, as the effect doth the cause, and as the thread doth the needle. This punishment is—1. Projected. 2. Prosecuted. 3. Executed. (1) For this intolerable affront done to this honourable family, wherein are considerable.—(2) The inducement to; and (3) the opportunity for some revenge. (a) The inducement was twofold. (b) Jacob's silence (Gen. xxxiv. 5). (*C. Ness.*) *Marrying unbelievers*:—The Rev. S. Kilpin, of Exeter, had witnessed the awful consequences produced in the Church of Christ, and in families from those who professed to be the disciples of Jesus, forming marriages contrary to the command—"Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers," "only in the Lord," &c. As he never shunned to declare the whole counsel of God, this subject was presented to his congregation. The next day, a gentleman, whose name or residence he never knew, called to thank him for the discourse, adding that his state of mind, when he entered Exeter, was most distressing, as he was on the very point of complying with a dreadful temptation which would have embittered his future life. He had been a disciple of Christ, was anxious to consecrate his life to the service of his adorable Master, and had sought a helpmate to strengthen his hands in serving God. A lady, whom he deemed pious, had accepted his addresses; but, when every customary arrangement was made, she had dishonourably discarded him. His mind was so exceedingly wounded and disgusted, that he had determined to choose a wife who made no profession of religion, and had fixed on another object for his addresses, with every prospect of success, although he had not as yet mentioned his intention to her. He added, "But the providence of God led me, an entire stranger in this city, to your meeting-house. You may suppose that your subject arrested my attention. You appeared to be acquainted with every feeling of my soul. I saw my danger, and perceived the temptation, and the certain ruin of my peace, if the dreadful snare had not been broken. You, sir, under God, have been my deliverer. By the next Sabbath I should have been bound in honour to an enemy of that Jesus whom I adore; for although she is moral and externally correct, yet she knows the Saviour only in name. I could not leave the city in peace until I had

sought to make this communication." They unitedly addressed Him who can deliver, and does deliver His people. Thus, while part of his congregation thought it an unfit subject for the pulpit, at least one person received it as a message from God, by whom it was no doubt sent. (*Moral and Religious Anecdotes.*)

CHAPTER XXXV.

VERS. 1-15. God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there.—*Jacob's second journey to Bethel:—*I. IT WAS UNDERTAKEN AT THE CALL OF GOD. II. IT WAS ACCOMPLISHED IN THE SPIRIT OF OBEDIENCE AND CONSECRATION. III. IT WAS ACCOMPANIED BY THE DIVINE PROTECTION. IV. IT WAS FOLLOWED BY INCREASED SPIRITUAL BLESSING. 1. The old promises were renewed. 2. He has increased knowledge of God. 3. His religious character is purified and raised. (*T. H. Leale.*) *The second journey of Jacob to Bethel:—*I. REFRESHING OF EARLY RECOLLECTIONS. 1. Respecting this pilgrimage to Bethel, observe, first, that it was done by Divine direction—"God said to Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel." Let us not imagine that a voice spoke articulately. There were simple modes of thinking in those days; men had not learnt to philosophize on their mental operations. They strongly felt an impulse within them. They knew that it was a higher one, and in the simple poetry of thought they said, "God is speaking." The voice that spoke to Jacob was the voice within him, the voice of conscience—the same voice that speaks to us. 2. Observe, secondly, Jacob's preparation for this act of remembrance. He puts away the strange gods from his household. 3. The third thing we mark here is the consecration of the place (ver. 1). It is not in reference to God, but for a help to our own feelings that we consecrate certain spots of earth and buildings. There are sacred places, not sacred for their own sake, but sacred to us. Where we have loved and lost, where we have gained new light and life, the church where our forefathers worshipped, the place where we first knew God—these are by instinct hallowed. Hence we are told that God met Jacob in Bethel; not that He came down from another place, for He is everywhere, but that Jacob experienced a feeling of awe, a feeling that God was then specially near to him. In this meeting of Jacob with God, there are two facts to observe. (1) The first is that since he was last at Bethel he had increased in the knowledge of God. He knew Him then only as God, now he knows Him as the God Almighty (ver. 11). This is but a type of our own life; our knowledge of God must always be progressive. (2) Another thing we perceive, that in these twenty years there had been a growth in his personal religion. Once it had been but a selfish religion—he adopted a system of barter with God; if God will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, then shall God be my God (chap. xxix.). Now there is a higher step, it is gratitude; God has done it, and now God shall be his God (ver. 3)—a higher motive, but not the highest; he has yet to learn to serve Him, not in happiness, but in misery; to serve Him in trial, because He is God, and to learn to say simply and believingly, "Thy will be done." II. THE GATHERING OF HIS MISFORTUNES. 1. The first of these was one not so keenly felt—the death of Deborah, Rebekah's nurse. He buried her at Bethel, under an oak (ver. 8), and the story gives us an interesting view of the ancient relation between master and servant. 2. But Jacob's second blow was of a different kind—Rachel dies, his early and youthful passion, his beloved wife, the only one whom, with all his strength of affection, Jacob loved, and whose children were dearer for her sake to him than all the others. Even his father and fondly indulgent self-sacrificing mother he seems to have regarded with coldness. From this moment he becomes a mourner for the rest of his life; and yet we can see the infinite good of this. Jacob was a selfish, comfort-loving man; these sorrows drew him out of himself to think of something higher. 3. The last blow was the death of Isaac. (*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*) *Jacob's return to Bethel:—*I. GOD REMINDS OF HIS BENEFACCTIONS. "God, that appeared to thee," &c. 1. An incident of the past brought to mind. 2. The place of future dwelling indicated. 3. Continual worship required for continued favours. The altar should not be absent from the home. II. THE BENEFACITOR'S WILL OBEYED (vers. 2, 3). 1. An immediate response. "Then." 2. A proposal for preparation. "Put away"—wrong thoughts, desires, purposes,

practices. 3. A summons to Divine service. Self-devotion first, then concern for all whom we can influence. III. THE BENEFactor's GOODNESS ACKNOWLEDGED. 1. He declared God's supremacy. 2. He owned God's kindness. 3. He realized God's presence. (*M. Braithwaite.*) *Lessons from the life of Jacob*:—I. EVERY SPIRITUAL HISTORY HAS ITS SPECIAL PLACES, WHERE MEMORY LOVES TO LINGER, AND WHERE SPIRITUAL POWER PERTAINS. II. SPECIAL MERCIES DEMAND SPECIAL REMEMBRANCE. III. THE TEXT MAY BE APPLIED TO A DEVOUT REMEMBRANCE OF THE TIME AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF OUR EARLY CHRISTIAN LIFE. 1. Diligence in searching the Scriptures. 2. Fervour of private prayer and devotion. 3. Careful cultivation of the public means of grace. 4. Ardour of Christian zeal and work. The strong man grows stronger by exercise, so the robust Christian is always an active one. IV. [BETHEL WAS THE SCENE OF "VOWS" WHICH HAD BEEN PARTIALLY NEGLECTED AND FORGOTTEN. Prosperity has turned more heads than Jacob's. V. "DWELL THERE." A picture of a man of activity and business retiring to spend the leisure of age amidst the contemplations of religion and the memories of its power. (*G. Deane, B.Sc.*) *Jacob sent to Bethel*:—I. God's COMMAND TO WORSHIP. 1. This intimates that God places man in the most favourable circumstances to obey His commandments. 2. It intimates the employment of man's highest and noblest faculties. 3. It implies the necessity of having the consciousness of God's presence. 4. It suggests the spirit of entire dependence upon God. II. THE NECESSARY PREPARATION TO OBEY THIS COMMAND. 1. A willing heart. 2. A determination to have all obstacles removed. 3. A sincere love for the pure. III. THE RESULT OF POSSESSING A WORSHIPPING SPIRIT. 1. A manifestation of Divine power. 2. Safety in the midst of foes. (*Homilist.*) *Forgetfulness of God's goodness*:—I. HERE IS A REFERENCE TO JACOB'S PAST EXPERIENCE OF JEHOVAH'S KINDNESS. "The God that appeared to thee." 1. His fleeing from the wrath of an enraged brother. 2. The manifestation of God to him as his Friend. 3. His consecration of himself to God. II. HERE IS A CALL FOR GRATITUDE TO GOD FOR HIS PAST KINDNESS. "Arise, and go to Bethel." 1. God was peculiarly kind to Jacob. He had given him more than he asked—two wives, ten children, and large possessions (chaps. xxix., xxx., xxxi.). 2. God had subdued the anger of his brother, even though Esau had kept it up twenty years. 3. Jacob returned to his own country, but forgot his vow. He settles down for eight years before he visits Bethel, and not then until visited by a domestic affliction, and God thereby reminded him of his neglected duties; then he and his household went up to Bethel, and paid his vows, and had a renewed instance of God's favour. III. HERE LEARN A LESSON OF GRATITUDE TO THE GOD OF ALL YOUR MERCIES. For this is recorded for that purpose. 1. How many mercies have you to be thankful for! Not only common, but special mercies. 2. Many a place has been a Bethel to the Christian's soul. 3. Think of your vows and resolutions, and carry them out, and you will have renewed seasons of enjoyment, and fresh instances of the Divine favour. (*The Evangelical Preacher.*) *The forgotten vow*:—I. THE VOW MADE. II. THE VOW FORGOTTEN. A common occurrence. III. THE VOW CALLED TO REMEMBRANCE. 1. The Lord is never at a loss for means in order that His ends may be gained. 2. Mark the way in which He acts here. (1) First a gentle hint—"Arise, go to Bethel." (2) Then the command, "and make there an altar." 3. Has not the Lord brought your vows to your remembrance? (1) Failure. (2) Sickness. (3) Conscience. IV. THE VOW PAID. *Lessons*: 1. How soon the influences of the most impressive scenes may pass away. 2. God's forbearance when the performing of the vow is so long delayed. 3. By acting rightly ourselves, we influence others. 4. Bethel was to Jacob the house of God, and he went there. So it is right for you, in a particular place and in a marked manner, to perform your vow. (*A. F. Barfield.*) *Jacob returning to Bethel*:—I. JACOB WAS NOW IN A MOURNFUL STATE OF MIND, AND YET A VERY COMMON ONE. 1. Forgotten mercies. 2. Forgotten vows. II. Let us look now at the COMMAND GIVEN TO JACOB IN HIS FORGETFULNESS. 1. The Lord remembers our promises and vows. 2. The Lord often reminds His people of their forgotten mercies and vows. He did so in this case again and again. III. We come now to our third point—THE OBEDIENCE THE PATRIARCH RENDERED TO THE DIVINE COMMAND. 1. Here is something to surprise us. There were strange gods, we find, in the house of Jacob at this time; yes, idols in the house of almost the only man in the world who worshipped the true God; and he knew they were there, and tolerated them. Well may we ask, how was this? We must go back for an answer. The Rachel whom he so tenderly loved, and for whom he had so patiently waited and laboured, was an amiable and affectionate woman; but she wanted one thing,

and that one thing was a decided love for the Lord God of Israel. She had been brought up in an idolatrous country, and she herself was half an idolater. Accordingly, when he married her, he introduced a worshipper of false gods into his house; she had her secret idols, and she brought them with her. Here began, perhaps, Jacob's own forgetfulness of God, and here undoubtedly began much of the ungodliness and wretchedness of his children. Shall I say that we may learn here the vast importance of the connections which we form in the days of our youth? that there is a loud warning given here to the pious young never to let their affections wind round one who does not plainly and decidedly love the Lord? to let the heart break rather than give the heart to an idolater? I had rather speak to men like this patriarch, men who have households, children, and servants. I would say to them, Dear brethren, look through your houses and ask, "Are there no idols here? Is there nothing here that takes God's place in our hearts or our children's? Is there nothing here that is opposed to God's will and law, and tends to God's dishonour?" Bad books, bad company, dangerous amusements, practices which the world does not condemn nor even some of those who profess to live above the world, but such as will not bear the trial of Scripture for one moment, such as you would see the evil of in a moment did they not in some way or other fall in with your taste or interest—these are all idols; these will lead to irreligion and ungodliness in your houses: these will bring down on you God's displeasure and judgments. Mischief will rise up in your families from these things, and through your families God will smite you for them. 2. There is something also here to instruct us. It is the promptitude and decision of the patriarch's obedience. (*C. Bradley, M.A.*) *A call to religious observances*:—I. JACOB CALLED TO SERIOUS CONSIDERATION. Bethel was forgotten. How often is it forgotten by us! Time wears out the impressions of mercies received. Afflictions come upon us, public calamities, and the approach even of pestilence; we are alarmed and distracted, but we never think of our vow, and of raising our altar, and beginning a thorough, speedy downright conversion to God as the God of mercies. Brethren, we should often turn back the book of our lives. We are fond of reading many books, but no book would be so profitable as the book of our past history. II. THE PROMPT OBEDIENCE TO THE DIVINE ADMONITION WHICH JACOB RENDERED. The pious man, the conscientious master of a house, loses no time when Providence concurs with his own conviction of duty, in rousing him to religion, and in reminding him of his past neglects and family derelictions; and, therefore, we find Jacob addressing his household, and all that were with him, thus: "Put away the strange gods," &c. 1. Jacob addresses his household as one who well knew that he was answerable to God for it. 2. He exhorts them to put away the strange gods that were among them. Alas! idols will enter the best family, in spite of Jacob, because they are the creatures of the human heart, and they regard not Jacob's prohibition. Therefore, when providences are moving, when conscience is awakened, when every heart trembles, then Jacob must say to his family—and every head of a family, every master, every parent, must say unto his household—"Put away the strange gods that are among you." For whatever takes the place in our heart of the Lord God, is a strange god and an idol; whatever takes the place of God's name is an idol; whatever takes the place of God's revelation, God's truth, is an idol. A strange god! "Covetousness, which is idolatry." A strange god! The world is the strange god of the worldly-minded. Talents, beauty of person, dress, pleasure, are the strange gods of the young. 3. But besides putting away their strange gods, Jacob called his family to purity of heart. "Be clean, and change your garments." 4. Family prayer. The preceding led up to this. (1) Scriptural exhortations to this duty. (2) But, further, family prayer comes under the promise, "Where two or three are met together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." (3) The third argument is, the example of the saints in every age. (4) But the fourth argument is, that family prayer, like social, rests on the nature of man. We are destined to live in society, and are bound together by mutual wants and sympathies; and, therefore, man's religion, like his nature, must be social. (5) Once more, the duties of the head of a household towards his family cannot be discharged without its observance. You wish to train up your children in the fear of the Lord; but is it possible to do so while you neglect to afford them an example of what you wish them to practice. (*D. Wilson, M.A.*) *At Bethel again*:—I. THE ADMONITION FROM GOD. How common a fault it is, to put off some religious duty to what we think a more convenient season! Then, oftentimes, God reminds us by some affliction—some loss—some calamity—of our want of earnestness, and bids us do what we had long left undone in His service. II.

THE PURIFICATION OF JACOB'S HOUSEHOLD. 1. The strange gods were to be given up and put away. 2. They were, moreover, to cleanse themselves and to change their clothes. Outward signs of inward consecration and cleansing. **III. THE FULFILLMENT OF JACOB'S VOW.** **IV. THE RENEWAL OF GOD'S PROMISE.** 1. God reminds Jacob of his recent change of name. 2. God reminds Jacob of His own Almighty power. 3. God renews the Abrahamic promise in its threefold form of—(1) An onreaching blessing; (2) A promised numerous seed; (3) A promised possession of the land. (*W. S. Smith, B.D.*) *Family reformation; or, Jacob's second visit to Bethel:*—There are critical times in most families; times when much decision of character will be needed on the part of the father to guide things aright. Even the heathen outside began to smell the ill savour of Jacob's disorganized family, and the one alternative was—mend or end. If you notice, Jacob himself was in a bad way. His business was to remain in Canaan a mere sojourner, dwelling in tents, not one of the people, but moving about among them, testifying that he looked for "a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." He expected to inherit the land, but, for the time being, he was to be a stranger and a sojourner, as his fathers Abraham and Isaac had been. Yet at Succoth we read that he built booths—scarcely houses, I suppose, but more than tents. It was a compromise, and a compromise is often worse than a direct and overt disobedience of command. He dares not erect a house, but he builds a booth and thus shows his desire for a settled life; and though it is not ours to judge the purchase of land at Shechem, still it looks in the same direction. Jacob is endeavouring to find a resting-place where Abraham and Isaac had none. I will not speak too positively, but the patriarch's acts look as if he desired to find a house for himself, where he might rest and be on familiar terms with the inhabitants of the land. Now the Lord his God would not have it so. Children of God cannot mix with the world without mischief. The world does hurt to us and we to it when once we begin to be of the world and like it. It is an ill-assorted match. Fire and water were never meant to be blended. The seed of the woman must not mix with the seed of the serpent. A stand must be made. Something behoves to be done, and Jacob must do it. The Lord comes in, and He speaks with Jacob, and since the good man's heart was sound towards God's statutes, the Lord had only to speak to him and he obeyed. He was pulled up short, and made to look at things, and set his house in order, and he did so with that resolution of character which comes out in Jacob when he is brought into a strait, but which at other times is not perceptible. **I. First, then, WHAT WAS TO BE DONE?** 1. The first thing to do was to make a decided move. God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there." You must hasten away from Shechem, with its fertile plains, and make a mountain journey up to Bethel, and dwell there. You have been long enough near these Shechemites; mischief has come from your being so intimate with the world. You must cut a trench between yourselves and the associations you have formed, and you must go up to Bethel and remain there awhile. Every now and then we shall find it necessary to say to ourselves and to our family, "We must come out from among worldlings, we must be separate. We are forming connections which are injurious to us, and we must snap the deceitful bonds." 2. Now they must revive old memories. "Go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother." A revival of old memories is often most useful to us, especially to revive the memory of our conversion. Then you must come back to your first hours of communion. Where you lost your joy you will find it, for it remains where you left it. Then go back mourning and sighing to Bethel, and pray that the old feelings may be revived in you. 3. But now, again, Jacob must keep an old vow. I do not quite remember how many years old that vow was, but I suppose some thirty or so; yet he had not kept it. Be very slow to make vows, brethren—very slow. They should be but very seldom presented, because all that you can do for God you are bound to do as it is; and a vow is often a superfluity of superstition. But if the vow be made, let it not wait beyond its time, and complain of thee to thy God. An old and forgotten vow will rot and breed most solemn discomfort to thy heart; at first it will gnaw at thy conscience, and if thy conscience at last grows hardened to it, others of thy powers will suffer the same petrifying process. Moreover, a vow forgotten will bring chastisement on thee, and perhaps the rod will fall upon thy family. 4. It appeared to Jacob, next, that if he was to fulfil his vow, it was necessary to reform his whole house; for he could not serve the Lord and worship other gods. He said to all that were with him—to his sons first, and then to his hired servants and the

rest—"Put away the strange gods that are among you." Yes, it must come to that. If I am to get back to my old position with God I must break my idols. And then next he said, "Be clean." There was to be, I suppose, a general washing, indicative of purgation of character by going to God with repentance and seeking forgiveness. Jacob also said, "Change your garments." This was symbolic of an entire renewal of life, though I fear me they were not all renewed. At any rate this is what was symbolized by "Change your garments." Alas, it is easier to say this to our families than it is to get them to do it. And do we wonder? Since it is so much easier for ourselves to say than it is for ourselves to do. Yet, beloved, if your walk is to be close with God, if you are to commune with the God of Bethel, you must be cleansed. 5. Well, then, the next and last thing which they were to do was to celebrate special worship. "Let us arise, and go up to Bethel, and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went." When we get wrong and feel that there must be a decided change, we must set apart special times of devotion. Family prayer is the nutriment of family piety, and woe to those who allow it to cease. I read the other day of parents who said they could not have family prayer, and one asked this question: "If you knew that your children would be sick through the neglect of family prayer, would you not have it? If one child was smitten down with fever each morning that you neglected prayer, how then?" Oh, then they would have it. "And if there was a law that you should be fined five shillings if you did not meet for prayer, would you find time for it?" Yes. "And if there were five pounds given to all who had family prayer, would you not by some means arrange to have it?" Yes. And so the inquirer went on with many questions, and wound up with this: "Then it is but an idle excuse when you, who profess to be servants of God, say that you have no time or opportunity for family prayer!" Should idle excuses rob God of His worship and our families of a blessing? Begin to pray in your families, and especially if things have gone wrong get them right by drawing near to God more distinctly. II. And now I come to my second point—WHAT HAPPENED IN THE DOING OF IT? Well, several things happened, and one or two of those were rather surprising. 1. The first was that all heartily entered into the reforming work. I am sure they did, because the fourth verse says, "They gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hands"—all of them—"and all their earrings which were in their ears." He had not said anything about their earrings. Was there any hurt in their earrings? For a woman to wear an earring is not such a dreadful thing, is it? Perhaps not, but I suppose that these earrings were charms, and that they were used in certain incantations, and heathenish customs. Now, as soon as Jacob speaks they all give up their idols and their earrings. I like this. It is a blessed thing when a man of God takes a stand, and speaks, and finds that his family are all ready to follow. Perhaps it was the fear that was upon them just then, the fear of the nations round about which made them so obedient. I am not sure it was a work of grace; but still, as far as outward appearance went, there was a willing giving up of all that could have grieved the Lord. And you will sometimes be pleased, Christian friends, when things get wrong and you determine to set them right, to see how others will yield to your determination. You ought to take courage from this. 2. Another circumstance happened, namely, that protection was afforded him, immediate and complete. "They journeyed: and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob." "When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him"; and now that Jacob has determined to set things right he walks unharmed. You do not know how much of personal trouble which you are now bearing will vanish as soon as you determine to stand out for God. You do not know how much of family difficulty that now covers you with dread will vanish when you yourself have feared the Lord, and have come forth decidedly and determinedly to do the right. 3. In the next place the vow was performed. They came to Bethel, and I can almost picture the grateful delight of Jacob as he looked upon those great stones among which he had lain him down to sleep, a lonely man. He thought of the past, rejoiced in the present, and hoped for the future, for now he had come to be with God and to draw near to Him. 4. But what else happened? Why, now there came a death and a funeral. Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died. Her name means a bee. And we have had old nurses ourselves, have we not, who have been like busy bees in our household. The good nurse died when they seemed to want her most, but it was better for her to die then than that she should have departed when Dinah's shame and Simeon's

crime had made the household dark. It was better that she should live to see them purged from idols and on the road to her old master Isaac, for then she would feel as if she could say, "Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." The moral of the incident is that the Lord may heat the fire all the more when He sees the refining process going on, and we must receive the further trial as a token of love and not of anger if He smites us heavily when we are honestly endeavouring to seek His face.

III. Now we close with the third head, namely, *WHAT FOLLOWED THEREON*. All this putting away of idols and going to Bethel—did anything come of it? Yes. 1. First, there was a new appearance of God. Read the ninth verse. "And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padan-arara, and blessed him": this was a new appearance of God. It is worth while to have been purged and cleansed, and to have done anything to be favoured with one of those Divine visits in which we almost cry with Paul, "Whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell: God knoweth." A clear view of God in Christ Jesus and a vivid sense of Jesus' love is a sweet reward for broken idols and Bethel reformations. 2. The next thing that came of it was a confirmation to Jacob of his title of prince, which conferred a dignity on the whole family. For a father to be a prince ennobles all the clan. God now puts upon them another dignity and nobility which they had not known before, for a holy people are a noble people. You that live in God's presence are in the peerage of the skies. Such honour have all the saints who follow the Lord fully. God help us to keep close to Jesus, and enjoy daily communion with Him. 3. And then, next, there was given to Jacob and his family a vast promise, which was, in some degree, an enlargement of a promise made to Isaac and to Abraham before. "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins." I do not remember anything said to Abraham about a company of nations, or about kings coming out of his loins, but out of the loins of Israel, a prince, princes may come. God puts upon His promise a certain freshness of vastness and infinity now that Jacob has drawn near to Him. Brethren, God will give us no new promise, but He will make the old promises look wondrously new. He will enlarge our vision so that we shall see what we never saw before. Have you ever had a painting which hung neglected in some back room? Did it one day strike you that you would have it framed and brought into a good light? When you saw it properly hung on the wall did you not exclaim, "Dear me! I never noticed that picture before. How wonderfully it has come out"? And many and many a promise in God's Word will never be noticed by you till it is set in a new frame of experience. Then, when it is hung up before you, you will be lost in admiration of it. 4. I will not detain you except to say that you may also expect very familiar communion. Notice the thirteenth verse, "God went up from him in the place where He talked with him." Talked with him! Talked with him! It is such a familiar word. God talking with man. We say "conversing" when we are speaking in a dignified manner; but "talking!" Oh that blessed condescension of God when He speaks to us in the familiar tones of His great love in Christ Jesus. There is a way of converse with God which no tongue can explain: they only know it who have enjoyed it. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The revival*:—1. Observe, a season of prosperity is too frequently a season of religious decline. The religion of the Gospel, though it is a scheme of mercy, is a system of discipline. An undisturbed enjoyment of the goods of this world has, at the best, a sensualizing tendency. Now it is in these circumstances of repose—of gradual yielding to allowed indulgence—of lethargic sinking into spiritual self-complacency and inactivity, that men are apt to forget the vows of their distress, and, even within the sphere of their own influence and authority, to suffer sin around them without marking it with that holy indignation with which, at one time, it would have been reprobated and discountenanced. Without meaning to justify any thing decidedly wrong, the declining Christian, from the consciousness of his own listless and unprosperous state, and from a false application of the very principle of justice, deals more leniently with the faults of those around him than he would have done formerly, and remains silent when he ought to administer reproof. In the midst of comforts and indulgence we lose something of that holy jealousy, circumspection and activity, to which the heavy pressure of affliction and temptation had given birth. 2. But observe that God will not suffer His people to sink habitually into this state of spiritual sloth. He will, in His own time, deal strictly and retributively with the true Israel. We see this in the case of Jacob.

Painful and humiliating as was the visitation to which he was exposed, yet the whole evil might easily be traced to one source. The disgrace of his daughter, the fraud and cruelty of his sons, the dishonour and danger of his whole family, and the stain brought upon the cause of God and truth, might be all fairly attributed to his incautious sojourning among an unenlightened and careless people, at a time when he should have hastened to Bethel for the performance of his vow. The more we are enabled to look into the history of individual Christians, the more we shall find that their respected afflictions are especially calculated to correct the prevailing evil of their characters; and that they may be traced to close connection with some of their prominent moral defects. The naturally proud man is frequently touched in the very core of his pride. The covetous man is often annoyed by worldly anxieties and losses. Still even the afflictions which are permitted to arise out of a Christian's errors have a merciful intention. Their specific object is the more ample sanctification of his soul and body. They are to work out for him "the peaceable fruits of righteousness." 3. But observe, that when God really calls a man to a review, and a cleansing of his ways, He makes him serious and in earnest. Any attempts at reformation which originate in merely human effort, are in their extent partial, and in their duration transitory. And it is indeed a beautiful sight when we see the soul of a sincere Christian thoroughly awakened by the dispensations of providence, and by the quickening power of the Spirit of grace, to renewed devotion and activity for God. When the command comes with power into the soul, "Arise, and go up to Bethel," then there is no more parleying, delaying, or excuse. The same spirit is shown in the conduct of Jacob. He appears at once to have been roused to aim strenuously at the revival of religion both in himself and his family; and he addresses himself without delay to the confession of his neglect, to the performance of his duty, and to a close inspection into the state of his household, that they also, in whatsoever thing they had sinned against the Lord, should be thoroughly reformed and corrected. Such a work of revival is the work of God; and wherever it occurs, it will be marked by certain characteristics which cannot easily be mistaken; for they savour too strongly of that heaven from whence alone grace and holiness flow, to be fairly attributed to any other source. The call of God to renewed devotion produces a sincere surrender of all idolatrous attachments, either to the things or the persons of this world. "Put away your strange gods. And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods that were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears, and Jacob hid them in the oak which was Shechem." The call of God produces a cessation from all impurity of the flesh and of the spirit. The reviving call of God will appear in an honest endeavour to repair those breaches which negligence has made, and to remedy by greater effort the evil of time wasted, opportunities lost, evil habits acquired and strengthened, and vows unpaid. "Let us arise, and go up to Bethel, and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress." The call of God to a revival of religion will appear in a renewed and faithful application, in the means of grace, to God, as a reconciled and covenant God; and this one of the most prominent features—one of the most satisfactory indications of a sincere revival of religious hope and devotion. Again; a sincere revival of religious influence in the heart leads to renewed endeavours to produce a gracious change in those connections over whom we have any influence. It is not sufficient to a gracious spirit to serve God alone. If we feel His love, and value His salvation, we shall be anxious for others—both for the honour of God, and for their eternal welfare. The unfailing mercy of the Lord extended yet farther; for we observe that when the humbled and penitent patriarch presented himself at last at Bethel, and built his promised altar there, "God appeared unto him again," in unchanging faithfulness and grace, "and blessed him, and renewed with him there His covenant and His promise." The subject addresses itself especially to one class, of hearers—to those who, by experience, can sympathize with Jacob in this part of his history. It speaks to those who have "felt the powers of the world to come" and tasted of the heavenly gift." (*E Craig.*)

Vers. 2-4. Put away the strange gods that are among you.—The putting away of idols.—I. MANY CHRISTIANS ARE SUFFERING FROM SPIRITUAL DECLENSION. They hardly realize it, it has crept on them so quietly; but they have drifted far away from their Bethel and Peniel. Gray hairs are on a man before he knows. Summer fruit is beginning to rot within long before its surface is pitted with specks. The leaf's connection with the branch is severed, even when it looks green. The devil

is too shrewd to make Judases at a stroke; he wins us from the side of Christ by hair-breadths. II. IDOLS ARE THE INEVITABLE SYMPTOM OF INCIPIENT DECAY. Go at autumn into the woods and see how the members of the fungus tribes are scattered plentifully throughout the unfrequented glades. All through the long scorching summer days their germs were present in the soil; but they were kept from germinating by the dryness of the air and the heat of the sun. However, there is now nothing to prevent it; nay, the dank damp of decay is the very food of their life. Where the shade is deepest and the soil most impregnated with the products of corruption, they love to pitch their tents. Wherever, therefore, you find these fungus growths, you may be sure that there is corruption and decay. Similarly, whenever there has set in upon the spiritual life the autumn of decay, you will be sure to find a fungus—growth of idols—the sorrowful symptoms that the bright summer time has passed, or is passing away from the soul. III. THESE IDOLS MUST BE SURRENDERED BEFORE THERE CAN BE VICTORY OR PEACE. The reason for Jacob's flight before those alien tribes was, of course, the censurable and merciless action of his sons; but above and beyond this lay the fact that Jacob had been giving some measure of countenance to the existence of idolatry in the camp. I always find in Christian experience that failure and defeat indicate the presence of some idol somewhere and the need of more complete consecration to God. It may be a hidden idol; and it may be hidden by the Rachel of your heart, lovely and beloved: but if it be there it will be the certain cause of disappointment. You say that you do not find yourself able to overcome besetting sin; that you are tripped up before you look to Christ; that you are sometimes hot as juniper-coals, and then cold as ice; you talk about your experiences as if Christ had failed—no such thing! Get down on your knees, search out the idols, ransack all the camel-baggage in spite of all that Rachel may say, bring out the accursed things, and bury them. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Buried idols*:—Jacob did not break or burn the idols, but hid them. Jacob's besetting sin was double-dealing, and it appears to us the text is another example of the patriarch's special failing. He was not altogether weaned from his idols, he had a lingering regard for them; he did not, even yet, yield himself fully to Jehovah. Let us show—I. How we may still be guilty of the equivocal conduct recorded in the text. 1. We are thus guilty when we retain privately those evil practices we have renounced in public. Iniquity is iniquity to God, whether done in the eye of the sun or wrought in thickest darkness; whether coarse or refined; whether called by its true name or wrapped in glozing gilded speech. Burke tells of that "sensibility of principle, that chastity of honour which ennobled whatever it touched, and under which vice itself lost half its evil by losing all its grossness." This is rhetoric. When vice is divested of all grossness it has not lost a particle of its evil in the judgment of heaven; the secret idol, the idol skilfully veiled or richly adorned by taste, is equally hateful to God with the open and gross idolatries of inferior civilization. 2. We are thus guilty when we practise partially the evils we have renounced as a whole. In the days of the English Reformation, the reformers finding the coloured windows in the churches to be objects of reverence to the people, ordered them to be broken and replaced by plain glass. But where the authorities had a love for the beautiful they contented themselves by taking out a few panes here and there—a saint's head, a martyr's nimbus, an angel's wing, and having thus mutilated the figures, trusted they would do no harm. Somewhat after this fashion are men apt to renounce the world and sin. We deal delicately with things, habits, associations, pursuits, pleasures, employments, which ought to be utterly sacrificed, and sacrificed for ever. 3. We are thus guilty when we retain mentally what we have renounced in action. It is possible that the idols of life which have no longer any concrete existence may find asylum in the heart and brain, and be most steadily worshipped there. This is true—(1) When the evil renounced in the life is not also renounced in the will. (2) When the evil renounced in our life is cherished in our imagination we are victims of the patriarch's fallacy. It has been said: "It is possible to lead a life of imagination quite distinct from the active life." This is quite true. Our life may be as blameless on the practical side as it is stained on the mental side. (3) When the evil renounced in our life is cherished in affection we similarly err. We profess renunciation of the world—of its pomps and vanities; yet do we sympathize with the merely secular side of life. How intoxicated we are by a little prosperity! How depressed by a little adversity! The world has still a place in our heart; we are not altogether rid of the great idol. II. We must feel the importance of COMPLETE CONSECRATION TO GOD. This secret clinging to sin is a

source of weakness, unhappiness, and peril. The apostle writes to the Romans, "ye are dead to sin." How completely this idea cuts us off from the world of evil! how utterly it separates us from all godlessness and wickedness! We once heard a converted Persian relate that when he was converted to Christianity his angry kindred considered him a dead man, and celebrated his funeral obsequies accordingly. They were not far wrong. When one is converted to Christ he has absolutely renounced sin, the world may justly count him dead, and all the vices follow his bier. (W. L. Watkinson.) *A needed reformation*:—No sooner is Jacob admonished to go to Bethel, than he feels the necessity of a reformation, and gives command for it. This proves that he knew of the corrupt practices of his family, and had too long connived at them. We are glad however to find him resolved at last to put them away. A constant attendance on God's ordinances is dwelling as it were in Bethel; and it is by this that we detect ourselves of evils which we should otherwise go on in without thought or concern. It is coming to the light, which will manifest our deeds, whether they be wrought in God or not. Wicked men may reconcile the most sacred religious duties with the indulgence of secret sins; but good men cannot do so. They must wash their hands in innocency, and so compass God's altar. Jacob not only commands his household to put away their idols, but endeavours to impress upon them his own sentiments. "Let us arise," saith he, "and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went." He is decided for himself, and uses all means to persuade his family to unite with him. His intimating that God had heretofore "answered him in the day of his distress," might be designed not only to show them the propriety of what he was about to do, but to excite a hope that God might disperse the cloud which now hung over them on account of the late impure and bloody transaction. (A. Fuller.) *Lessons*:—1. Grace keeps hearts close in obedience unto God's call. 2. It is the duty of conscience in all governors of families and others to enjoin all with them to obey God's call. It is no violence. 3. It is rulers' duty in order to reconcile God, so much as they may, to bring souls to repentance. 4. The first part of repentance is to depart from evil. 5. Governors are bound to turn all under them from outward evils which they may prevent. 6. Images and relics of idolatry may not be suffered in the families of Jacob's children. 7. Repentance requireth not only negative but positive cleanness. 8. Typical repentance in outward washings was in the Church before the law was written. 9. Real endowment with righteousness unto God's likeness was intended by it (ver. 2). 10. It is Jacob's work to rouse his family to move towards God (so good rulers will do) when he himself is roused by Him. 11. Not only preparation but motion must be in penitents to God's house. 12. Repentance is then complete when men are brought fully home to God. 13. God is reached unto when His true worship is entertained by men. 14. God may and doth use some eminent minister to set up His worship, that others might know it. 15. God is known to Jacob and his seed to be a God answering prayer. 16. All good providences to Jacob are mercies truly to his family. 17. Mercies of God to our fathers while we enjoy them bind us to own and worship the same God (ver. 3). (G. Hughes, B.D.) *Lessons*:—1. When rulers obey God's call, He maketh subjects obey theirs. 2. Where God overpowers, souls freely and fully part with their desired jewels of vanity and superstition. 3. Good rulers will execute as well as enjoin sentence against false gods. 4. In bringing false worshippers to God, it is good to bury the monuments of their sin out of sight. 5. Jacob-rulers will not be content but in the destruction of all means of false worship. 6. Monuments of idolatry must die at Shechem, and not live at Bethel (ver. 4). (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 6, 7. So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Bethel, he and all the people that were with him. And he built there an altar, and called the place El-beth-el; because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother.—*The obituary of a name*:—"Jacob" is dead; "Israel" still lives. I want now to pronounce the obituary of "Jacob." There are just two classes of lessons to be learned from the story of Bethel and Peniel, for there were just two persons in contact and conflict in this thirty years' war. The type of all is found in the early vision of the ladder. At the foot of it lay Jacob on his pillow of stone: "And behold, the Lord stood above it." Hence one class of lessons will instruct us concerning God, and one concerning man. One touches on doctrine, the other on duty. So everywhere "The Scriptures principally teach what we are to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man." I.

We begin with the lessons of DOCTRINE. The same Divine Being, with all attributes and characteristics unchanged, rules to-day as then. It is wisely worth our while to note how He is wont to deal with a free-willed human creature, and how He manages a world of such. 1. Mark, for one thing, how independent God is in choosing His especial agents. He chooses whom He will for His purposes; and He chose this man Jacob. 2. Now let us learn a second lesson, and possibly we shall derive some slight help before we get through with that. See how wise God is in discriminating character. Why did God choose Jacob rather than Esau? Because he was the more serviceable man of the two. The long run in those days was a more desirable thing than the short cut. Patient steadiness was more serviceable for the Divine ends than mere executive rush. James would have been better than Peter to go on Old Testament errands. 3. But we pass on to a third lesson: indeed, we feel the need of it. Mark here how persistent God is in preparing men for a better life by means of His choice. Just tell over the old fable as you used to tell it to your little children, for there is an illustration of Divine truth in it; I mean that about the coward whose cure was effected by an enchanted sword put in his hand. He was timid enough, but the trusty blade was of itself belligerent. He could not drop it, for it clung to his hand. He could not run to the rear, for the sword remained steadily at the head of the attack. He could not surrender, for the moment he got his foolish lips ready to cry for quarter, the weapon had already leapt from the scabbard and was fighting like a thing of life. So at last he began to understand it, then he began to obey it, then he began to watch it, then he began to trust it; and then he began to be a new man under its working. And home from the campaign he came, the welkin ringing with praises of his prowess. There is fine truth in that little tale. The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. It converts the man who carries it. And before you go any further in commenting on the singular choice God made of Jacob, thoughtfully consider that the choice was the exact force which made Jacob Israel. 4. One more lesson under this head; see here how perfectly satisfied God seems to be with the result of His election. II. LESSONS OF DUTY. 1. One is concerning the recognition of God in even the personal biographies of men. 2. Another lesson is concerning what are sometimes called hard cases. "All the wood-carvings in God's temple have been made out of knots!" 3. A third lesson is concerning the value of even one high attainment of grace. You see in some true Christians the glory of superior meekness; in others the beauty of unusual zeal. So on: these excellencies are costly. They are rare; they have used up labour; they have been found with pain; but they transform and transfigure the whole character. The little child asked its aged grandparent, as it laid its tiny finger in the furrow of his forehead, "What made that wrinkle?" He might well ask, for an artist would have said it alone was the old man's feature of beauty. But what made it? An early sorrow first cut it, deep, sharp, painful. Then a time of generous success rounded its edges somewhat. Then a loss went over the line and made it plainer. As life rolled on, that wrinkle became one of the permanent institutions of the countenance, so that things gladdening and things saddening all went into it. And by-and-by there came to be fixed this quiet, resigned, gentle line in the face, to give it all its character. The Italians call Time "an inaudible file." It took fifty years to smooth and fashion that one exquisite expression. So there are lines on the soul which do not come at conversion or grow in an hour. It is better to begin early to work for such. Any one may miss his chance by being careless and getting behindhand. 4. Our final lesson is concerning the folly of losing thirty years of time. (*C. S. Robinson, D.D.*) *Jacob back at Bethel*.—I. THAT MEN ARE LIABLE TO SUFFER LOSSES IN THIS WORLD EVEN WHEN OBEYING GOD'S COMMANDMENTS. II. THAT WHEN OBEYING GOD'S WORD WE MAY EXPECT TO MEET GOD HIMSELF. 1. Meeting God is to have a greater knowledge of ourselves. 2. Meeting God is to have a clearer revelation of Him. 3. Meeting God will increase our usefulness. 4. Meeting God gives us an assurance of the future. III. MEETING GOD IS A MEMORABLE EVENT. (*Homilist*.) *Lessons*.—1. God securing His by His terrors upon enemies, they come in safety where God calleth them. 2. Names of places old and new may be indifferently used without superstition. 3. God's providence brings all with Jacob into the place of His security (ver. 6). 4. Jacob is working to honour providence, even as that worketh to save them. 5. Double indigitation of God's name do His saints make upon continued goodness. 6. The revelation of God by Himself or angels requireth worship from His saints to the utmost (ver. 7). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Grateful memory*.—In the midst of his greatest prosperity George Moore never forgot

"ruld Cumberland." His mind was always turning back to the home of his birth and the scenes of his boyhood. The very name of Cumberland had a charm for him. When any Cumberland lad called upon him at his office, he welcomed him cheerfully, asked him to his house, and often got him a situation. (*S. Smiles.*) *Past scenes*:—The early childhood of Dean Hook was spent at the rectory of Hertingfordbury, and to this, the house of his earliest recollections, he ever looked back with the fondest affection. A very few years before his death he made a journey with his youngest son specially to see it: to pace once more the pleasant lawn and garden, and to see if the names were still legible which in his boyhood he had carved upon some of the trees that shaded the path by the river-side, the names of himself and of his friend William Page Wood, together with the names of Shakespeare and Milton, both of whom they loved with passionate devotion.

Ver. 8. **Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died.**—*Lessons*:—1. Sad providences in the loss of dearest friends may befall the saints when they are in duty with God. 2. Parents' friends should be dear unto, and accepted with their children also, especially gracious ones (Prov. xxvii. 10). 3. Death and burial are the events of providence unto the holiest and the oldest and dearest friends. 4. Burial places are of natural and not religious consideration, any fit place pointed out by providence. 5. Old gracious friends, as they live desired, so they die lamented. 6. Lamentations for good old friends, deceased, is a duty beseeeming God's church, yet not without hope. 7. Saints mourn for the loss of friends for goodness sake, not for gain. Jacob had no gain by Deborah. 8. Monuments of said providences, and lamentations over them, are not unbecoming saints to make. (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Death of Deborah*:—"But," continues the narrative, "but Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died"; that is, although Jacob and his house were now living in the fear of God, that did not exempt them from the ordinary distresses of family life. And among these, one that falls on us with a chastening and mild sadness all its own, occurs when there passes from the family one of its oldest members, and one who has by the delicate tact of love gained influence over all, and has by the common consent become the arbiter and mediator, the confident and counsellor of the family. They, indeed, are the true salt of the earth whose own peace is so deep and abiding, and whose purity is so thorough and energetic, that into their ear we can disburden the troubled heart or the guilty conscience, as the wildest brook disturbs not and the most polluted founts not the settled depths of the all-cleansing ocean. Such must Deborah have been, for the oak under which she was buried was afterwards known as "the oak of weeping." Specially must Jacob himself have mourned the death of her whose face was the oldest in his remembrance, and with whom his mother and his happy early days were associated. Very dear to Jacob, as to most men, were those who had been connected with and could tell him of his parents, and remind him of his early years. Deborah, by treating him still as a little boy, perhaps the only one who now called him by the pet name of childhood, gave him the pleasantest relief from the cares of manhood and the obsequious deportment of the other members of his household towards him. So that when she went a great blank was made to him: no longer was the wise and happy old face seen in her tent door to greet him of an evening; no longer could he take refuge in the peacefulness of her old age from the troubles of his lot; she being gone, a whole generation was gone, and a new stage of life was entered on. (*M. Dods, D.D.*) *Rebekah and her nurse*; or, *friendly counsels to employers and employed*:—Here is a servant remaining in the same family through four generations, leaving Laban's house with Rebekah, when a young bride, going with her into a distant country, living and serving in that family till one after another are conveyed to the grave. First, the elements of character in servants; second, the elements of character in the employer that would help to form and lead to the appreciation and honour of such a character in the employed. I. I will begin by detailing some of the more important elements of character in servants. 1. There must be in the servant a sense of responsibility to God. 2. Then you have another characteristic, that of willingly and cheerfully doing her work. 3. Then servants must be truthful. 4. Then faithfulness—just let us look at this. Faithfulness is to action what truthfulness is to word. 5. Faithfulness also implies frugality. 6. Then with regard to the influence on little children; as, you know, nursery rhymes and nursery talk cling to the child, when it has forgotten things that he had acquired in maturer life. 7. Then another thing is obedience. II. Now, a few remarks in regard to the character of employers. 1. He too must have the fear of God in his heart, as the

ground of all his obligations, not only to God, but to his fellow-creatures. 2. Then there must be justice done by the employer to the employed. 3. In the next place, there must be order on the part of the employer. 4. Then next there must be right example before the servants on the part of the master and mistress. 5. Benevolence should be another part of the master's character. Finally, I would direct the employer and employed to that world where the faithful servant of God will receive an inheritance that will never pass away, and a crown that will never perish, and where both masters and servants, who have followed the Lord in their lives, will become priests and kings unto God for ever. (*T. Thomas.*)

Vers. 9, 10. God appeared unto Jacob again.—*Lessons*:—1. God useth to knit comforts unto griefs for His saints. When creature comforts go out of sight, God cometh in. 2. God's appearance is enough to countervail the disappearance of any comfort. 3. In various ways God hath appeared to His saints, but now only in Christ. 4. Repeated manifestations of Himself doth God afford to the necessities of His saints. 5. All God's gracious appearances are to bless His people. 6. God's blessing for this life and that which is to come is effectual. (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. God makes good His general blessing in special effects to His saints. 2. God minds His saints of their own mean name and state in changing it. 3. God alone removeth the lost estate and name of His people. 4. God alone bringeth His saints to a higher name and state. 5. God's sanction alone settles the name and glory of His saints. 6. This sanction God repeats at His pleasure for His people (ver. 10). (*Ibid.*) **He called his name Israel.**—*The Divine culture of a human life*:—I. THE WAY IN WHICH ALL JACOB'S PREVIOUS CULTURE TENDED TO THIS ONE RESULT OF MAKING HIM AN ISRAEL. II. THE WAY IN WHICH ALL JACOB'S SUBSEQUENT EXPERIENCES IN LIFE TENDED TO THE CONFIRMING IN HIM OF THE CHARACTER OF AN "ISRAEL." Even to the end of Jacob's life, God did not wholly remit His discipline. Loss of Joseph, famine, anxiety respecting Benjamin, &c. III. WHAT A GLORIOUS ISSUE IT WAS TO A LIFE SO UNTOWARDLY BEGUN, THAT, BY THE DIVINE CULTURE, IT SHOULD BE THUS TRANSFORMED FROM THE CHARACTER OF A "SUPPLANTER" INTO THAT OF AN "ISRAEL." 1. It is a glorious thing for a man, by means of a Divine discipline of life, to be made acquainted with the characteristics of his own nature. 2. It is a glorious thing to have life enriched with manifold experiences. 3. It is a glorious thing to be made conscious of moral improvement and advantage. 4. It is a glorious thing to be brought into intimate fellowship and communion with God. (*W. Roberts.*)

Ver. 11. I am God Almighty.—*God's arm sufficient*:—In like manner God has spoken to Abraham: He had said, "I am the Almighty God; walk before Me and be thou upright." The declaration of almightiness is, according to the sacred narrative, the first declaration of God concerning Himself. A sense of power is one of the first endowments to which we awaken. Almightyness is power without limit. God cannot lie, He cannot be tempted with evil, He cannot act contrary to His own nature, but He can do all that He wills to do. 1. God can create. He can create what He wills, when He pleases, as He will, and for His own pleasure. He has created all things—all matter, all spirit. 2. God can create, and He can make, that is, adapt, fashion, mould, and organise all these materials. We can make, but we cannot create; God can do both. 3. God can control all He makes and creates. God can over-rule; He can create, and make, and control, and He can over-rule. For example, He can permit His image on earth to be broken, and then repair the ruin, and make the ruined image much more glorious than the primitive likeness. This is over-ruling. He can allow sin to enter the world without Himself being chargeable with the entrance of that sin; and He can take it away by an all-sufficient sacrifice. He can suffer all nations to walk for a time in their own ways, and then He can restore them to the paths of righteousness. 4. God can destroy. He can blot out all races and classes of creatures, as He has done on our planet. He can reduce the world to chaos, or burn it with fire, and resolve it into its original elements. He can cause them to fly as vapours through space afterwards. Often has He destroyed cities, and their memorial has perished with them, and perhaps has He destroyed worlds. 5. God can retain His own life from everlasting to everlasting. "I am," saith He, "that I am." There is no limit put to God's power by decay or by death, or by any prospect or fear of such dissolution. No plan is contracted, no work is interrupted. 6. Every attribute of God is a power. His infinity is the fulness of power; His eternity the continuance of power; His spirituality the

highest kind of power, power inexhaustible and incapable of weariness. There is power in His knowledge. If there is power in our limited information, what power there must be in the knowledge that embraces all things. There is power in His wisdom, power in His love, power in His blessedness, power in the happiness, and power in the peace of God. There is power in God's own sense of power. There is power in all that constitutes His goodness. God has no weakness, or shadow of impotency; none from the presence of any evil, and none from the absence of any good; no fear, no remorse, no doubt, no hesitation, no suspicion, no imperfection. To God all things are possible. Is anything too hard for Him? 7. God can redeem. Such was the sufficiency of God for this work, that He so loved the world as to give His only Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. And in the application of the provisions of this redemption, what do we see? We see men born again; so great is God's power, that we find in connection with the Christian dispensation, there is new creation—old things passing away, all thing becoming new. This dispensation finds men dead in sin; it leaves them quickened. It finds them grovelling on the earth like wounded worms; and it fits them to fly in the heavens as with the wings of the eagle. Brethren, fear to rebel against this God Almighty. How vain is your resistance and your defiance. What if you set Him at naught! You may judge as to the issue; who will prevail—you, a mortal, dust and ashes, or this God Almighty. (S. Martin.)

Vers. 16-20. **Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Beth-lehem.**—*The death of Rachel*.—I. IN ITS SOLEMN AND MELANCHOLY ASPECT. 1. It was death upon a journey. 2. It was death in the time of travail. 3. It was death just when his old fond desire was accomplished. II. IN ITS HOPEFUL AND PROPHECIC ASPECT. 1. It teaches the doctrine of victory through pain. 2. It teaches that death is not annihilation. "As her soul was in departing (for she died)" (ver. 18). Death is here represented, not as the complete extinction of all thought and feeling, but as the separation of soul and body. It is not a sinking into nought, but only a change of state and place. 3. It teaches us what is the characteristic mark of God's chosen people. Israel of old had the portion of affliction, and thus became the time of the Messiah, whose peculiar and distinctive mark was, that He was "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isa. liii. 3). Rachel was the ancestress of the suffering children of Israel. 4. It teaches a lesson of encouragement to all mothers dying in similar circumstances. (T. H. Leale.) *Rachel's death*.—Thus she that had said, "Give me children, or I die," died in child-birth! Several circumstances which attended this afflictive event are deserving of notice. (1) The words of the midwife: "Fear not: thou shalt have this son also." When Rachel bare her first son, she called him Joseph, that is, adding; "for," said she, by a prophetic impulse, "the Lord shall add to me another son." It is probably in reference to this that the midwife spake as she did. Her words, if reported to Jacob, with the recollection of the above prophetic hint, would raise his hopes, and render his loss more affecting, by adding to it the pain of disappointment. They appear to have no influence however on Rachel. She has the sentence of death in herself, and makes no answer; but turning her eyes towards the child, and calling him "Ben-oni, the son of my sorrow," she expired! (2) The terms by which her death is described. "As her soul was in departing." An ordinary historian would have said, as she was dying, or as she was ready to expire: but the Scriptures delight in an impressive kind of phraseology, which at the same time shall both instruct the mind and effect the heart. It was by means of such language, on various occasions, that the doctrine of a future state was known and felt from generation to generation among the Israelites, while the heathen around them, with all their learning, were in the dark upon the subject. (3) The change of the child's name—"She called his name Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin." The former, though very appropriate at the time, yet if continued, must tend perpetually to revive the recollection of the death of his mother; and of such a monitor Jacob did not stand in need. The name given him, signified, the son of my right hand; that is, a son of the most tender affection and delight, inheriting the place which his mother had formerly possessed in his father's heart. If the love of God be wanting, that of a creature will often be supreme; and where this is the case, the loss of the object is frequently known to leave the party utterly inconsolable; but though the affection of a good man may be very strong, and his sorrow proportionably very deep; yet he is taught to consider that every created good is only lent him; and that his generation work

being as yet unfulfilled, it is not for him to feel melancholy, nor to pore over his loss with a sullenness that shall unfit him for duty, but rather to divert his affections from the object that is taken, and direct them to those that are left. (4) The stone erected to her memory, and which appears to have continued for many generations. Burying her in the place where she died, "Jacob set a pillar upon her grave"; and that was the pillar of Rachel's grave when her history was written. It was near this place, if not upon the very spot, that the tribe of Benjamin afterwards had its inheritance: and therefore it is that the people who lived in the times of Jeremiah are called Rachel's children. The babes which Herod murdered are also so called. (*A. Fuller.*) *Lessons*.—1. Providence ordereth the saints below no long settlement, but to move sometimes from desired places. 2. Motions from Bethel to Ephrath, from God's comforts to God's chastenings are ordered to God's saint's by himself. 3. Providential afflictions may betide God's dearest servants unexpectedly in their ways. 4. Souls exorbitantly desirous of children, may have them from God with bitterness enough (ver. 16). 5. The bitterest pains in child-bearing may befall the best of women. 6. It is the midwife's honour, with God's Spirit, to be pitiful and comfortable unto women in travail. 7. God doth add sons to His in their earnest desires sometimes, wherein they may take little delight (Gen. xxx. 24). 8. Providence sometimes brings living children out of dying mothers (Ver. 17). 9. Killing pains in child-bearing may befall souls to much longing for children. 10. Dying mothers in their passions may name children their griefs and not their joy. 11. Souls die not, but go out of bodies to God who gave them (Eccles. xii. 7). 12. Tender affection in fathers name their children more dear which they have with loss of wives (ver. 18). 13. Rachels may die when Leahs live, the beloved before the despised. 14. Comely interment is a duty to relations in all places, where providence calleth them away. 15. Places notable for births and burials are sometimes noted by God's spirit (ver. 19). 16. It is suitable to nature and not contrary to grace, to set up and keep memorials of deceased relations. 17. Durable monuments of providences may be useful for posterity. 18. It is not unlawful to leave monuments of the dead, only vanity and superstition avoided (ver. 20). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*)

Ver. 18. Ben-oni.—*The marks of a Ben-oni*.—These words were spoken of Rachel, Jacob's wife. Her youngest child had just been born: she was very sick, and was going to die. The little child was lying by her. She called to see it; she kissed it, and called his name Ben-oni. Ben-oni means, "the son of my sorrow." This child was about to occasion the death of his mother, and therefore she gave him this name. She was sorry to leave her husband, her family, and her friends; and this feeling of sorrow led her to call his name Ben-oni. "But his father called him Benjamin." Benjamin means, "the son of a right hand." Our right hand is a great comfort and blessing to us. What could we do without a right hand? Now, every child that is born into this world will be either a Ben-oni or a Benjamin. There is not much difference between these two names, but there is a great deal of difference between the natures which they represent. Now, the great question for us to consider is, What are the marks of a Ben-oni or of a Benjamin? We shall mention four things which may always be considered as the marks of a Ben-oni; and the opposite of these, of course, will be the marks of a Benjamin. 1. The first mark of a Ben-oni—"a child of sorrow"—is **ILL-TEMPER**. Suppose you had to walk four or five miles with a pebble in your shoe; or suppose you had to wear a coat or dress with a pin sticking in it; or suppose you had to lie all night in bed with a porcupine by your side, sticking you with his sharp-pointed quills—what an uncomfortable thing it would be! But none of these things are so uncomfortable as to be connected with an ill-temper. All peevish, cross, ill-natured children are Ben-onies—children of sorrow to their parents and the families where they dwell. There was a rich nobleman in England who had a little daughter named Anne. They were very fond of her; for she was a fine little creature, very lively, and merry, and affectionate, and exceedingly beautiful. But she had a very ill temper. When anything vexed her she would fly into a rage, and turn and strike any one that provoked her. After every fit of anger she would be ashamed and sorry, and resolve never to do so again. But the next time she was provoked it was all forgotten, and she was as angry as ever. When she was between four and five years of age, her mother had a little son, a sweet little tender baby. Anne's nurse, who was thoughtless and wicked, loved to tease her, because she was so easily irritated; and so she told her that her father and mother would not care for her now, because

all their love and pleasure would be in this little brother, and they would not mind her. Poor Anne burst into a flood of tears, and cried bitterly, saying, "You are a naughty woman to say so! Mamma will always love me; I know she will, and I'll go this very moment and ask her." And she ran out of the nursery and hastened to her mother's room. The servant called after her: "Come, miss, you needn't go to your mother's room; she won't see you now." Anne burst open the door, but was instantly caught hold of by a strange woman she had never seen before. "My dear," said this woman, "you cannot see your mother just now"; and she was going on to tell that it was because she was very sick, and could not be disturbed. But she was too angry to listen; and she screamed and kicked at the woman, who was obliged to take her by force and carry her back to the nursery. When she put her down she gave the servant a charge not to let her go to her mother's room. This added to her rage. But the thoughtless, wicked servant, instead of trying to soothe and quiet her, burst out into a laugh, and said, "I told you that, miss. You see your mamma does not love you now." Then the poor child became mad with fury. She seized a smoothing-iron, and, darting forward, threw it upon the baby's head as it lay in the cradle. The child gave one struggle, and breathed no more. Anne's mother died that night of grief. Anne grew up in the possession of great riches. She had every outward comfort about her that money could procure; but she was a very unhappy and miserable woman. She was never known to smile. The thought of the terrible consequences of that one outburst of passion pressed upon her like a heavy burden all her days. Ah! what a Ben-oni this girl became! She was a child of sorrow to her parents. Her ill-temper made her so. If you give way to such tempers, my dear young friends, you will certainly be Ben-onies; but if you strive and pray against such feelings, and try to be gentle, kind, and pleasant to those around you, then you will be Benjamins—children of the right hand to your parents. See, now, how differently such children will act. A gentleman was walking on the Battery, in the city of New York, one day, and, as he passed a little girl who was cheerfully rolling her hoop, he said to her, "You are a nice little girl"; to which she replied, patting her little brother on the head, "And Bobbie is a nice little brother too." Here was a good-temper, which would make this dear child "a child of the right hand" to her parents, and cause her to be loved by all who were about her. II. The second mark of a Ben-oni is IDLENESS. Idle children love to lie in bed in the morning; they love to do nothing all day, if they can help it, but play. It is a great trouble to get them to study, to read, or to work. Now, idle children always make idle men; for the habits which children form while they are children will surely remain with them when they grow up to be men and women. Now, we are to remember, dear children, that God is busy at all times, and almost everything that God has made is busy. Look at the sun; it is always at work, shining and shining and shining from one year's end to the other. In the daytime it is shining in our part of the world, and when it is night to us it is shining in the opposite part of the world. And so it is with the moon—always shining in one part of the world or the other. So it is with the sea; its waves are rising, and falling, and rolling, and flowing continually. So it is with the rivers; they are continually running, from the fountains where they spring, on, on to the ocean. And so it is with the little birds, and little fishes, and the bees, and the ants—none of these are idle. A gentleman in England had an estate which was worth over two hundred pounds a year. For a while he kept his farm in his own hands, but at length found himself so much in debt that he was obliged to sell one-half of his place to pay up. The rest he let out to a farmer for several years. Towards the end of that time, the farmer, on coming to pay his rent, asked him whether he would sell his farm. The gentleman was surprised that the farmer should be able to make him an offer for his place. "Pray, tell me," said he, "how it happens that, while I could not live upon twice as much land, for which I paid no rent, you are regularly paying me about one hundred pounds a year for the farm, and able in a few years to purchase it?" "The reason is plain," answered the farmer; "it lies in the difference between 'go' and 'come.'" "I do not understand you," said the gentleman. "I mean," said the farmer, "that you sat still and said, 'Go'; I get up and say 'Come.' You lie in bed, and enjoy your ease; I rise early in the morning, and attend to my business." In other words, this was an industrious man; there was no love of idleness about him, and this led to his success in life. III. The third mark of a Ben-oni is PRIDE. Some children are proud of their clothes. This is very silly indeed; for the butterflies have much more beautiful clothes than we, and yet they are never proud of their dress. Some

children are proud of their families. This also is very silly, for we have all sprung at first from one father. Some children are proud about their houses. This, too, is very silly, for, by-and-by, they will all crumble into the dust, from which they have been taken, while the grave is the one house to which we must all come at last. Proud children feel and think themselves better than others, and are often unwilling to engage in honest and honourable employments. Listen to what I am going to tell you. Chief-Justice Marshall was a great man; but great men are never proud. He was not too proud to wait upon himself. He was in the habit of going to market himself, and carrying home his purchases. Often he would be seen returning at sunrise with poultry in one hand and vegetables in the other. On one of these occasions a fashionable young man from the North, who had removed to Richmond, was swearing violently because he could find no one to carry home his turkey. Judge Marshall stepped up and asked him where he lived. When he heard, he said, "That is in my way, and I will take your turkey home for you." When they came to the house the young man inquired, "What shall I pay you?" "Oh, nothing," said the Judge; "you are welcome; it was all in the way, and it was no trouble to me." "Who is that polite old gentleman who brought home my turkey for me?" asked the young man of a by-stander. "Oh," said he, "that was Judge Marshall, Chief-Justice of the United States." "Why did he bring home my turkey?" "He did it," said the by-stander, "to give you a rebuke, and teach you to attend to your own business." True greatness never feels above doing anything that is useful; but especially the truly great man will never feel above helping himself; his own independence of character depends upon his being able to help himself. The great Dr. Franklin, when he first established himself in business in Philadelphia, wheeled home the paper which he purchased for his printing-office upon a wheelbarrow with his own hands. IV. The fourth and only other mark that we shall speak of is DISOBEDIENCE. There is nothing on which the comfort and happiness of parents and families depend more than on the obedience of children. My dear children, if you want to plant thorns on the pillows of you parents, and plunge daggers into their bosoms, be disobedient. If you want to make them as uncomfortable as they possibly can be in this world, then be disobedient. This is the chief mark of a Ben-oni. I remember reading not long ago of a gentleman in England who had two sons. He was a kind, excellent, pious man, and did everything for the comfort of his children that he thought it right to do. But sometimes the boys were anxious to do things which their parents were not willing that they should do. One Sunday, the eldest boy went to his father and asked permission to take the carriage and go riding in the afternoon, instead of going to church. His father told him he could not, because it would be breaking the Sabbath. The boy was very much displeased because his father would not let him go riding, as some of the boys in the neighbourhood had been allowed by their parents to do. He was so wicked about this that he determined no longer to stay at home, because his father would not let him do just what he wanted. So the next day he persuaded his brother to go with him, and they went down to Portsmouth, a town by the seaside, intending to go to sea. Before going, however, they called on the Rev. Mr. Griffin, to assist them to get a situation on board a man-of-war. This good man, perceiving that they were not accustomed to the mode of life in which they were about to enter, inquired of them their object in going to sea. The eldest boy frankly told him they were going in order to spite their parents! Then he told him the story of what had taken place at home—of his father's unwillingness to allow him to ride on Sunday—and said he was going to sea in order to make his father feel sorry for refusing to gratify him. The good clergyman tried to show them the guilt and folly of the course they were about to pursue, and to set before them the unavoidable consequences that would result from it. The younger son was impressed by the counsels and advice of the clergyman, and went home; but the elder son resolved to go on in his evil course. Some twelve or fifteen years after this had taken place, this same clergyman was called to the prison in the town of Portsmouth to see a sailor who was condemned to be executed, and who was going to be hung in a few days. When he entered the cell of the prison he saw a wretched, miserable, squalid-looking creature sitting by a table in the cell, who looked up to him as he entered, and said, "Do you not remember me, sir?" "No," said the clergyman; "I do not recollect that I ever saw you before." Then the poor man recalled to him the story of the boy who went from home in order to spite his parents. "And are you the miserable man," said the clergyman, "who did this?" "Yes," said the poor culprit; "I followed out my own plan; I went on the course which I had chosen, contrary to your advice and

to my own convictions; I plunged into all sorts of wickedness and sin, and finally became involved in a robbery and murder, for which I am now about to suffer the penalty. And all this in consequence of my disobedience to my parents!" The clergyman wrote to the father of this unhappy man, who came to visit his son in his last hours, and who had the unspeakable anguish of standing by and seeing him suffer the penalty of the law, and reap the bitter fruits of his disobedience. What a Ben-oni that son was to his father! Let us look, now, at one or two examples of an opposite character. William Hale was an obedient son. He was spending some time with his mother at the Saratoga Springs, and had become acquainted with a number of boys of his own age there. One day some half-dozen of the children were playing on the piazza, and one of them was heard exclaiming—"Oh, yes, that's capital! So we will; come on, now! Where's William Hale? Come on, Will! We are going to have a ride on the circular railroad. Come with us." "Yes, if my mother is willing," said William. "I will run and ask her." "Ah, ah! so you must run and ask your ma!—great baby-boy!—run along to your ma! Ain't you ashamed?" "I don't ask my mother," said one. "Neither do I," said another. "Neither do I," said a third. "Be a man, Will, and come along," said the first boy, "if you don't wish to be called a coward as long as you live; don't you see we are all waiting?" William was standing with one foot advanced, and his hand firmly clenched, in the midst of the group. His brow was flushed, his eye was flashing, his lip was compressed, his cheek was changing—all showing how the epithet "coward" rankled in his bosom. It was doubtful for a moment whether he would have the true bravery to be called a coward rather than to do wrong; but, with a voice trembling with emotion, he replied:—"I will not go without I ask my mother; and I am no coward, either. I promised her I would not go from the house without her permission; and I should be a base coward if I were to tell my mother a lie." When William returned to his mother to ask her permission to go, and told her of what had taken place, she threw her arms around his neck, and exclaimed: "God bless you, my dear child, and give you grace always to act in this way." Ah, my dear children, he was a Benjamin—a child of comfort—to his dear mother; and doubtless he grew up to be her support and comfort all her days. After the surrender of Cornwallis, and the victory achieved by the American arms, George Washington, when the war was over, returned in triumph to his mother's home. Everybody was honouring him and praising him as the saviour of his country and the greatest man of the age. When he reached the place of his mother's abode a large concourse of the people had met to greet him and welcome him to his home. In the centre of the assembled crowd stood his mother, and, pushing his way through the crowd around him, he hastened to pay her his respects; and, as she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him, she said to some who were congratulating her upon having so noble a son: "George always was an obedient child." He was indeed a Benjamin—a son of comfort—to his mother, and a blessing to the country and to the world; and the spirit of obedience early learned and early practised was that which went to make him what he was. And now, in conclusion, my dear children, let me ask you, Which of these two do you desire to be? Will you be Ben-onies—children of sorrow and grief—to your parents? or will you be Benjamins—children of joy and comfort and blessing—to them? If you would be the latter—Benjamins indeed—then you must watch and strive and pray against all the evils of which we have been speaking. Watch against these four marks of a Ben-oni; watch against ill-temper, watch against idleness, watch against pride, watch against disobedience; and pray God to enable you each to overcome all these evils—to erase these marks of a Ben-oni as they are beginning to fasten themselves on your character, and to earn for yourself the character of a Benjamin indeed. (*R. Newton, D.D.*)

Vers. 22-26. The sons of Jacob.—I. SIGNIFICANCE OF NAMES. Proper names had among them (the Hebrews) a deeper meaning, and were more closely connected in men's thoughts with character and condition, than among any other ancient nation with the history and character of which we are acquainted. This is apparent from the care taken in the sacred writings to record the origin of so many names of individuals and of places, from the frequent allusions to them as significant, and the remarks made upon their meaning, and from the peculiar employment of them on important and solemn occasions, when given or changed, to mark some great transaction or event, to form titles of honour; or to record a promise, or threat, or prophecy. II. DIVERSITY OF CHARACTER. Among these twelve sons of one man no

two precisely alike. Dark and bright traits of character strangely intermingle in this household. Joseph seems to have served the Lord from his youth, and Simeon appears to have been the darkest character of the twelve. As children often differ in complexion and stature, &c., so do they also in taste, moral character, &c. Often less like their immediate progenitors than their remoter ancestors; pointing far back to past times in their moral and physical portrait. How far back we point to the source of the evil there is in us. Diversity of bodily, mental, and moral qualities a blessing, when under the influence of Divine grace; otherwise a source of mischief and sorrow, engendering rivalry and strife. III. WAYS OF PROVIDENCE. How marvellous the history wrought out in the world by means of these twelve men and their descendants! How wonderfully Providence blended these unlike characters for working out His purposes! He maketh the wrath of men to praise Him. While imagining they were working their own will, their acts were subordinate, by the power of God, to high and gracious purposes. Yet the good, in the end, attain to the most honourable places, and the widest influence. The youngest, and most despised, and helpless, are in the end advanced. We often spoil the best instruments, and turn but sorry work out of most refined materials. God brings good out of evil. A world of beauty out of chaos; a great people out of these twelve shepherds. Think of another twelve whose work it was to lay the foundation of a still greater and more enduring kingdom. They also were shepherds in another sense. Learn: I. Among all names there is only one whereby we can be saved. "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people," &c. II. Natural differences of character may be purified by Divine grace. The worst may be saved by Christ, the best need His salvation. III. Cast yourself upon the bountiful care and inexhaustible wisdom of Providence. He who of such material laid the foundations of a great nation, can make all things work together for our good. (*J. C. Gray.*) *Jacob's grief at Reuben's sin:*—Moses expresseth not how Jacob grieved when he heard this, but only saith, "It came to Israel's ears" that it was done. Surely the reason was this, that we might thereby conceive that the grief was greater than could be expressed, to have his bed defiled by his own son. So read we, the painter that portrayed the intended sacrifice of Iphigenia, painted her father Agamemnon's face covered, because it was not possible to express well the countenance of a man so plunged in woe. Think we then earnestly of Jacob's sorrow, but know that we cannot think how it was. And what crossing griefs the Lord sends us, let us strive to patience by these examples. Yea, let us grow by these examples to a Christian strength against worldly scandals and offences, not moved by them to waver up and down as some do, condemning truth, and judging persons by faults and offences that do happen. As if one should say, See the religion of these men; can it be true, can it be good, when the professors of it have such spots? Simeon and Levi cruel bloodshedders, Dinah wanton and wantonly defiled, and now Reuben an incestuous person, defiling his own father's bed. How should the religion of these men be good? Surely the idolatrous ignorance, and ignorant idolatry of the Gentiles, of the Canaanites, Perizzites, Jebusites, or such like, was the good religion, and not the way that Jacob served God by. But let us be wise, and learn by this to take a surer course to judge both of men and of religion. Jacob and his family had the true religion, though their sinful flesh offended sometimes. All were not evil in such degrees, though some offended too much. Bewail the falls we may of those that profess the truth, nay, bewail them we ought with a sighing heart; but forsake truth for them, or condemn truth to be no truth, we may not, we dare not, we ought not. Let God be true, and all men liars. Let truth be truth, and all men sinful; yea, such great patriarchs as these were not ever free. (*Bp. Babington.*) *Lessons:*—1. God carrieth His Jacobs sometimes from Ephrath to Edar, from one affliction to a worse. 2. The Church's journeys and stages are appointed and ordered by God. 3. Israel is willing to pitch his tents where God allots him. 4. The Church and its pastor sit down by the tower of the flock; shepherds and sheep have their tower (ver. 21). 5. The Church's habitation is not free from affection and affliction in the land of its sojournings. 6. Providence ordereth the permission of the foulest crimes sometimes in His own Church. 7. The chiefest in outward privilege in the Church may fall into greatest sin. God's wisdom orders it. 8. God will not suffer the blots in His Church to be wholly covered or silenced. Others may learn by them. 9. Great is the fascination of lust which makes a son and wife conspire to pollute the father's bed. 10. Deep impressions the tidings of such wickedness in the Church makes upon gracious men, to consternation. 11. Providence distinctly notes the genealogy and number of the

Church's beginnings, to observe God's making good His promises. Now Jacob was come to twelve (ver. 22). 12. God doth not always cast out of His visible Church for greatest wickedness. Reuben is numbered. 13. The twelve first patriarchs were ordained of God's grace, not for their worth. 14. Scripture useth figurative speeches, warily to be opened by God's ministers (vers. 23-26). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*)

Vers. 28. 29. **And the days of Isaac were a hundred and fourscore years. And Isaac gave up the ghost.**—*The character of Isaac*:—The lives of Abraham and Jacob are as attractive as the life of Isaac is apparently unattractive. Isaac's character had few salient features. It had no great faults, no striking virtues; it is the quietest, smoothest, most silent character in the Old Testament. It is owing to this that there are so few remarkable events in the life of Isaac, for the remarkableness of events is created by the character that meets them. It seems to be a law that all national, social, and personal life should advance by alternate contractions and expansions. There are few instances where a great father has had a son who equalled him in greatness. The old power more often reappears in Jacob than in Isaac. The spirit of Abraham's energy passed over his son to his son's son. The circumstances that moulded the character of Isaac were these. 1. He was an only son. 2. His parents were both very old. At atmosphere of antique quiet hung about his life. 3. These two old hearts lived for him alone. I. Take the EXCELLENCES of his character first. His submissive self-surrender on Mount Gerizim, which shadowed forth the perfect sacrifice of Christ. 2. His tender constancy, seen in his mourning for his mother, and in the fact that he alone of the patriarchs represented to the Jewish nation the ideal of true marriage. 3. His piety. It was as natural to him as to a woman to trust and love: not strongly, but constantly, sincerely. His trust became the habit of his soul. His days were knit each to each by natural piety. II. Look next at the FAULTS of Isaac's character. 1. He was slow, indifferent, inactive. We find this exemplified in the story of the wells (ver. xxvi. 18-22). 2. The same weakness, ending in selfishness, appears in the history of Isaac's lie to Abimelech. 3. He showed his weakness in the division between Jacob and Esau. He took no pains to harmonize them. The curse of favouritism prevailed in his tent. 4. He dropped into a querulous old age, and became a lover of savoury meat. But our last glimpse of him is happy. He saw the sons of Jacob at Hebron, and felt that God's promise was fulfilled. (*S. A. Brooke, M.A.*) *The death and burial of Isaac*:—I. IT WAS THE OCCASION OF FAMILY REUNION. II. IT WAS A TIME FOR REVIVAL OF MEMORIES OF THE PAST. III. IT WAS THE BEGINNING OF ANOTHER AND A HIGHER LIFE. (*T. H. Leale.*) *The death of Isaac*:—I. THAT HIS DEATH WAS PEACEFUL. 1. Because his spirit was given up to the rightful owner. 2. Because the soul's earthly activities had come to an end. 3. Because his soul's temporal purposes had been gained. II. THAT HIS LIFE WAS WELL SPENT. 1. His soul's interests had not been neglected. 2. Society had been benefited. 3. God had been served. III. HE WAS BELOVED AND HONOURED BY HIS FAMILY. This is intimated to us—1. By his being buried with his people. 2. By his sons attending his funeral. (*Homilist.*) *Lessons*:—1. God brings at last His Jacob and Church to their desired place in their pilgrimage. 2. God makes good His word in making Jacob successor to Abraham and Isaac in their sojourning (ver. 27). 3. The blessing of long life God grants to His servants, when and where it may be beneficial to His Church (ver. 28). 4. Expiration and dissolution are the appointed conditions of saints in order unto glory. 5. Saints in dissolution go out of the world unto their own people. 6. Old age or fulness of days is given here sometimes to God's saints, i.e., days full of work, as well as many. 7. Nature and grace agree to evince and perform the duty of burial. 8. It is piety to parents deceased so to order their burial and interment that it may be comely and honourable. 9. The death as well as the life of saints God recordeth for His Church's instruction, and to point out distinct periods (ver. 29). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Esau and Jacob at Isaac's deathbed*:—The tenderness of these two brothers towards one another and towards their father was probably quickened by remorse when they met at his deathbed. They could not, perhaps, think that they had hastened his end by causing him anxieties which age has not strength to throw off; but they could not miss the reflection that the life now closed and finally sealed up might have been a much brighter life had they acted the part of dutiful, loving sons. Scarcely can one of our number pass from among us without leaving in our minds some self-reproach that we were not more kindly towards him, and that now he was beyond our kindness; that our opportunity for being brotherly towards him is for ever gone. And when we have

very manifestly erred in this respect, perhaps there are among all the stings of a guilty conscience few more bitterly piercing than this. Many a son who has stood unmoved by the tears of a living mother—his mother by whom he lives, who has cherished him as her own soul, who has forgiven and forgiven and forgiven him, who has toiled and prayed, and watched for him—though he has hardened himself against her looks of imploring love and turned carelessly from her entreaties and burst through all the fond cords and snares by which she has sought to keep him, has yet broken down before the calm, unsolicitous, resting face of the dead. Hitherto he has not listened to her pleadings, and now she pleads no more. Hitherto she has heard no word of pure love from him, and now she hears no more. Hitherto he has done nothing for her of all that a son may do, and now there is nothing he can do. All the goodness of her life gathers up and stands out at once, and the time for gratitude is past. He sees suddenly, as by the withdrawal of a veil, all that that worn body has passed through for him, and all the goodness these features have expressed, and now they can never light up with joyful acceptance of his love and duty. Such grief as this finds its one alleviation in the knowledge that we may follow those who have gone before us; that we may yet make reparation. (*M. Dods, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XXXVI.

VERS. 1-43. Now these are the generations of Esau, who is Edom.—*The history of the generations of Esau*.—I. WE SEE HOW THE PROMISES OF GOD CONCERNING ESAU WERE FULFILLED. Temporal prosperity. II. WE LEARN WHAT IS THE PRINCIPLE UPON WHICH OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY IS WRITTEN. This chapter is a kind of leave-taking of Esau and his posterity. The stream of sacred history leads on to the Messiah, the flower and perfection of our human race. Scripture history is written upon this principle—that it was God's design throughout to bring His only begotten Son into the world, and, therefore, that family alone in which He is to appear shall have a prominent record. III. WE LEARN THAT THE ENEMIES OF GOD MAY BE DISTINGUISHED BY GREAT WORLDLY GLORY AND PROSPERITY. Three times in this chapter we meet with the phrase, "This is Edom"; and once "He is Esau, the father of the Edomites" (vers. 1, 9, 19, 43). They were the bitterest enemies of Israel. Esau is the father of persecutors. Yet Esau was prospered in his lifetime more than his brother. Thus the believer is taught that he must toil slowly upwards, and must not envy the rapid and joyful prosperity of the children of this world. His record and his reward are with the Most High. His prosperity may be late and remote, but it is permanent. IV. WE LEARN HOW GOD WORKS IN THE FORMATION OF PEOPLES AND NATIONS. The subjugation of the Horites by the Edomites, and the fusion of both under one kingdom, is an instance of the manner in which peoples and nations are formed and consolidated. This has often occurred in history. We have examples in the rise of the Samaritans, and in the formation of the Roman people. And in modern times, we have a similar instance in the subjugation of the Gauls by the Franks. We see that the footsteps of God are to be traced throughout all human history. These nations which lay outside the covenant people were yet under the care and control of that Divine providence which appointed the bounds of their habitation, and watched over their growth and development (Acts xvii. 26). V. WE LEARN, ALSO, THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INDIVIDUAL ELEMENT IN HISTORY. The personal or individual element appears in all history, but in a most marked manner in sacred history. We see how nations are stamped with the character of their ancestor. (*T. H. Leale*). *Lessons*.—1. The genealogy of the wicked God records for His own ends in His Church. 2. God's record of the wicked's line is but to brand them to those who read it (ver. 1). 3. Godless hearts take strange wives—Hittites, Hivites, Ishmaelites—whatever God says against it (ver. 2, 3). 4. Providence doth vouchsafe progeny to wicked and multiplied matches, though He like them not (ver. 4, 5). 5. In God's own time He moveth the hearts of wicked enemies, to turn aside from straitening His Church (ver. 6). 6. Outward portions to the wicked satisfy them in and for their departing from God's Church (ver. 7). 7. Mount Seir pleaseth Esau better than the land of promise, because he is Edom (ver. 8). 8. The reproach of a profane Esau God maketh to rest upon his posterity (ver. 9). 9. Multitudes of wives and children and offspring God may grant unto the wicked. 10. God hath recorded the wicked and their progeny to distinguish them from His Church (ver. 10-14). 11. Duke-

doms and dignities in the world is only the ambition of the wicked. The saint's is of another kind (2 Cor. 5-9). 12. Dignities can never blot out the stain of sin from God's presence. The Dukes are Edomites still (ver. 15-19). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Lessons*:—The name and line of the wicked are mentioned by God's Spirit for distinction, not for honour to them. 2. Horites, Hittites, and Hivites are the national titles of the same sort of sinful people. 3. Uncleanliness and unnaturalness are recorded in the wicked's line to make them stink. 4. A numerous progeny with dignity may be the portion of the wicked here below. 5. Affinity with persons that are wicked, usually bring souls to affinity with their sins. 6. God suffers and orders the wicked to join so in affinity, in order to the destroying of each other. So it was with Seir and Edom (ver. 20-30.) (*Ibid.*) *Lessons*:—1. Worldly men are ambitious of the highest titles of honour. Kings and dukes. 2. Earthly kingdoms God may order to the wicked (a settled government) before His Church (ver. 31). 3. Stinted are the numbers of kings and dignities by God in the world. 4. God maketh some notable for exploits above others. Hadad vanquisheth Midian. 5. Kings and queens are sometimes recorded for their shame by God's Spirit. 6. God overturneth and changeth states and government at His pleasure. 7. Profane fathers and profane children are branded by God's Spirit together, where mention is made of them. (*Ibid.*) *Increase of Esau's house*:—The text systematically shows the gradual growth and increase of the house of Esau. Through his three wives he became the father of five sons; Adah and Bashemath gave each birth to one son (Eliphaz the firstborn (ver. 15), and Reuel), and Aholibamah to three (Jeush, Jaalam, and Korah). These children were born to him in Canaan. But he could no longer stay in the land of his birth. His herds and flocks were too numerous to find room, by the side of those of his brother Jacob; and he emigrated spontaneously. But this took place a very considerable time before the events related in the preceding chapter; for when Jacob returned from Mesopotamia, he sent messengers to Esau into Idumea, and promised to visit him later in Seir. But this circumstance does not imply a contradiction. Our portion records the history of Esau as far as it relates to political power; it, therefore, goes back to the fortieth year of his life when he first married. He had then long sold his birthright; he had, no doubt, heard the prophecy given to his mother, that to his younger brother Jacob, the inheritance of the blessings of Abraham was reserved; when, therefore, his father Isaac advanced in years and became afflicted with infirmity, Jacob was regarded as the future head of the house, and as such obtained the superintendence over his father's property; the cattle of Isaac was, therefore, considered as that of Jacob; and it was within the thirty-eight years between his marriage and Jacob's flight, that Esau, at that time not inimical to his brother, left Canaan, thus willingly acknowledging the superior rights of Jacob, and spontaneously resigning his own claims upon the land. When Isaac, at the age of nearly 140 years, wish to bless his firstborn and favourite son, he sent for him to his new abodes; and Esau answered to the call, just as he came later to Canaan, at his father's death, to assist at the funeral duties. (*M. M. Kalisch, Ph.D.*)

Ver. 7. For their riches were more.—*Riches cannot secure happiness*:—"I wish I were rich, I would buy everything," cried Charlie. "The sun, moon, and stars?" inquired William. "No; everything that can be had for money." "That's not happiness," said William. "Get your hat, Charlie, and come with me to Mr. Morrison's," said his father. "Oh, please not, papa, he is such a disagreeable, miserable old man, with his cross looks and gouty foot, hobbling about and groaning." "I think you would like to live with him," said his father. "I, papa? I would rather live down a coal-pit!" "With him you would have all that can be bought with money." "I see it won't do," said Charlie. "Health cannot be bought with money." "Nor good temper, nor friendship, nor life," said William. "Above all," added their papa, "the favour of God cannot be bought with money. Be content with as much of it as God gives, and seek to use it aright."

"The fear of God and sweet content
Yield riches that will ne'er be spent."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

VERS. 1, 2. Joseph.—*The history of Joseph*:—Joseph's is one of the most interesting histories in the world. He has the strange power of uniting our hearts to him, as to a well-beloved friend. He had "the genius to be loved greatly," because he had the genius to love greatly, and his genius still lives in these Bible pages.

I. JOSEPH WAS A HATED BROTHER. The boy was his father's pet. Very likely he was the perfect picture of Rachel who was gone, and so Jacob saw and loved in him his sainted wife. In token of love his father foolishly gave him a coat of many colours, to which, alas! the colour of blood was soon added. It was for no good reason that his brothers hated him. Joseph brought unto his father their evil report. Not that he was a sneaking tell-tale; but he would not do as they did, nor would he hide from his father their evil doings. God means the children of a family to feel bound together by bands that grapple the heart, and to stand true to one another to life's end. Reverence the mighty ties of kindred which God has fashioned. Joseph also teaches you never to make any one your foe without a very good reason. The weakest whom you wrong may one day be your master.

II. JOSEPH WAS A BLAMELESS YOUTH. Though terribly tempted, he never yielded. He was shamefully wronged, yet he was not hardened or soured. His soul was like the oak which is nursed into strength by storms. In his heart, not on it, he wore a talisman that destroyed sin's charms. The heavenly plan of his piety disclosed all its beauty, and gave out its sweet odours in the wicked palaces of Potiphar and Pharaoh.

III. JOSEPH WAS A FAMOUS RULER. He entered Egypt as a Hebrew slave, and became its prime minister. He was the hero of his age, the saviour of his country, the most successful man of his day. He became so great because he was so good; he was a noble man because he was a thorough man of God.

IV. JOSEPH WAS A TYPE OF CHRIST. Joseph, like Jesus, was his father's well-beloved son, the best of brothers, yet hated and rejected by his own; was sold from envy for a few pieces of silver, endured a great temptation, yet without sin; was brought into a low estate and falsely condemned; was the greatest of forgivers, the forgiver of his own murderers; and was in all things the son and hope of Israel. (*J. Wells.*)

The commencement of Joseph's history:—**I. AS DISTINGUISHED BY HIS EARLY PIETY.** His conduct was not back-biting, but a filial confidential report to his father. 1. It showed his love of truth and right. He would not suffer his father to be deceived by a false estimate of the conduct of his sons. He must be made acquainted with the truth, however painful, or be the consequences what they might to all concerned. 2. It showed his unwillingness to be a partaker of other men's sins. 3. It showed a spirit of ready obedience. He knew that a faithful report of the conduct of his brethren was a duty he owed to his father.

II. AS MARKED OUT FOR A GREAT DESTINY. **III. AS THE OBJECT OF ENVY AND HATRED.** 1. Because of his faithful testimony. 2. Because of his father's partiality. 3. Because of the distinction for which God had destined him. (*T. H. Leale.*)

Jacob and Joseph:—**I. THE DIVISION FOUND IN JACOB'S FAMILY.** Four reasons for this. 1. Jacob's favouritism for Joseph. 2. The scandal-bearing of Joseph. 3. The polygamy of Jacob. 4. The envy of the brothers.

II. JOSEPH'S MISSION TO SHECHEM. Observe here the bloodguiltiness of these brothers; they did not take Joseph's life, but they intended to take it; they were therefore murderers. Let us make a distinction; for when we are told that the thought is as bad as the crime, sometimes we are tempted to argue thus: I have indulged the thought, I will therefore do the deed, it will be no worse. This sophistry can scarcely deceive the heart that uses it; yet, merely to put the thing verbally right, let us strip it of its casuistry. The thought is as bad as the act, because the act would be committed if it could. But if these brethren of Joseph had mourned over and repented of their sin, would we dare to say that the thought would have been as bad as the act? But we do say that the thought in this case was as bad as the act, because it was not restrained or prevented by any regret or repentant feeling; it was merely prevented by the coming in of another passion, it was the triumph of avarice over malice. But all these brothers were not equally guilty. Simeon and Levi and others wished to slay Joseph; Judah proposed his being sold into captivity; while Reuben tried to save him secretly, although he had not courage to save him openly. He proposed that he should be put into the pit, intending to take him out when the others were not by. His conduct in this instance was just in accordance with his character, which seems to have been remarkable for a certain softness. He did not dare to shed his brother's

blood, neither did he dare manfully to save him. He was not cruel, simply because he was guilty of a different class of sin. It is well for us, before we take credit to ourselves for being free from that or this sin, to inquire whether it be banished by grace or only by another sin. (*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*) *The father's favourite, and the brothers' censor*:—1. We are taught here the evil of favouritism in the family. The balance, as between the different children in the same household, must be held evenly by the parents. No one ought to be the "pet" of either father or mother, for the "pet" is apt to become petted, haughty, and arrogant towards the others; while the showing of constant favour to him alienates the affections of the rest, both from him and from the parents. "Is that you, Pet?" said a father from his bedroom to a little one who stood at the door in the early morning knocking for admission. "No, it isn't Pet, it's only me," replied a sorrowful little voice; and that was the last of "pet" in that family. See what mischief it occasioned here in Jacob's household! 2. We may learn from this narrative how bitter is the antagonism of the wicked to the righteous in the world. The real root of the hatred of Joseph's brethren is to be traced to the fact that he would not consent to be one of them, and join in the doing of things which they knew that their father would condemn. His conscience was tender, his heart was pure, his will was firm. He was a Puritan and they were regardless, and they chose to set down his non-conformity to pride rather than to principle, and persecuted him accordingly. There is an immense amount of petty persecution of this sort going on in all our colleges, commercial establishments, and factories, of which the principals and the great world seldom hear, but which shows us that the human nature of to-day is in its great features identical with that which existed many centuries ago in the family of Jacob. What then? Are the upright to yield? are they to abate their protest? are they to become even as the others? No; for that would be to take the leaven out of the mass; that would be to let evil become triumphant, and so that must never be thought of. Let the persecuted in these ways hold out. Let them neither retaliate, nor recriminate, nor carry evil reports, but let them simply hold on, believing that "he that endureth overcometh." 3. The case of Joseph here brings up the whole question of our responsibility in regard to what we see and hear that is evil in other people. I have come to the conclusion that Joseph was by his father placed in formal charge of his brothers, and that it was his duty to give a truthful report concerning them, even as to-day an overseer is bound in justice to his employer to state precisely the kind of service which those under him are rendering. That is no tale-bearing; that is simple duty. But now, suppose we are invested with no such charge over another, and yet we see him do something that is deplorably wrong, what is our duty in such a case? Are we bound to carry the report to his father or to his employer, or must we leave things alone and let them take their course? The question so put is a delicate one and very difficult to handle. But I think I see two or three things that cast some little light upon it. (1) In the first place we are not bound by any law, human or divine, to act the part of a detective on our neighbour and lay ourselves out for the discovery of that in him which is disreputable or dishonest. We must have detectives in the department of police, and they are very serviceable there; but that every one of us should be closely watching every other to see what evil he can discover in him is intolerable, and we should discourage in all young people every tendency to such peering Paul Pryism. (2) Then, in the second place, when, without any such deliberate inspection on our part, we happen to see that which is wrong, we should, in the way in which we treat the case, make a distinction between a crime and a vice. A crime is that which is a violation of the civil law; a vice is that which, without violating the civil law, is a sin against God. Now suppose that what we see is a crime—the man, let us say, is robbing his employer—then my clear duty, if I would not be a *particeps criminis*, is to give information to his master, and let him deal with the case as he sees fit. On the other hand, if the evil is a vice—say, for example, sensuality or the like, which does not, directly at least interfere with his efficiency as a servant—then I must deal with himself alone. If he hear me, then I have gained him; but if he refuse to hear me, then I may say to him that, as he has chosen to pay no heed to my expostulation, I shall feel it my duty to inform his father of the matter; and then, having acted out that determination, I may consider that my responsibility in regard to him is at an end, unless, in God's providence, there is given me some other opening through which to approach him. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Joseph at home*:—I. THE OCCUPATION OF HIS EARLY YEARS. 'Trained from youth to healthy

labour and useful employment. Idleness, like pride, was never made for man. II. THE ACCOUNT WHICH HE GAVE TO HIS FATHER OF WHAT HE HAD SEEN WHILE WITH HIS BRETHREN. When open and undisguised sin has actually been committed before our eyes, we are on no account to wink at it. It is a time to speak when, by reporting what is amiss to those who have power to restrain and correct it, we may either put an end to that evil, or bring those to repentance who have committed it. This, however, is both a difficult and painful duty, and it requires much wisdom and grace to perform it aright. III. ISRAEL'S SPECIAL LOVE FOR JOSEPH. IV. THE MANNER IN WHICH HE SHOWED HIS PARTIALITY. Various ways may be found of showing our approbation of those that are good, without displaying those outward marks of distinction, which are almost certain to provoke the envy of others. V. THE IMPROPER FEELINGS AWAKENED IN THE BREASTS OF HIS OTHER CHILDREN. VI. JOSEPH'S REMARKABLE DREAMS. He dreamt of preferment, but not of imprisonment. (*C. Overton.*) *Joseph the favourite son*:—1. Joseph, though the object of his father's tenderest love, was not brought up to idleness. The young man who is desirous of rising in the world, should not forget that the world's prizes are for those who win them on the field of toil. 2. It is impossible to determine whether it was Jacob's partiality and Joseph's superior merit which secured for him the office of superintendent of his brethren. Whatever may have secured him the situation, he seems to have proved himself equal to it. 3. Jacob's ill-disguised partiality for the son of endeared Rachel prompted him to an act injurious at once to himself, to Joseph, and to his other children. (*J. S. Van Dyke.*) *Joseph's first experience of life*:—I. This young man was taught to work. II. He was placed in favourable circumstances. III. He saw the iniquity of society. IV. He remained uncontaminated in the midst of evil. V. He sought to better society. (*Homilist.*) *Lessons*:—1. The Church's line is drawn by God's Spirit eminently opposite to the wicked. 2. The Church's generations are best made out from the best of her children. 3. Youth is eminently memorable, when it is sanctified, and gracious. 4. Gracious parents are careful, though never so rich, to bring up their children in honest callings. So Jacob did Joseph, &c. 5. God can preserve some pure, though conversing with wicked brethren, and relations. 6. Gracious dispositions cannot bear or favour the sins of nearest relations. 8. Souls grieved with sins of other relations bring the discovery to such as can amend them (ver. 2.) (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Joseph*:—In Joseph we meet a type of character rare in any race, and which, though occasionally reproduced in Jewish history, we should certainly not have expected to meet with at so early a period. For what chiefly strikes one in Joseph is a combination of grace and power, which is commonly looked upon as the peculiar result of civilising influences, knowledge of history, familiarity with foreign races, and hereditary dignity. In David we find a similar flexibility and grace of character, and a similar personal superiority. We find the same bright and humorous disposition helping him to play the man in adverse circumstances; but we miss in David Joseph's self-control and incorruptible purity, as we also miss something of his capacity for difficult affairs of state. In Daniel this latter capacity is abundantly present, and a facility equal to Joseph's in dealing with foreigners, and there is also a certain grace of nobility in the Jewish Vizier; but Joseph had a surplus of power which enabled him to be cheerful and alert in doleful circumstances, which Daniel would certainly have borne manfully but probably in a sterner and more passive mode. Joseph, indeed, seemed to inherit and happily combine the highest qualities of his ancestors. He had Abraham's dignity and capacity, Isaac's purity and power of self-devotion, Jacob's cleverness and buoyancy and tenacity. From his mother's family he had personal beauty, humour, and management. A young man of such capabilities could not long remain insensible to his own destiny. Indeed, the conduct of his father and brothers towards him must have made him self-conscious, even though he had been wholly innocent of introspection. The force of the impression he produced on his family may be measured by the circumstance that the princely dress given him by his father did not excite his brothers' ridicule but their envy and hatred. In this dress there was a manifest suitableness to his person, and this excited them to a keen resentment of distinction. So too they felt that his dreams were not the mere whimsicalities of a lively fancy, but were possessed of a verisimilitude which gave them importance. In short, the dress and the dreams were insufferably exasperating to the brothers, because they proclaimed and marked in a definite way the feeling of Joseph's superiority which had already been vaguely rankling in their consciousness. And it is creditable to Joseph that this superiority should first have emerged in connec-

tion with a point of conduct. It was in moral stature that the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah felt that they were outgrown by the stripling whom they carried with them as their drudge. Neither are we obliged to suppose that Joseph was a gratuitous tale-bearer, or that when he carried their evil report to his father he was actuated by a prudish, censorious, or in any way unworthy spirit. That he very well knew how to hold his tongue no man ever gave more adequate proof; but he that understands that there is a time to keep silence necessarily sees also that there is a time to speak. And no one can tell what torture that pure young soul may have endured in the remote pastures, when left alone to withstand day after day the outrage of these coarse and unscrupulous men. An elder brother, if he will, can more effectually guard the innocence of a younger brother than any other relative can, but he can also inflict a more exquisite torture. (*M. Dods, D.D.*)

Feeding the flock.—*Joseph feeding his father's flock*:—We have in the text various statements respecting Joseph. I. His feeding his father's flock. II. His father's great love for him. III. His brethren's hatred of him. IV. His keeping company more especially with the humbler children of Israel, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, the two handmaids. 1. The description of the youthful Joseph, as feeding his father's flock, may well remind us of the great Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, who as the good Shepherd laid down His life for the flock of God, and leads His own sheep forth by the still waters of salvation, and makes them to lie down in the wholesome pastures of His Word (Psa. lxxx; xcv. 6, 7; Isa. xl. 11; Ezek. xxxiv. 22-31; Zech. xiii. 7). 2. We are now to consider Joseph as the dearest of his father's sons, as a type of Jesus, the beloved Son of His Eternal Father. Joseph as he grew up was still more endeared to his father. The death of his mother would naturally lead Jacob to centre his affections still more absorbingly upon him. And it appears, that Joseph repaid the old man's warm affections by filial obedience and love. And parents value a dutiful and heavenly-minded child the more, when, like Joseph, he is preserved unpolluted by the bad example of his ungodly brothers. We have in the inspired narrative very early proofs of this partiality of the patriarch. "And he put the two handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph hindmost" (Gen xxxiii. 1, 2). But it is time we directed our attention to One greater than Joseph. The love of the Father to the Lord Jesus immeasurably exceeds every love of which we have any experience in our own breasts. It passeth knowledge. Of all the sons of God, Jesus is certainly the chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely in the sight of His eternal Father. Jesus is indeed "the only-begotten of the Father," His only-begotten Son. The obedience and love and filial sympathy of the Lord Jesus was, to use the language of men, the solace of Jehovah's heart when grieved with the ingratitude and vileness of the whole human family. He was a perfect Son, and the only perfect Son the world ever beheld. The zeal of His Father's house consumed Him. Throughout His whole life He was, like Joseph, separate from His sinful brethren, and mourned with His Father over their wickedness. The obedience of Christ to His Father was well pleasing to Him, and we are again and again informed throughout the Gospels that the Father delighteth to honour the Son, and viewed every step of His work on earth with the highest satisfaction. 3. His keeping company with the humbler children of his father, the sons of Bilhah, and the sons of Zilpah, the two handmaids. In how much higher a sense must it have been indeed painful in the extreme for the meek and lowly Saviour to live in the polluted atmosphere of our guilty world. What wonderful condescension, what humility, that He should stoop from heaven to mingle with vile sinners here! Learn a lesson of forbearance and patience with sinners from our dear Redeemer. 4. And now let us briefly consider the last particular respecting Joseph, mentioned in my text; viz., the envy with which his brethren regarded him. As this envy will come again under our notice as we proceed further into the life of Joseph, we will now simply consider the result of it mentioned in the text: "They could not speak peaceably unto him." The higher a man rises in the estimation and friendship of some, the more he is hated and abhorred by others. The nearer a man lives and the closer a man walks with his heavenly Father, the more will he experience of this world's envy and the anger of the old serpent's seed. If Joseph drinks most fully of the sweets of his father's love, he must also drink most deeply of the bitters of his brethren's hate. If anything could disarm opposition and rob envy of his fang, surely it was the mild meekness and humility of that Man of Sorrows. (*E. Dalton.*)

Ver. 3. **Israel loved Joseph more than all his children.**—*Partiality in the family*:—I. IT WAS NATURAL. 1. On account of a kindred spirit. 2. On account of pleasant associations. II. UNCONCEALED. 1. It was revealed for the comfort of Joseph. 2. It was manifested in such a manner that the other children could take offence. III. IT PRODUCED HATRED. 1. Their hatred took a wrong direction. 2. Their hatred overcame their humanity. (*Homilist.*) *Evils of partiality in the family*:—I. PARTIALITY SHOWS WEARINESS IN THOSE EXERCISING IT. II. PARTIALITY OFFENDS THOSE OVERLOOKED. III. PARTIALITY INJURES THE ONE IT IS INTENDED TO BENEFIT. IV. PARTIALITY LEADS TO ESTRANGEMENT IN THE FAMILY. V. PARTIALITY RESULTS IN MANY SINS AND MANY SORROWS. (*J. Henry Burn, B.D.*) *Jacob's affection for Joseph not misplaced*:—Enabled to study characters, alike by long experience and natural shrewdness, he was eminently fit to discover the spirit of Joseph's accounts; and had he detected a vile motive, his heart would have turned from the slanderer; for he had himself thoroughly completed his moral purification. Further, the general conduct of the brothers were such as to let unfavourable statements appear at least as no deceitful fabrications. And, lastly, depravity and meanness are totally at variance with those noble qualities of Joseph's mind, which we shall soon have opportunities to unfold, and which alone could make him the worthy medium of the great plans of Providence. Too young to listen to prudence, and too generous to regard expediency, his pure and susceptible mind repeated in harmless innocence what passed among his brothers; and open and communicative, he knew no artificial reserve. He, therefore, is not even liable to the reproach of carelessness; for he would have seen no wrong in his conduct, even had his attention been directed to it; following the unrestricted impulses of his nature, he had not yet commenced to reflect upon his feelings, or to control and direct his emotions. But was it not blamable on the part of Jacob, so decidedly to prefer one son to all the others? Ought not a father to bestow an equal share of affection upon all his children? This question is but partially to be answered in the affirmative. Certainly, the natural love of a father, which is the result of the close relationship, is very generally equally ardent towards all his children; he will, with the greatest sacrifices, support, educate, and protect all his offspring. But another affection, based upon esteem or internal affinity of characters, may be superadded to the natural love, as will frequently be the case with parents of strongly-marked mental or moral organization; and thus that love is produced which is the emancipation from the blind rule of instinct, and consists in the prevalence of reason and moral liberty. And if it is not reprehensible in a father to feel more strongly for the children in whom he finds his own existence more distinctly renewed, or who are more susceptible of culture and refinement, it can, at the utmost, only be deemed an imprudence if the predilection is manifested before the less beloved children. But though it is no moral offence, it may become a source of envy, strife and domestic discord. This truth was neglected by Jacob when he made for his favoured son Joseph a long and costly robe. The ample and folding garments of persons of wealth and distinction were not seldom composed of, or covered with, pieces of various costly stuffs, tastefully arranged—ambitious vestments, well calculated to account for the feelings of animosity on the part of Joseph's brothers. (*M. M. Katisch, Ph.D.*) *Parental fidelity*:—It is interesting to read the testimony of men at once great and good, to parental fidelity and affection. Said Lamartine, the celebrated French author: "The future state of the child depends in a great measure upon the home in which he is born. His soul is nourished and grows, above all, by the impressions which are there left upon his memory. My father gave me the example of a sincerity carried even to scrupulousness; my mother, of a goodness rising to devotion the most heroic. . . . I drank deep from my mother's mind; I read through her eyes; I felt through her impressions; I lived through her life." Further on, he says: "I know that my mother wished to make me a happy child, with a healthy mind and a loving soul, a creature of God, not a puppet of men." Again, he adds: "Our mother's knee was always our familiar altar in infancy and in boyhood. She elevated our thoughts to God as naturally as the plant stretches upward to the air and light. When she prayed along with us and over us, her lovely countenance became even sweeter and gentler than before, and when we left her side to battle with the world, we never forgot her precepts." The child of the wisest and best may go wrong, for there are seeds of evil in every heart. But the rule is that God's blessing on affectionate fidelity secures a happy and useful life here, with the assurance of heavenly awards in the hereafter. (*Henry M. Grout, D.D.*) *Family training*:—Another manifest

principle observed by Mrs. Wesley in the education and training of her family, was that of thorough impartiality. There was no pet lamb in her deeply interesting flock: no Joseph among her children to be decked out in a coat of many colours, to the envy of his less loved brethren. It was supposed by some of her sisters that Martha was a greater favourite with Mrs. Wesley than the rest of her children, and Charles expressed his "wonder that so wise a woman as his mother could give way to such a partiality or did not better conceal it." This, however, was an evident mistake. Many years afterwards, when the saying of her brother was mentioned to Martha, she replied, "What my sisters call partiality was what they might all have enjoyed if they had wished it, which was permission to sit in my mother's chamber when disengaged, to listen to her conversation with others, and to hear her remarks on things and books out of school-hours." There is certainly no evidence of partiality here. All her children stood before her on a common level, with equal claims, and all were treated in the same way. (*J. Kirk.*)

A coat of many colours.—*Joseph's coat of many colours*:—It may remind us

I. OF THE DRESS WHICH EARTHLY PARENTS PREPARE FOR THEIR CHILDREN. Respecting which consider—1. They toil to procure it, working hard and long. 2. They exercise thought in selecting. Have to consider size, season, material, appearance. 3. They have to inspect it often. How it has been used; how it wears; does it need repair. 4. They have to renew it often. The best will wear out or be out-grown (see 1 Sam. ii. 19). II. OF THE ROBE WHICH OUR HEAVENLY FATHER PREPARES FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM. 1. We need clothing for the soul, as well as for the body (1 Pet. iii. 3, 4; v. 5). God knows what things we have need of, even if we are unconscious of our need (Rev. iii. 17). 2. We cannot make, or purchase, soul-clothing. We must receive it as a free gift. Only God can give it (Rev. iii. 18). 3. For earnest, persevering, asking—accompanied by watching—we may obtain the robe of righteousness, the garment of salvation. This robe Jesus wrought for us. 4. This robe will fit well, look well, wear for ever. It is a white robe. White includes all the colours (explain). Hence it is a coat of many colours. 5. It is a court dress (explain) in which to enter the great King's presence. Learn: (1) Be careful of clothes. Those who cannot earn them may lessen their parent's expenses and labour and anxiety by taking care of them. (2) Keep your soul-clothes unspotted from the world. Beware of sin-stains, and of self-righteous cleansing and patching. (*J. C. Gray.*)

Joseph:—I. THE MANY-COLOURED COAT. The margin says many "pieces." May have been "many colours" as well. Such coats are not uncommon for young people in the East at this day (*"Ranwolf's Travels,"* pt. I, p. 89), in Syria, Persia, and India. Made probably of strips of variously-coloured cloth. This Jacob gave to Joseph because he was a "son of his old age;" a phrase understood by most to mean that Jacob was an old man when Joseph was born; but which Dr. Jamieson says means that Joseph had—to use a familiar phrase—an old head on young shoulders. This coat may be regarded—1. As a gift of affection. It may be questioned how far it was wise to show special love in so marked a manner. Jacob, knowing his other sons, must have been sure that their envy would be excited. 2. As a reward of merit. Some reward less noticeable would have been better. Joseph was made overseer, or chief shepherd, for such is the meaning of verse 2, and hence it might be also—3. A badge of office. II. THE EVIL EFFORT. If Joseph were a mere tale-bearer he would be blamable. But as chief shepherd he was bound to state what was the conduct of his brothers, if they were under-shepherds. III. THE WONDERFUL DREAMS. Dreams in that age more influential than with us. No sure word of prophecy. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had had wonderful dreams, or rather visions. Such had, doubtless, been often related. Hence these sons of Jacob were prepared to consider dreams with much reverence and awe. But believing them to be Divine messages, they should not have been angry. It is clear that their hearts were not right with God, or they would not have opposed His will. Learn: 1. To guard against the appearance of partiality in our families. 2. God is no respecter of persons. 3. To abstain from the appearance of evil, that there be no evil report concerning us. (*J. C. Gray.*)

Joseph's coat of many colours:—It was customary in those times for princes to give to their subjects, and parents to their children, valuable garments as tokens of esteem. These garments were of different texture and material, and were more or less valuable according to their quality. The art of manufacturing cloths is of very great antiquity. Wool, cotton, and flax were all used in these fabrications, both by the Hebrews and the Egyptians. The colours generally used were white, purple, scarlet, and black; but party-coloured cloths, or plaids, were also much

esteemed. Such garments are represented on some of the monuments of Egypt. At Beni-Hassan, for example, there is a magnificent excavation, forming the tomb of Pihrai, a military officer of Osartasen I., in which a train of foreign captives appears, who are supposed to be Jebusites, an inscription over one person in the group reading, "The Chief of the land of the Jebusites." The whole of the captives are clad in party-coloured garments, and the tunic of this individual in particular may be called "a coat of many colours." "A coat of many colours" Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Some, however, are of opinion that it was not a plaid, but a garment of patch-work, the word rendered "colours" being in the margin "pieces." In reference to the narrative, Mr. Roberts, in his "Oriental Illustrations of the Sacred Scriptures," observes: "For beautiful or favoured children precisely the same thing is done at this day. Crimson, and purple, and other colours are often tastefully sewed together. Sometimes the children of Mahometans have their jackets embroidered with gold and silk of various colours." (*Thornley Smith.*) *Imprudent testimonies of regard*:—Parents ought to love most affectionately those children who best deserve their love; but they ought not to hurt, instead of benefiting, the children whom they love, by imprudent testimonies of their regard. Joseph might have lived happily in his father's house without a garment of divers colours; but he could not wear it without encountering the hatred of all his brethren. (*G. Lawson, D.D.*)

Ver. 4. **They hated him.**—*Lessons*:—1. Choice respects to any, from parents, above all others, usually make such favourites to be envied. 2. Flesh and blood usually hate that which grace affects and loves. 3. Sin, and envy specially, put men out of a capacity of doing duty to relations. 4. Where hearts are full of hatred, mouths speak not peace but bitterness and scorning. (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Causes of envy*:—Notice now what are the three things for which we are prone to envy others. 1. Their privileges. Joseph was envied because his father favoured him. Asaph was "envious at the foolish," when he "saw the prosperity of the wicked" (*Psa. lxxiii. 3*). Against this David warns us—"Fret not thyself because of evil doers"—"Fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way" (*Psa. xxxvii. 1-7*). 2. Their prospects. Joseph was envied because of the destiny foreshadowed by his dreams. Walter Scott envied his school-fellow the prize he seemed certain to win. This again, how common! Many a boy stands aloof from his comrades, and joins little and without heart in their sports, because he has fixed his hopes—his ambition if you will—on some object to be gained. Now the others will not envy him in the sense of wishing to be as he is; but they resent his presuming to have objects higher than theirs. 3. Their piety. Joseph was envied because he held aloof from his brothers' sins. It is not so now? (*E. Stock.*) *Envy*:—The happiness of other men is poison to the envious man. The odious passion of envy torments and destroys one's self, while it seeks the ruin of its object. Beware of envy; you know not to what it tends. Beware of all its fruits; you will find them to be deadly, when they have time and opportunity to ripen. Joseph's brethren did not proceed to extremes of cruelty when they were first seized with this baleful passion. They "could not speak peaceably to him," but they entertained no thoughts of killing him, till their envy had by indulgence acquired a greater degree of strength. Their "lust conceived and brought forth sin; and when their sin was finished, it brought forth death" to Joseph in their intentions. They contracted the guilt of his blood, although they did not shed it. They were chargeable with intended murder in the sight of men, when they cast Joseph into the pit; but in the sight of God they were chargeable with this crime as soon as they began to hate Joseph; for "he that hateth his brother in his heart is a murderer." (*G. Lawson, D.D.*) *The baleful nature of envy*:—"Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?" (*Prov. xxvii. 4*). Even a brother is sometimes exposed to its influence. Like the wild tornado which, as it sweeps along, destroys the loveliest flowers, and leaves the garden desolate as the wilderness, it has cut down many a youth of promise, and turned many a peaceful home into a scene of sadness and distress. We may say of it as Seneca says of anger, to which it is intimately allied; that it is a vice decidedly against nature; for it divides instead of joining, and in some measure frustrates the end of Providence in human society. "One man was born to help another; envy makes us destroy one another. Nature unites, envy separates; the one is beneficial, the other mischievous; the one succours even strangers, the other destroys the most intimate friends; the one ventures all to save another, the other ruins himself to

undo another." (*Thornley Smith*). *Envy hateful*:—When Sir Walter Scott was a boy at school, his efforts to gain a prize seemed all to no purpose, on account of the superior memory of one of his companions, who never failed to say his lessons perfectly. Walter did well, but now and then he would make a slip. In vain he strove to be first; he was always second, but could not oust his school-fellow from the top place. One day, watching his rival repeating a long task without mistake or hesitation, Walter noticed that his fingers were perpetually fidgeting a particular button on his waistcoat. A thought struck the envious lad. Could it be? He would see. An opportunity soon occurred, and he cut off that button from that waistcoat while its owner was asleep. Next day the class stood up. Number one began, and as the first words left his lips, his fingers might be seen feeling for the familiar button. They felt for it in vain; and the hapless boy stopped, then stammered, then stopped again, and broke down altogether. Utterly unconscious of the cause, he racked his memory in despairing amazement, but he could not remember a line, and Walter stepped to the top of the class. Not a very serious trick, many boys will say. I choose it on this very account, as an illustration of what envy will lead to. Our object in this lesson should be to show envy at work in ordinary daily life, working all manner of mischief, just because its wickedness is not appreciated. An illustration of some murderer, whose crime was instigated by envy, would not answer our purpose. Our Sunday scholars would condemn the sin with horror, utterly failing to see the less glaring, but in God's sight not less hateful, fault of their own hearts and tongues and lives. Our illustrations should be such as will enable us effectively to say, like Nathan, "Thou art the man!" "*Mutato nomine, de te fabula narratur.*" But it is not enough to show the hideousness of envy. We must show the beauty of the "charity" which "envieth not." Thus: What should Walter Scott have done? Let the button alone? Yes; but more than that. He should have honoured his companion, and rejoiced in his success. Ah, that is hard! (*E. Stock*). *Envy soon finds an opportunity*:—When envy has fully formed its purpose of cruelty, it very speedily sees and seizes an opportunity for carrying it through. The great dramatist, indeed, has represented one of the most unscrupulous of his characters as excusing himself after this fashion: "How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds makes ill deeds done"; but then it is only the envious and malicious man who is on the outlook for means to do ill deeds, and therefore it is to him only that the perception of them offers a temptation. If King John had not been wishing to make away with Arthur, the presence of Hubert would not have suggested to him that he had found a fit instrument to do what he desired. Just as love keens the vision to such a degree that it sees ways of service that are invisible to others, so hate quickens the perception, and finds an occasion for its gratification in things that would have passed unnoticed by others. The brothers of Joseph, therefore, being filled with envy towards him, soon had an opportunity of working their will upon him, and they seized it with an eagerness which showed how intensely they hated him. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

Vers. 5-11. Joseph dreamed a dream.—*The dreams of Joseph*:—Destined superiority to brethren and parents is the one grand idea that comes out in the strange visions of the night recorded here. 1. This idea was evidently a Divine communication. 2. This idea was expressed at different periods and in different symbols. 3. This idea was felt by all to have a Divine significance. I. **THE VISIONS OF YOUTH.** The young generally create bright visions of the future. This tendency serves—(1) To increase the amount of man's happiness on this earth. (2) To supply a mighty stimulus to our mental powers. (3) To intimate what human nature would have been had there been no sin. II. **THE JEALOUSIES OF SOCIETY.** Jealousy is a passion that springs from the fear of a rival enjoying advantages which we desire for ourselves. 1. It is very general. 2. It is an unhappy feeling. 3. It is unchristian. III. **THE DESTINY OF VIRTUE.** 1. There is much in a virtuous life itself to ensure advancement. 2. Advancement is pledged by God Himself to a virtuous life. Learn: 1. The fate of eminence. To encounter jealousy. Heed it not. March on. 2. The path of glory. Virtue. The beginning may be difficult, but the end will be everlasting life. (*Homilist*). *The favourite son*:—I. **JOSEPH'S DREAMS.** II. **JOSEPH'S DISTRESS.** III. **JOSEPH'S DISAPPEARANCE.** 1. He was separate by a superior destiny, of which his youthful dreams were permitted to give a dim, indefinite glimpse. 2. He was separate by reason of the fondness of his father for him, on the one side, and by the envy and enmity of his brethren, on the other. 3.

He was separate by the banishment from his home in Canaan to the land of Egypt, where the Midianites sold him to an officer high in the service of the Egyptian king. 4. And over all the chances and changes of his life God ruled. Joseph's history remarkably illustrates Paul's saying in Rom. viii. 28. Let us remember this, and try from our earliest youth to serve God faithfully, and to suffer our trials patiently, as Joseph did. (*W. S. Smith, B.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. Good souls whom men hate for their goodness, God chooseth to reveal His mind more graciously to them. 2. God hath by dreams, in time past, revealed His future providences about His Church unto men. 3. Young years, addicted to godliness, are made capable of great and sweet discoveries from God (ver. 5). 4. It is duty to declare God's will revealed concerning His purposes to His Church, though it please not men (ver. 6). 5. Dark, but certain, have been the revelations of God in times past, concerning His providence to His Church (ver. 7, 9). 6. God in bringing about the salvation of His Church, makes parents and brethren stoop to His instruments. Superiors to inferiors. 7. God maketh persons in themselves adverse to His providences, yet to be interpreters of His revelations (ver. 8). 8. The Lord hath usually foretold the salvation and advancement of His Church, but not the way; Joseph dreams not of prisons. 9. Carnal relations are apt to hate and envy their very brother, when God sets him up above them. 10. The way and means of comfort which man despiseth, God useth yet to do them good who hate it. So here. 11. Gracious souls that wait for the Church's delivery may yet have regret against the means discovered (ver. 10). 12. Grace in those souls checks their regret, and makes them observe, and keep God's discoveries to them (ver. 11). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *How to judge of a dream*:—When a person told his dream in relating religious experience, Rowland Hill said, "we do not despise a good man's dreams, but we will judge of the dream after we have seen how you act when you are awake." *Ambition's brilliant dreams*:—A youth of rare promise was Joseph. From his aptitude in creating and divining dreams, we may infer his fondness for quiet contemplation. His mind was active; he lived much in the future; he loved to roam amid unseen realities. Yet Joseph was not a perfect man. As every rose has its attendant thorn, so blemishes appear on his young soul. A sense of superiority and self-importance was fast springing up, under the unwise partiality of his father. It was a tiny rift which would soon spoil the music of his life; a little cloud that would soon cover the whole horizon.

I. OBSERVE THE RAW MATERIAL OF THESE DREAMS. Every part of the history proceeds in a manner the most natural. It was the season of summer, and Joseph had been sharing with his brethren the labours of the harvest-field; for in Syria corn comes to maturity much earlier than in England. Overwearied with the excitements of the harvest, what more natural than that a busy imagination would weave into his dreams the stirring scenes in which he had just played a part? Touching the second dream, we must remember that, in the East the vocation of shepherds require their presence, in turn, during the hours of night, when wild beasts seek their prey. In that translucent atmosphere, and amid those cloudless skies, the lamps of heaven gleam with a brilliance unknown in Western climes. Again, by the natural processes of human thought, such a scene would furnish fit elements for the young man's dreams. Even nature moulds a man.

II. OBSERVE THE ARTIFICER OF THESE DREAMS. Not only does mystery appertain to heavenly things, there is mystery unfathomed within ourselves. Who can expound to us the philosophy of our dreams, yet these are full of significance. Aspirations, ambitions, projects, which during the day were kept in reserve, locked in secret by the monarch Will, now freely disport themselves, and the man's real self is seen in the mirror of his dreams. The prospect of eminence and rule rose before his eye, awake or asleep, like a glittering imperial crown, until that which at first was a vague possibility grew into a mental certainty. The conviction was rooting itself that he was to be a king.

III. OBSERVE THE OVER-RULING PURPOSE OF GOD. Although Joseph was conscious that he was free to choose his own course in life, free to frame ambitions, yet he was free only within certain limits, within a fitting circle: choice and will could act. Nevertheless the will of God encompassed and controlled the whole. There is no such thing as fatalism. We are moulding our own destiny, both temporal and eternal. We can catch at times a whispering of God's voice even in our dreams. (*J. D. Davies, M.A.*) *Joseph has clear intimations of his future greatness*:—We are told in these verses that Joseph had intimations given him of his future greatness; that God revealed to him by dreams that, notwithstanding his brethren's present hatred and envy, they should one day come and bow themselves down before him. The happy end of all his troubles was thus mercifully made known to him, that he might be supported

under them, and be strengthened to endure the depths of affliction into which his brethren were soon to plunge him. These dreams would doubtless often recur to his memory as he lay in the Egyptian prison, and cheer and comfort him as he felt the iron enter into his soul. And Joseph, in thus having his high destiny revealed to him at the commencement of his career, was a type of our dear Saviour. In all his sufferings on earth he was sustained and cheered by the joy that was set before him. The Father gave him this for the same reason that He gave Joseph early intimations of his future dignity, to cheer and solace his depressed spirit while rudely buffeted and tossed to and fro on the billows of earthly sorrow. We have thus seen, that the Father made known to Jesus as He did to Joseph the greatness that awaited Him, in order to sustain Him as He passed through the dreary waste of trouble that stretched far away between Him and the promised glory. We have seen also that Jesus, as well as Joseph, made mention of His coming dignity to His brethren. We shall now see that the result was the same in both cases. They hated him yet the more for his words, and said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? So far from receiving Jesus as the Saviour when He clearly intimated to them that He was the Messiah, and proved it most convincingly by a thousand miracles, they despised and rejected Him. (*E. Dalton*). *The sanguine temperament of youth*:—It is worthy of remark, that Joseph's visions were such as predicted only advancement and honour; his perils and imprisonment formed no part of his dreams. At this stage of the history, we are reminded of the sanguine hopes and lively anticipations which usually animate the minds of the young. (*T. Gibson*.)

Vers. 12-17. His brethren went to feed their father's flock.—Joseph leaves his father to seek his brethren:—Do you discover in this any type of the Redeemer? Does it remind you of one who left a far better home, and descended from the bosom of a far more illustrious father, to travel through this wilderness world in quest of his wicked and wandering brethren? Brethren, there is a closer analogy between the two cases than appears at first sight. It was at his father's command that Joseph abandoned the comforts of his father's home and became a wanderer in search of his brethren; and it was equally at the command of His Father that Jesus came down from His eternal home in the bosom of the Father, to seek and to save our fallen race. We sadly overlook this in our theology. The Lord Jesus, then, did not come into our world unsent. He was "the Messenger of the Covenant," the Sent of the Father. He did not come to do His own will, but the will of Him that sent Him. The obedience of Jesus to His Father, however, infinitely surpasses the obedience of Joseph. Joseph might have anticipated danger, but he could not certainly know that his brethren would treat him roughly and cruelly. Jesus came into the world, having a perfect knowledge of every indignity that awaited Him. Imagine yourselves each a beloved Joseph sent forth by a fond father to your brethren with a message of peace and love; speak to your fellow sinners in this way—talk to them of the glories of your Father's home—point them to an everlasting resting-place in a Saviour's arms—entreat them no longer to wander in the wilderness. (*E. Dalton*.)

Vers. 18, 19. They conspired against him to slay him.—The conspiracy to murder Joseph:—I. AN EXAMPLE OF THE RAPIDLY DOWNWARD COURSE OF EVIL. II. AN EXAMPLE OF THE BOLD DARING OF SINNERS. III. AN EXAMPLE OF GUILT INCURRED EVEN WHERE PURPOSE HAS NOT RIPEDED INTO ACT. IV. AN EXAMPLE OF DEGREES OF GUILTINESS EVEN AMONG THOSE WHO HAVE LENT THEMSELVES TO ONE DESIGN. (*T. H. Leale*). *Joseph with his brethren*:—I. MAN UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF JEALOUSY. 1. Jealousy leads a man to slander. 2. Jealousy leads to falsehood. 3. Jealousy hardens the heart. 4. Jealousy leads to crime. II. MAN UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF MERCY. 1. The merciful are in the minority. 2. The merciful lose sight of self. 3. The merciful are always ready to assist others. (*Homilist*). *Lessons*:—1. The sight of the righteous, whom the wicked hate, is an occasion of working mischief and evil to them. 2. The looks of the wicked is for the mischief of those good souls, who look and seek for their peace. 3. Subtlety and conspiracy for death is the wicked's practice against innocent gracious souls (ver. 18). 4. The wicked encourage each other in evil matters to committing them. 5. Vile persons jeer and scorn the revelations of God under terms of contempt. Dreamer (ver. 19). 6. Sinners persecute the saints for God's revelations to them. 7. Providence suffers sinners to breathe the death and destruction to saints, when they effect it not. 8. Murderers themselves are

ashamed to own blood-guiltiness, therefore seek to hide it. 9. Brother's blood is not pitied with men of sin. 10. Evil men design to frustrate the counsels and revelation of God by their crafty and cruel practices (ver. 20). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. In evil counsels against the saints, God overpowers the heart of some to frustrate bloody designs of others. 2. God makes evil projected against His servants to come to the cognizance of those that shall defeat it. 3. Deliverance is effected sometimes for the saints by such as hate them enough. 4. Providence causeth the counsel of one evil man to prevail against others, for His saint's good (ver. 21). 5. God puts an awe upon some to counsel others not to shed blood. 6. Pretence of a worse death providence ordereth to be made by men to save His from death wholly. 7. Fratricide is made horrid to evil men by God for saving His own. 8. Respect to paternal honour may sway with men of bad resolutions, to abstain from evil and offering violence to a brother (ver. 21, 22). (*Ibid.*) *Lessons*:—1. Under Providence innocent souls come in their integrity into the hands of spoilers. 2. Simple, honest hearts, may think of coming to brethren when it is to cruel destroyers. 3. Unnatural treacherous dealers stick not to take a garment from a brother. 4. Garments of pleasure may expose men to envy and spoil by wicked hands (ver. 23). 5. Violent hands are soon layed even upon an innocent brother by envious and enraged spirits. 6. Brethren degenerate into spoilers, stick not at it to bury an innocent brother alive. 7. God emptieth the pits of water where He will not have His innocents perish. 8. Dry pits of trouble are in God's use, tokens of deliverance. Joseph shall come out (ver. 24). (*Ibid.*) *Reuben's attempt to save Joseph*:—He boarded the train which he could not arrest, but he boarded it with the purpose of ultimately controlling it and so preventing a catastrophe. The motive was good, but I am not quite so sure about the policy. It savours a little too much of worldly wisdom for me, and little good came out of it in the end. We have seen it tried here often enough in politics, and almost always with this result: that the well-meaning men who have gone into a questionable movement under the idea that they could thereby guide it into something that would be at least harmless, have been themselves outwitted and befooled. It would have been just about as easy for Reuben to have stood out against the persecution of Joseph altogether as it was for him to protest against the shedding of his blood, and it might have been equally efficacious. At any rate it would have exonerated him from the guilt which they all alike ultimately incurred. His plan was to deliver Joseph, but in a way that was itself deceptive, for he seemed to be doing one thing while he was really seeking another. His proposal was that they should put Joseph into a pit. That to them looked to be a refinement on their cruelty, for it left him to starve to death, while they had meant that he should be slain out of hand. As such, therefore, it commended itself to their acceptance. But his secret intention was to come back by himself when the others should be out of the way, and then take him out and return with him to his father. It was well meant, and not very badly planned either; but then it required that a very careful watch should be maintained, and just there the instability of Reuben's character came in to mar it all; for, thinking that now the crisis was past, he went away and took no further oversight of the matter, and in his absence it was all upset. For the moment, however, it looked as if he had succeeded, for the others accepted his suggestion, and after stripping Joseph of his hated coat, they put him into one of those cisterns which were so common in Palestine, and which, when dry, were sometimes, as in the case of Jeremiah, used as a prison. Lieutenant Anderson, of the Palestine Exploration Enterprise, thus writes regarding them: "The numerous rock-hewn cisterns that are found everywhere would furnish a suitable pit in which they might have thrust him; and as these cisterns are shaped like a bottle, with a narrow mouth, it would be impossible for any one imprisoned within it to extricate himself without assistance. These cisterns are now all cracked and useless; they are, however, the most undoubted evidences that exist of handiwork of the inhabitants in ancient times." (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Evil for good*:—Joseph put himself to so much trouble to find out his brethren that he might inform himself and his father of their welfare; but they took advantage from his love to wreak their hatred upon him, as if they had been devils in flesh and blood, rather than patriarchs in the Church. It is too common with discontented men to say that none were even so ill-used as themselves. But let us consider how Joseph was used, how David was used, how Christ Himself was used, by those men from whom they had most reason to expect kindness. (*G. Lawson.*) *Joseph's brethren conspire against him*:—I. The Scriptures expressly prohibit envy (Prov. iii. 31; Prov. xxiii. 17). God prohibits envy, then, because

it is rebellion against His just authority, an insult to His honour, and a denial of His attributes of wisdom and justice and truth. It is also a passion which is infinitely removed from His own pure nature. God prohibits it also because it cannot exist with peace and happiness. Where envy enters happiness departs. Like the buckets of a well, they cannot both descend into the depths of the human heart together. The absence of envy is spoken of in Scripture as a mark of a renewed mind, the characteristic of a soul born of God (Titus iii. 3). II. The Lord has, however, given us something more than precepts against envy in His word. To prohibit it ought to be enough, and it will be enough with the child of God to make him loathe and abhor a thing so detestable in the sight of his heavenly Father. The Lord has added to these precepts many most instructive illustrations of the pernicious effects of this base passion. He points us to the fugitive Cain, as he rushes from His presence, his brow stamped with the brand of infamy, and his hand steeped in the life-blood of his righteous brother, and He says, "Behold the effects of envy." He points us to the distracted family of Jacob in their rival tents, Rachel envying Leah her children, and Leah envying Rachel the first place in their husband's affections, and He says, "Behold the misery and torment produced by envy." To what a fiend does envy reduce the man! These unnatural children appear to have had no more compassion for their father than for Joseph; perhaps they even secretly enjoyed the thought of disappointing and grieving him by dashing to the ground all his hopes of his favourite son's advancement. "Let us kill him," say they, "and then he cannot rule over us." And is there nothing, in this conspiracy of his brethren against Joseph, to remind us of a similar conspiracy against God's beloved Son? Joseph was here in the strictest sense a type of Christ. Envy endangered His life at its first commencement, and the slaughter of the innocents at Bethlehem may teach us how a man may become envious at the predicted royalties of an infant, as well as at the actual prosperity of those of riper years. His own brethren after the flesh in his after life conspired against Him, and why? Envy was at the root of all their conspiracies. They treated His claim to the Messiahship as a dream. And in their treatment of Jesus they discovered as strong a hatred of His Father, whom they also called their Father, as did Joseph's brethren towards their father. So evident was this that Jesus Himself says of them, "Now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father (John xv. 24). There is one more point which makes the type perfect. The steps the brethren of Joseph took to prevent his exaltation over them, actually helped forward the very thing they wished to prevent; so inscrutable are the ways of God in His providence, "He maketh the wrath of man to praise Him." The same was the case with Jesus. God permitted His enemies to go just far enough to accomplish His purposes and to defeat their own. By crucifying Jesus the Jews effectually fulfilled His most ardent wishes, and promoted the benefit and advancement of believers which they meant to hinder. (*E. Dalton.*) **This dreamer.**—*The world's treatment of dreamers:*—To-day we do not like the dreamers who have seen visions which involve us more or less in decay and inferiority. It is not easy to forgive a man who has dreamed an unpleasant dream concerning us. We cannot easily forgive a man who has founded an obnoxious institution. If a man has written a book which is distasteful to us, it is no matter, though he should do ten thousand acts which ought to excite our admiration and confirm our confidence, we will go back and back upon the obnoxious publication, and whosoever that man's name is mentioned, that book will always come up in association with it. Is this right? Ought we to be confined in our view of human character to single points, and those points always of a kind to excite unpleasant, indignant, perhaps vindictive feelings? The world's dreamers have never had an easy lot of it. Don't let us imagine that Joseph was called to a very easy and comfortable position when he was called to see the visions of Providence in the time of his slumber. God speaks to man by dream and by vision, by strange scene and unexpected sight; and we who are prosaic groundlings are apt to imagine that those men who live in transcendental regions, who are privileged occasionally to see the invisible, have all the good fortune of life, and we ourselves are but servants of dust and hirelings of an ill-paid day. No; the poets have their own pains, and the dreamers have their own peculiar sorrows. Men of double sight often have double difficulties in life. Don't let us suppose that we are all true dreamers. Let us distinguish between the nightmare of dyspepsia and the dreams of inspiration. It is not because a man has had a dream that he is to be hearkened unto. It is because the dream is a parable of heaven that we ought to ask him to

speak freely and fully to us concerning his wondrous vision, (that we may see further into the truth and beauty of God's way concerning man. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *God in dreams* :—They insulted the Sovereign of the world, while they persecuted their poor brother. They intended to frustrate the Word of the Lord, and hoped they would bring to nothing the counsels of the Most High. Presumptuous creatures! did they think they were stronger than the Almighty? If they had cut Joseph into a thousand pieces, the Word of the Lord would have stood firm and sure. It would be far easier to arrest the sun in his course, than to hinder the performance of any promise that God has made to His people. "His counsel shall stand for ever; the thoughts of His heart to all generations." They might, no doubt, imagine that they were fighting, not against God, but against a presumptuous boy, who fondly dreamed of rising into honours above his equals or superiors, and that Joseph's arrogance well deserved to be humbled. They did not perhaps think that Joseph's dreams were from God; but why, then, were they so much piqued with his dreams? Might they not have suffered them to pass from their memories like other vanities, which pass away the moment in which they make their appearance? Must a man be hunted day after day, till he is chased out of the world, for a silly dream? But if their spirits had not been blinded by envy, they might have either seen that there was something more than ordinary in Joseph's dream, or at least have seen good reason to suspend their judgment. It was not a good excuse that they did not know the dreams to be from God. They ought to have known with certainty that they did not come from God, before they ventured to turn them into derision. (*G. Lawson, D.D.*) *A remarkable dream* :—In "a sketch of my life-work," which appears in the Christmas number of the *Methodist*, Geo. Smith, of Coalville, says :—"One night, in the summer of 1868, I had a remarkable dream, which, strange to say, was repeated three nights in succession. Thousands of poor little children clustered round me, with looks and cries which pierced my soul. I was toiling to drag them to the top of a mountain. Just as I was giving up the struggle, Mr. Gladstone joined in my effort, and just as we both were giving up, our good and noble Queen came to the rescue, and we landed them all at the top. A similar dream occurred during the early part of my canal crusade." *Dreams but not dreams* :—"Carnal men hear of the beauty of holiness, of the excellency of Christ, of the preciousness of the covenant, of the rich treasures of grace, as if they were in a dream. They look upon such things as mere fancies, like to foolish dreams of golden mountains, or showers of pearls." "This their way is their folly." When scientific men describe to us their curious experiments and their singular discoveries, we know them to be persons of credit, and therefore accept their testimony: why do not men of the world do us the like justice and believe what we tell them? We are as sane as they, and as observant of the law of truth: why, then, do they not believe us when we declare what the Lord has done for our souls? Why is our experience, in the spiritual world, to be treated as a fiction, any more than their discoveries in chemistry or geography? There is no justice in the treatment with which our witness is received. Yet the Christian man need not complain, for in the nature of things he may expect it to be so, and the fact that it is so is a confirmation of his own beliefs. In a world of blind men, an elect race to whom eyes had been given, would be sure to be regarded as either mad or false. How could the sightless majority be expected to accept the witness of the seeing few? Would it not touch their dignity to admit that others possessed faculties of which they were destitute? And would it not be highly probable that the blind would conspire to regard the men of eyes as fanatical dreamers or deluded fools? Unrenewed men know not the things which are of the Spirit of God, and it is by no means a strange thing that they should deride what they cannot understand. It is sad that those who are dreamers, in the worst sense, should think others so, but it is by no means so extraordinary as to cause surprise. Oh, my Lord, whatever others may think of me, let me be more and more sensible of Thy presence, and of the glorious privileges and hopes which are created in the heart by Thy grace. If men should even say of me as of Joseph, "behold this dreamer cometh," it will not grieve me so long as Thou art with me, and Thy favour makes me blest. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 20. We will say, some evil beast hath devoured him.—*Plottings of iniquity* :—This text is no part of revelation. It is a premeditated falsehood, agreed to and told by Joseph's brothers, to account for his absence. I. THAT WICKED MEN DARE NOT TRUST EACH OTHER TO EXPLAIN THINGS, BUT MUST AGREE TO FALSIFY AND DECEIVE. "We will say." II. THAT IT IS A CHARACTERISTIC OF WICKED

MEN TO LAY THE BLAME OF THEIR SINS UPON OTHERS. "We will say, a wild beast," etc. From the very first it was so. Adam struck upon that mean device, and threw the blame of his sin upon his wife: "The woman that Thou gavest me." I know of no instance in the Bible that so clearly indicates the strength of the tendency as this. Some blame one thing or person, and some another; but, like Joseph's brethren, they know there is no "wild beast," and they must sooner or later confess their sins and say, "We are verily guilty." III. THAT WICKED MEN FEEL THERE IS A TIME COMING WHEN THEY MUST MAKE OUT A CASE—MUST TELL HOW THINGS HAPPENED. "We will say, an evil beast," etc. (*T. Kelly.*) *The conspiracy*:—I. THE VICTIM. Joseph. What were his crimes? 1. He had done his duty as superintendent of the shepherds; even though it must have been painful to him to convey bad tidings about his brethren, and painful to grieve his father's mind by doing so. Yet he only discharged the duty of his office. Tho fault was theirs, not his. 2. He had been marked as his father's special favourite and confidant. But they should have tried to be more worthy of trust themselves. 3. He had been favoured with wonderful dreams, in which their future subordinate relation was clearly indicated. II. THE PLOTTERS. 1. Ten against one. Cowardice of this. Combination of thought and strength for a wicked purpose. 2. Ten brothers against one brother. Fratricidal struggles the worst of all. Of all relatives, such near ones as these should agree. 3. Ten men, and brothers, against a youthful brother. Might and numbers are not always a proof of right (once all the world was against our elder Brother). 4. Ten wicked men against one good man. "Though hand join in hand, wickedness shall not go unpunished." 5. Ten sons against a father. In plotting against Joseph they were fighting against Jacob. Those who oppose Jesus are rebelling against God. III. THE PLOT. 1. The opportunity. (1) They are away from home. (2) They are alone. (3) Joseph, in his coat of honour, approaches to inspect the flocks. 2. The conspiracy. "The dreamer cometh." All agree on one point. Joseph to be put out of the way. First resolve to kill him and tell a lie to hide the crime (ver. 20). Reuben intercedes, intending to rescue him (ver. 22). They agree to this, thinking he would die of starvation. Thus they would not shed his blood, and yet would take his life. They strip off his offending coat. Approach of the merchants. Judah would make a profit by the transaction. He little thought of the great profit his wickedness would yield (see chap. xlv. 7, 8). Joseph is sold. Imagine his cries and tears, &c. (see chap. xlii. 21). The remorse of Reuben, and the joy of the rest. 3. The consequences. One sin leads to another. They must resort to lying, &c. The trouble that comes upon Jacob (vers. 34, 35). Learn: I. Innocent people are often surrounded by evil (Jo. xvi. 33). II. Virtue and truth to be pursued, notwithstanding danger. III. One sin leads to another. Ultimate concealment impossible. IV. God makes the wrath of man to praise Him. V. Jesus has saved us from going down into the pit, and has redeemed us from bondage. (*J. C. Gray.*) *Joseph's confinement in a tank*:—The tank in which Joseph's brethren cast him was apparently one of those huge reservoirs excavated by shepherds in the East, that they may have a supply of water for their flocks in the end of the dry season, when the running waters fail them. Being so narrow at the mouth that they can be covered by a single stone, they gradually widen and form a large subterranean room; and the facility they thus afford for the confinement of prisoners was from the first too obvious not to be commonly taken advantage of. In such a place was Joseph left to die—under the ground, sinking in mire, his flesh creeping at the touch of unseen slimy creatures, in darkness, alone; that is to say, in a species of confinement which tames the most reckless and maddens the best balanced spirits, which shakes the nerve of the calmest, and has sometimes left the blankness of idiocy in masculine understandings. A few wild cries that ring painfully round his prison show him he need expect no help from without; a few wild and desperate beatings round the shelving walls of rock show him there is no possibility of escape; he covers his face, or casts himself on the floor of his dungeon to escape within himself, but only to find this also in vain, and to rise and renew efforts he knows to be fruitless. Here, then, is what has come of his fine dreams. With shame he now remembers the beaming confidence with which he had related them; with bitterness he thinks of the bright life above him, from which these few feet cut him so absolutely off, and of the quick termination that has been put to all his hopes. Into such tanks do young persons especially get cast; finding themselves suddenly dropped out of the lively scenery and bright sunshine in which they have been living, down into roomy graves where they seem left to die at leisure. They had conceived a way of being useful in the world; they had found an aim or a hope;

they had, like Joseph, discerned their place and were making towards it, when suddenly they seem to be thrown out and are left to learn that the world can do very well without them, that the sun and moon and the eleven stars do not drop from their courses or make wail because of their sad condition. High aims and commendable purposes are not so easily fulfilled as they fancied. The faculty and desire in them to be of service are not recognised. Men do not make room for them, and God seems to disregard the hopes He has excited in them. The little attempt at living they have made seems only to have got themselves and others into trouble. They begin to think it a mistake their being in the world at all; they curse the day of their birth. Others are enjoying this life, and seem to be making something of it, having found work that suits and develops them; but, for their own part, they cannot get fitted into life at any point, and are excluded from the onward movement of the world. They are again and again flung back, until they fear they are not to see the fulfilment of any one bright dream that has ever visited them, and that they are never, never at all, to live out the life it is in them to live, or find light and scope for maturing those germs of the rich human nature that they feel within them. All this is in the way to attainment. This or that check, this long burial for years, does not come upon you merely because stoppage and hindrance have been useful to others, but because your advancement lies through these experiences. (*M. Dods, D.D.*) *Evil and mistaken policy*:—After this profound scheme no doubt there would follow a chuckle of triumph. The thing was so lucky in its plan, in its seasonableness, in its practicability; it seemed to meet every point of the case; it made an end of the whole difficulty; it turned over a new leaf in the history of the family. Let us understand that our plans are not good simply because they happen to be easy. Let us understand that a policy is not necessarily sound because it is necessarily final. In the case before us we see both the power and the weakness of men. Let us slay—there is the power; and we will see what will become of his dreams—there is the weakness. You can slay the dreamer, but you cannot touch the dream. You can poison the preacher, but what power have you over his wonderful doctrine? Can you trace it? Where are its footprints? Ten or twelve men have power to take one lad, seventeen years of age, to double him up, and throw him, a dead carcase, into a pit. Wonderful power! What then? “And we will see what become of his dreams.” A word which perhaps was spoken in scorn or derision, or under a conviction that his dreams would go along with him. Still, underlying all the derision is the fact that, though the dreamer has been slain, the dream remains untouched. The principle applies very widely. You may disestablish an institution externally, politically, financially; but if the institution be founded upon truth, the Highest Himself will establish her. If we suppose that by putting out our puny arms and clustering in eager crowds round the ark of God, we are the only defenders of the faith and conservers of the Church—then be it known unto us that our power is a limited ability, that God himself is the life, the strength, the defence, and the hope of His own kingdom. The principle, then, has a double application—an application to those who would injure truth, and an application to those who would avail themselves of forbidden facilities to maintain the empire of God amongst men. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Joseph cast into the pit*:—The favoured son of Jacob was but a type of the Beloved of the Father. Joseph, in being thus murdered in the intention of his brethren, and, as it were, buried in the pit, yet preserved in order to be exalted to the right hand of royalty and power, was a type of Christ crucified, buried, risen, and glorified. Joseph was far away from his father when trouble overwhelmed him, and his loud cries for help died away in the distance without reaching the parental ear. And what were the words of Jesus in the depths of His affliction? (Ps. xxii. 1, 2). Pity from man He did not expect, and if His Father had but been near Him, He felt that He could brave every danger and endure every pain. Nay, that suffering would have lost all its sting, and sorrow its misery. But the bitter and the agonizing thing was to feel that He was alone—literally alone in His unparalleled sufferings. He had come to them on a better errand than Joseph’s, and with a message of mercy from a better than any earthly father. One would think that a herald from so august a court, and bearing so welcome a message, would have been hailed with acclamations of delight by the Jewish people. That people had long been looking anxiously for their long-promised Messiah. His deportment was far more lovely and prepossessing than Joseph’s—His innocence of life and warmth of brotherly affection far exceeded Joseph’s—He was the chiefest among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely. He pleaded with the Jews with a depth of pathos never

equalled. Have you ever envied Christ? Do you envy Him His right to the throne of your heart, and have you usurped it, and seated yourself in that throne? There is such a thing, too, as envying the Lord Jesus, in the persons of His happy and highly-favoured followers. Let us cheerfully share our blessings with every afflicted Joseph who is cast into the pit of adversity. (*E. Dalton.*) *No pit can hide from God's eye*:—How were Joseph's brethren to secure themselves from the reproach of the world, and the indignation of their father? They would cast Joseph's body into some pit after they had killed him. But where were they to find a pit deep enough to hide him from the view of God? It was right not to disoblige their father; but was their God less to be regarded than their father? Many heathens will rise up in judgment against those professors of the true religion, who behave in such manner, as if it were a matter of indifference what sins they commit, if they can preserve their characters from suspicion. A certain Hindoo, trained up in the strictest sect of the religion of his country, had macerated his body to such a degree, that his life was in imminent danger. A Christian physician, who went to see him with the governor of the town, begged him to swallow an infusion of the Jesuit's bark in wine, which he thought might preserve his life. The religion of the Indian prohibited this cure. The physician promised that none should hear of it. But the poor Indian answered, that he could not hide it from himself, and chose to die, rather than violate his conscience. (*G. Larsson, D.D.*) *Good intentions must be boldly carried out*:—Reuben's intention was good, and let all due credit be given to every man who has a good intention, a merciful object in view. No one of us has a word to say against such a man. But there are times when everything depends upon tone, precision, definiteness, emphasis. I am not sure that Reuben could not have turned the whole company. There are times when one man can play with a thousand. A little one can put ten thousand to flight. Why? Because wickedness is weakness. There is more craven heartedness among bad men than ever you can find among men who are soundly, living good. Is that a hard message to some of you? You know a very bold wicked man. Well, so you do; but that man is a coward. One day the shaking of a feather will cause him to become pale, and to tremble and turn round suspiciously, and timidly, as if every leaf in the forest had an indictment against him and all the elements in the universe had conspired to destroy him. Here is a call to us, most assuredly. We are placed in critical circumstances. Sometimes eight or nine men upon the board of directors have said that their plan will take this or that particular course. We believe that the plan is corrupt; we believe that it is wicked, displeasing to God, mischievous to man. What is our duty under circumstances such as these? To modify, to pare away, to dilute sound principle and intense conviction, to speak whisperingly, timidly, apologetically? I think not. But to meet the proposition with the definiteness of sound principle, and to be in that minority which in the long run is omnipotent—the minority of God. It is not easy to do this. Far be it from me to say that if I had been in Reuben's place I should take a more emphatic course. We are not called upon, in preaching God's truth, to say what we would have done under such circumstances; but to put out that which is ideal, absolute, final, and then to exhort one another, to endeavour by God's tender mighty grace to press towards its attainment. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 25. A company of Ishmeelites.—*Lessons*:—1. Providence can make eyes to see, and such objects to be presented, which may occasion diversion of evil plots against the saints. 2. God orders travellers, and trades, and journeys, to serve His own ends to His servants. 3. Accidental events to men are settled providences unto the servants of God. 4. Trade from land to land, about proper fruits of the respective countries, hath been, of old, ordered by Providence, for common advantage God allows and commends it (*Gen. xlix. 13*). 5. The same place may be aimed at by God and men, but upon several accounts (*ver. 25*). 6. Providence toucheth hearts as well as eyes of sinners to defeat cruel designs against His. 7. One spoiler may be wrought upon by God to cause others to desist from cruelty. 8. Thoughts of the unprofitableness of sin is a forcing means to avoid it. 9. Murder and concealment of blood bring no advantage to sinners (*ver. 26*). 10. Hypocrites may judge there is no profit in one sin, but some in another. 11. Hypocrites may dissuade men from one sin, but incite them to others, Come, &c. 12. Malice of formalists to sincere Christians sticks not to sell them to bitter enemies of the Church. 13. God makes natural relation and motions to flesh sometimes to keep persons from cruelty. 14. God causeth the counsel of one

conspirator to defeat the rest, and makes them concur to His ends (ver. 27). 15. Providence offers opportunity to sinners for doing their will, that His may be done. 16. Murderers are made deliverers by God at His pleasure and in His measure. 17. The most innocent souls may be sold for slaves when aimed by God to be lords. 18. A small price do wicked men put upon the best of God's servants, nay on His Son. 19. Gracious souls, surprised by the wicked in their honest ways, may be carried whither they would not. 20. Ishmaelites may carry innocents to Egypt for their ends, but God orders them thither for His own. So God maketh use of sinners. They bring him to make gain of him, God sends him to save and gain others. (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Caravan trade*.—From very early times, a lively caravan trade was entertained between Syria and the East-Jordanic provinces on the one hand, and Egypt on the other; it brought the esteemed products of Arabia and the wares and merchandises of eastern Asia into the land of the Pharaohs; and in the course of time, the importation was conducted with all possible regularity, and on lines prudently chosen and marked out. We find, that so early as the sixteenth dynasty, stations were formed, temples erected, and wells dug and protected, in the Arabian Desert, for the benefit of those who had occasion to pass through it in their commercial travels. Egypt had, at that period, already attained a great measure of the civilization of which it was capable; it enjoyed a strong government and well-organized public institutions; and the political and social relations were regulated on a firm basis. This sense of security favoured the development of comfort and luxury; the higher castes especially appreciated all that delights and embellishes life; their wants increased in an incredible degree; and they encouraged every undertaking which promised to gratify them. Among the articles in peculiar demand were all varieties of spicery and perfumes, required not only for the feasts and pleasures of the living, but for the embalming of the dead; the mummies generally emitted so delicious a fragrance that they were for generations kept in the houses of the relatives, arranged along the walls, and then only entombed; which practice, however, received, no doubt, its first impulse from the devoted love bestowed in Egypt on departed parents and relatives. The amount of spicery consumed for all these purposes was necessarily immense; and the caravan introduced in our narrative was exclusively laden with those costly commodities. The men who conducted it were Midianites (vers. 28, 36), a tribe partly nomadic, but partly actively engaged in commerce. But as the Ishmaelites commanded by far the greatest part of the caravan trade, all those who carried on the same pursuits were designated by their name. (*M. M. Kalisch, Ph.D.*) *Circumstances favouring bad men*.—There are times when circumstances seem to favour bad men. Some of us are accustomed to teach that circumstances are the voice of Divine Providence. There is a sense—a profound sense—in which that is perfectly true. God speaks by combinations of events, by the complications of history, by unexpected occurrences. Most undoubtedly so. We have marked this. In many cases we have seen their moral meaning, and have been attracted to them as to the cloudy pillar in the day time and the fire by night. At the same time, there is another side to that doctrine. Here in the text we find circumstances evidently combining in favour of the bad men who had agreed to part with their brother. They sat down to eat bread—perfectly tranquil, social amongst themselves, a rough hospitality prevailing. Just as they sat down to enjoy themselves with their bread they lifted up their eyes, and at that very moment a company of Ishmaelites came from Gilead with their camels. What could be more providential? They came in the very nick of time. The brethren hadn't to go up and down hawking their brother, knocking at door after door to ask if anybody could take him off their hands; but at the very moment when the discussion was pending and anxiety was at white heat, these circumstances so combined and converged as to point out the way of Providence and the path of right. Then we ought to look at circumstances with a critical eye. We ought first to look at moral principles and then at circumstances. If the morality is right, the eventuality may be taken as an element worthy of consideration in the debate and strife of the hour. But if the principles at the very base are wrong, we are not to see circumstances as Divine providences, but rather as casual ways to the realization of a nefarious intent. Let us be still more particular about this. I do not deny that these Ishmaelites came providentially at that identical moment. I believe that the Ishmaelites were sent by Almighty God at that very crisis, and that they were intended by Him to offer the solution of the difficult problem. But it is one thing for us to debase circumstances to our own use and convenience,

and another to view them from God's altitude and to accept them in God's spirit. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The uncertainties that characterize our human existence:*—How true it is that we know not what a day may bring forth! Joseph goes out on his father's errand and never more returns to his father's house—does not see his father again, in fact, for twenty-two years. Of course the crime of his brothers was of the cause of this long separation between him and his venerable parent. But how often similar things occur even among ourselves! Some years ago a little boy was stolen from his home in Philadelphia, and though every means that affection could suggest or professional skill could devise have been used for his discovery, the mystery has never been cleared up, so that to this hour his parents are in most horrible suspense. In our own city, too, scarcely a week elapses without the announcement that some one has disappeared from home and business, and very frequently nothing more is heard of him. But, apart from such occurrences, which may be traced to the cunning and malignity of wicked men, and which are a disgrace to our much boasted civilization, how often it happens, in the simple providence of God, and without blame to any one, that those who part in the morning with the hope of meeting again in a very short while never see each other more on earth! The street accident causes death; or the sudden outbreak of fire in the building in which their office hours are spent cuts off all possibility of escape, and they are burned to ashes; or a panic in a crowded place of amusement which they visited has caused a great loss of life, and they are numbered among the victims; or a railroad collision has smashed the train in which they were passengers, and they are reported among the dead; or, without any such catastrophe, they have simply yielded to a sudden paroxysm of illness and passed within the veil. Who knows not how frequently such things are occurring in the midst of us, so that, as we have lately had occasion again and again to say, the proverb is verified that it is "the unexpected that happens." What then? Are we to have our hearts for ever darkened with the shadow of the possibility of such things coming to us? No; for that would be to make our lives continually miserable; but the lesson is that we should be ever ready to respond to the call of God, and should take short views of things by living, as nearly as possible, a day at a time. We need not borrow trouble on the strength of the uncertainty to which I have referred, for "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof"; but we ought to be taught by it to finish every day's work in its own day, since its lesson is, "Boast not thyself of tomorrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Judah's suggestion:*—The very brightest and luckiest idea of all. He touched human nature to the very quick when he said, "What profit is it?" And instantly they seemed to convict themselves of a kind of thickheadedness, and said one to another, "Ah, to be sure, why no profit at all. Here is an opportunity of selling him, and that will turn to the account of us all. Sell is as short a word as slay. Sell! that will get clear of him. Let us sell. Sell! we shall have no blood upon our hands. Then we shall, perhaps, have a couple of shekels a-piece, and tossing them up in the air an inch or so, and catching them again, and hearing their pleasant chink. This is the plan, to be sure. This is the way out of the difficulty. We are sorry we ever thought of shedding blood; we shake ourselves from all such imputations. Let us sell the lad, and there will be an end of the difficulty." Selling does not always take a man out of difficulty. Bargain-making is not always satisfactory. There is a gain that is loss; there is a loss that is gain. There is a separation that takes the hated object from the eyes, yet that object is an element in society and in life—working, penetrating, developing—and it will come back again upon us some day greater than power, with intensified poignancy; and the man that was driven away from us a beggar and a slave may one day rise up in our path, terrible as an avenger, irresistible as a judgment of God. Well, his brethren were content. Men even say that they enjoy a great peace, and, therefore, that if circumstances are tolerably favourable, they say that on the whole they feel in a good state of mind. Therefore, they conclude that they have not been doing anything very wrong. Let us understand that vice may have a soporific effect upon the conscience and judgment; that we may work ourselves into such a state of mind as to place ourselves under circumstances that are fictitious, unsound in their moral bearing, however enjoyable may be their immediate influence upon the mind. I am struck by this circumstance, in reading the account which is before me, namely, how possible it is to fall from a rough kind of vice, such as, "Let us slay our brother," into a milder form of iniquity, such as, "Let us sell our brother," and to think that we have now

actually come into a state of virtue. That is to say, selling as contrasted with slaying seems so moderate and amiable a thing, as actually to amount to a kind of virtue. Am I understood upon this point? We are not to compare one act with another and say, Comparatively speaking this act is good. Virtue is not a quantity to be compared. Virtue is a non-declinable quality. I know how easy it is, when some very startling proposition has been before the mind, to accept a modified form of the proposition, which in itself is morally corrupt; and yet to imagine, by the very descent from the other point, that we have come into a region of virtue. When men say, "Let us slay our brother," there is a little shuddering in society. We don't want to slay our brother. "Well, then," says an acute man, "let us sell him." And, instantly, amiable Christian people say, "Ay, ay, this is a very different thing; yes, let us sell him." Observe, the morality is not changed, only the point in the scale has been lowered. When God comes to judge He will not say, Is this virtue and water? is this diluted vice? but, Is this right? is this wrong? The standard of judgment will be the holiness of God! (J. Parker, D.D.)

Ver. 28. Sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver; and they brought Joseph into Egypt.—*Joseph sold into Egypt*.—I. A FAMILY FEUD THE FOUNDATION OF A NATIONAL CALAMITY. Bondage for four hundred years. II. A DESPISED CLASS BECOMES THE INSTRUMENT OF GOD'S PROVIDENCES AND JUDGMENTS. Ishmaelites: the slave-traders of their day. III. THE COMFORT OF DEATH FOR PERSONAL LOSS AND AWAKENED JUDGMENTS (ver. 35). (W. R. Campbell.) *Joseph sold into Egypt*.—1. The narrative shows one of the not uncommon ways which God takes to prepare men for usefulness and blessing. The pathway to any eminence in usefulness, virtue, or joy, is commonly rugged. Muscular strength comes of abundant toil, mental vigour of hard study, moral force of temptation and discipline. It is by fire that gold is separated from its dross, and iron hardened into steel. Even the Captain of our salvation was made perfect through suffering. One cannot guess of how many noble lives the secret, if disclosed, would be found in some great trial. An Arab once bemoaned his fate thus: "Alas, I fear that God doth not remember me. I have no trials, nothing but ease and enjoyment." You cannot make a great life out of sunshine alone. Nor need one lose heart if his whole earthly course seems to be under a cloud. As the discipline of youth may be for riper years, so that of one's whole earthly career is for the ages beyond. 2. Again, the narrative shows how responsible parents are for the conduct and welfare of their children. One of the gravest errors in family training is that favouritism of which Jacob was guilty. On the one hand it engenders weak and offensive pride; on the other, angry and bitter resentment. Dissension is inevitable. 3. Here, again, we are impressed with the danger of sin in thought and feeling. Apparently, the criminal deed of Joseph's brethren was wholly unpremeditated. It was an unhappy moment's impulse. It has been said that "with one bound a soul sometimes overleaps all blessed restraints; we flee into crime as if the dogs of sinful desire were upon us." We rush to deeds of which at other moments we thought ourselves incapable. The petted feeling grows to be so completely master, that we obey it when obedience has ceased to be a pleasure. Some of the world's greatest criminals were not only sweet in childhood, but apparently amiable in youth. Let us never forget the tendency of sin to grow, and that as imperceptibly as does the plant or tree. It is also to be remembered that the guilt centres in the disposition rather than in the act. "God sees hearts as we do faces." "The powder that is explosive and the powder that explodes do not differ." "He that hateth his brother is a murderer." 4. Yet again, we here learn something of the unmixt wickedness of the particular sin of envy. It is the opposite of that "charity out of a pure heart," which, while it rejoices over a brother's or sister's good fortune, is itself thereby enriched; of that spirit which makes all another's gains its own, which is the richer for its neighbour's riches, the gladder for its brother's gladness. As love is of heaven, envy is of hell. 5. Briefly, at least, we must notice the illustration we here have of the bitter outcome of sin. (1) One part of this is a sort of necessity for more sin. No sooner is the heartless deed of Joseph's brethren done than they begin to add other sins for its concealment. (2) But the full outcome of sin includes also much sorrow. Witness the entreaties and tears of the lad Joseph; the distress of Reuben; the perplexity and fears of all. The comfortless, bereaved father is overwhelmed. 6. For God's children, the culminating lesson of this fragment of history is one of patience and trust in life's darkest hours. (H. M.

Grout, D.D.) *Sold to the Ishmaelites*.—I. This narrative may remind us of THE UNCERTAINTIES THAT CHARACTERIZE OUR HUMAN EXISTENCE. It is "the unexpected that happens." The lesson is, that we should be ever ready to respond to the call of God, and should take short views of things by living, as nearly as possible, a day at a time. II. We may see from this narrative that THE BEGINNING OF SIN IS LIKE THE LETTING OUT OF WATER. What began in envy leads to murder, and that again gives birth to falsehood. Sin thus multiplies as rapidly as the Colorado beetle, and no matter what may be the first one, you may always call its name Gad, for you may surely say, "a troop cometh." Therefore, if we would successfully resist it, we must withstand its beginnings. Especially is this true of envy, which is purely soul-sin—the hatred of a man for the good that is in him. Envy must be supplanted by the love of Christ. III. We may learn that IN SEEKING TO DEFEAT GOD'S PURPOSES WE ARE ALL THE WHILE UNCONSCIOUSLY HELPING ON THEIR FULFILMENT. We cannot explain the "law" of it, but we clearly see the fact. Oh the marvellous wisdom of that providence of God which thus, without doing violence to the will of any human being, lays all their actions under tribute for the furtherance of its designs! And what is the use of a man trying to thwart God's purposes when, whether he will or not, everything he does only helps them forward? Surely it is better far to acquiesce in them, and find our happiness in the doing of His will! IV. I note from this narrative that WE DO NOT GET RID OF A RESPONSIBILITY BY PUTTING IT OUT OF SIGHT. V. THERE IS A RETRIBUTIVE ELEMENT IN OUR TROUBLES. Jacob, who deceived his father Isaac, is now deceived by his own children. One of his "chickens" came home "to roost," and very bitter was the experience. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Lesson analysis*.—I. JOSEPH ABUSED. 1. Stripped of his raiment (ver. 23). 2. Taken by force (ver. 24). 3. Cast into a pit (ver. 24). (1) Separated from the presence of men. (2) Protected by the presence of God. II. JOSEPH SOLD. 1. The ready purchasers (ver. 25). 2. The mercenary plea (vers. 26, 27). 3. The paltry price. III. JOSEPH MOURNED. 1. Cruel deception (ver. 33). 2. Pitiable woe (ver. 34). 3. Inconsolable sorrow (ver. 35). (*American Sunday School Times.*) *Man's passions and God's purpose*.—I. THE BROAD TEACHING OF THE WHOLE STORY IS, THAT GOD WORKS OUT HIS GREAT PURPOSES THROUGH EVEN THE CRIMES OF UNCONSCIOUS MEN. As coral insects work, not knowing the plan of their reef, still less the fair vegetation and smiling homes which it will one day carry, but blindly building from the material supplied by the ocean a barrier against it; so even evil-doers are carrying on God's plan, and sin is made to counterwork itself, and be the black channel through which the flashing water of life pours. II. THE POISONOUS FRUIT OF BROTHERLY HATRED. The swift passage of the purely spiritual sin of jealous envy into the murderous act, as soon as opportunity offered, teaches the short path which connects the inmost passions with the grossest outward deeds. Like Jonah's gourd, the smallest seed of hate needs but an hour or two of favouring weather to become a great tree, with all obscene and blood-seeking birds croaking in its branches. "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer." Therefore the solemn need for guarding the heart from the beginnings of envy, and for walking in love. The clumsy contrivance for murder without criminality, which Reuben suggested, is an instance of the shallow pretexts with which the sophistry of sin fools men before they have done the wrong thing. The mask generally tumbles off very soon after. The bait is useless when the hook is well in the fish's gills. "Don't let us kill him. Let us put him into a cistern. He cannot climb up its bottle-shaped, smooth sides. But that is not our fault. Nobody will ever hear his muffled cries from its depths. But there will be no blood on our hands." It was not the first time, nor is it the last, that men have tried to blink their responsibility for the consequences which they hoped would come of their crimes. Such excuses seem sound when we are being tempted; but, as soon as the rush of passion is past, they are found to be worthless. Like some cheap castings, they are only meant to be seen in front, where they are rounded and burnished. Get behind them, and you find them hollow. "They sat down to eat bread." Thomas Fuller pithily says: "With what heart could they say grace, either before or after meat?" What a grim meal! And what an indication of their rude natures, seared consciences, and deadened affections! III. The ill-omened meal is interrupted by the sudden appearance, so picturesquely described, of THE CARAVAN OF ISHMAELITES WITH THEIR LOADED CAMELS. Dothan was on or near the great trade route to Egypt, where luxury, as well as the custom of embalming, opened a profitable market for spices. The traders would probably not be particular as to the sort of merchandize they picked up on their road, and such an "unconsidered trifle" as a slave or two would

be neither here nor there. This opportune advent of the caravan sets a thought buzzing in Judah's brain, which brings out a new phase of the crime. Hatred darkening to murder is bad enough; but hatred which has also an eye to business, and makes a profit out of a brother, is a shade or two blacker, because it means cold-blooded calculation and selfish advantage instead of raging passion. IV. Leaving Joseph to pursue his sad journey, our narrative introduces for the first time REUBEN, whose counsel, as the verses before our lesson tell us, it had been to cast the poor lad into the cistern. His motive had been altogether good; he wished to save life, and, as soon as the others were out of the way, to bring Joseph up again and get him safely back to Jacob (chap. xlii. 22). Well meant and kindly motivated as his action was—and self-sacrificing too, if, as is probable, Joseph was his destined successor in the forfeited birthright—his scheme breaks down, as attempts to mitigate evil by compliance and to make compromises with sinners usually do. The only one of the whole family who had some virtue in him, was too timid to take up a position of uncompromising condemnation. He thought it more politic to go part of the way, and to trust to being able to prevent the worst. That is always a dangerous experiment. It is often tried still; it never answers. Let a man stand to his guns, and speak out the condemnation that is in his heart; otherwise he will be sure to go farther than he meant, he will lose all right of remonstrance, and will generally find that the more daring sinners have made his well-meant schemes to avert the mischief impossible. V. THE CRUEL TRICK BY WHICH JACOB WAS DECEIVED is perhaps the most heartless bit of the whole heartless crime. It came as near an insult as possible. It was maliciously meant. The snarl about the coat, the studied use of "thy son" as if they disowned the brotherhood, the unfeeling harshness of choosing such a way of telling their lie—all were meant to give the maximum of pain, and betray their savage hatred of father and son, and its causes. VI. AND WHAT OF THE POOR OLD FATHER? His grief is unworthy of God's wrestler. It is not the part of a devout believer in God's providence to refuse to be comforted. There was no religious submission in his passionate sorrow. How unlike the quiet resignation which should have marked the recognition that the God who had been his guide was working here too! No doubt the hypocritical condolences of his children were as vinegar upon nitre. No doubt the loss of Joseph had taken away the one gentle and true son on whom his loneliness rested since his Rachel's death, while he found no solace in the wild, passionate men who called him "father," and brought him no "honour." But still his grief is beyond the measure which a true faith in God would have warranted; and we cannot but see that the dark picture which we have just been looking at gets no lighter or brighter tints from the demeanour of Jacob. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Joseph sold into Egypt*:—I. A BEAUTIFUL IDEAL OF WHAT A YOUNG CHRISTIAN SHOULD BE. 1. Having no fellowship with that which is evil. 2. As loved of the good. II. THE SAD EXPERIENCES THROUGH WHICH MANY A CONSISTENT YOUNG CHRISTIAN PASSES. 1. Joseph was hated of his brothers because their father loved him. 2. Joseph was cruelly treated by his brothers. 3. There are lighter and darker shades among the wicked. III. THE SORROW WHICH CRUEL TREATMENT CAUSES. IV. THE TENDER PROVIDENCE OF GOD IS SEEN IN THE DISPOSAL OF JOSEPH IN EGYPT. 1. His promotion in Potiphar's house proves this. 2. That he reached the rulership of Egypt through his experiences in Potiphar's house, proves it. Lessons: The permissions of God are full of mystery, but also full of grace. 2. The story of Joseph proves the possibility of youthful piety, and that Christian character may glow in adversity. (*D. C. Hughes, M.A.*) *Apparent disaster often real advancement*:—The chief peril which threatened Joseph was the foolish partiality of his father. Under this unwholesome influence he was likely enough to become vain, insolent, overbearing. So it was best that he should be removed from this mischievous hot-house of favouritism into a more bracing climate; where, under biting winds and nipping frosts, his virtues would be well rooted. Fortune's frowns serve our well-being, as much—perhaps more—than fortune's smiles. If friends of God, no harm can ever befall us. I. WE SEE HERE INNOCENCE PROVOKING MALICE TO VILDER DEEDS. Without question, the presence of a righteous man brings to light the baseness of the wicked. Just as the summer sun quickens the growth of noxious weeds, and makes the stench of a fœtid sewer still more odious; so the influence of a saintly character exasperates base men to do their worst. The presence of the Son of God on earth provoked Satan to put out prodigious efforts of malice. To a vitiated palate even food will produce vomiting. The beneficent errand of Joseph obtained only opprobrium and ill-nature. "Behold," said they, "this dreamer cometh." Then

this was the worst thing malice could lay to his charge. In this respect also Joseph was a type of Jesus Christ. The only accusation men could prefer against either was that he had aspired to be a king. Yet this was not merely a prophetic assertion; it was a divinely appointed office; it was a certain destiny. The righteous man must inevitably rule. II. WE SEE HERE WICKEDNESS RAPIDLY MATURING ITS FRUITS. 1. Sin is a hardening and a blinding process. It treats its victims as the Philistines treated Samson—puts out their eyes. They saw not Joseph as a brother; they saw him only as a dreamer. They saw only the gain of twenty dollars—about a dollar a piece; they were blind to the tremendous loss. 2. Under favourable circumstances sin speedily develops. Hatred soon grew into murderous conspiracy, into rude violence, into lying, deceit, avarice, fraud; into base traffic of a brother's flesh—the sum of all villainies. In the fields of nature some plants will bear ten thousand seeds; but this plant of sin is yet more prolific in effects. 3. Yet sin is temporarily checked by a sense of responsibility. Reuben alone of the eleven sought the deliverance of Joseph. 4. Sin defeats its own ends. When the innocent lad was led away an abject slave, had they baffled his dreams? They had helped the business forward. III. WE SEE HERE THAT HARD SERVICE IS THE WAY TO SOVEREIGNTY. There is great truth in the maxim that “he would rule, must first learn to serve.” Napoleon I. rose to sovereignty because he served well in the lowest ranks of the French army. Jesus Christ is enthroned in the hearts of myriads because He has served them so faithfully and so generously. It is a law in mechanics that in proportion as a free body is forced downward, will it rise upward when the force is withdrawn. Nature helps a rebound. (*J. Dickerson Davies, M.A.*) *Anything better than confinement in the dry pit*:—To be brought out of a pit wherein there is no water, is in Scripture represented as a great deliverance. Joseph would learn in this pit to bear those other sufferings that were allotted to him. He was sold to foreign merchants. He was carried into a strange land, to be again sold as a slave. He was cast into a prison, where he lay for several years. But the remembrance of the pit wherein was no water, and of his fruitless cries for relief, would make him think that his condition, under all these circumstances of distress, was not so bad as it might have been, and as it once actually was. (*G. Lawson, D.D.*) *Joseph betrayed and sold for twenty pieces of silver*:—Joseph, in his betrayal into the hands of the Ishmaelites, was a distinct type of the Redeemer betrayed into the hands of the Gentiles. The name of the betrayer was the same. In the case of Joseph it was a brother who lifted up his heel against him; in the case of Christ, it was His own familiar friend in whom He trusted, which did eat of His bread (Psa. xii. 9) that betrayed Him. In both cases it was covetousness which prompted the betrayer to the dark deed of treachery. In both cases the betrayer dissembled, and accomplished his wicked design under the mask of friendship. Do you observe how Judah speaks? How subtle is his argument, and yet how transparently hollow and treacherous and insincere! As hollow and as insincere as the kiss of Judas! Look at his speech. “Come,” said he, “and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh.” Oh what a contemptible vice is covetousness! The rest of his brethren readily consented to this proposal. The proposal itself, and their acquiescing in it, gives us a very painful view of the deceitfulness of the human heart. The proposal was a monstrous one; it was most cruel; and yet they ignorantly imagined that by adopting it they would be washing their hands of blood-guiltiness. They appear to have viewed it as an admirable contrivance, by which they would get rid of Joseph effectually, without loading their consciences with his death, just as though they would not be quite as responsible in the sight of God for the mischief done him by the Ishmaelites, as though their own hands had wrought it. It is very melancholy to see the conscience of man thus deceiving him. And are there not other practices amongst us in which this same principle of drugging our consciences deceitfully can be traced? Is there no such thing as servants being employed to do what we would be ashamed to do ourselves? But perhaps we may discover something more than a practical lesson in this conduct of the patriarchs. May not their “Let not our hand be upon Him” remind us of the Jews? When Pilate said to them, “Take ye Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him,” what did they say? “Oh no! let not our hand be upon Him; do you crucify Him; yes, crucify Him, by all means; but as for us, it is not lawful for us to put any man to death.” There are two other points in the text in which Joseph was a type of Christ. He was sold as a slave; Jesus was born under the law—a slave to perform all the rigid requirements of a law without mercy. Not one jot, not one

title of that rigid law was ever relaxed for Him. Joseph was sold for twenty pieces of silver, Jesus was sold for thirty. At what price do you value the Lord Jesus Christ? Is He, in your estimation, the pearl of great price? (*E. Dalton.*) *Joseph sold to Arabs:*—The passage of an Arab caravan towards Egypt, and its purchase of Joseph, is equally true to early times, and to the unchanging Eastern life of to-day. Sir Samuel Baker's boy, Saat, had, in the same way as Joseph, been carried off while he was tending goats, by an Arab caravan; hidden in a gum sack, and finally taken to Cairo and sold as a slave. "All the world may perish, so far as we care," said an Arab to Niebuhr, "if only Egypt remains." And it was left to them even more in Joseph's day than now, from the dislike of Egyptians to leave their country even for purposes of gain. The trade in "spices" was exceptionally great between the valley of the Nile and neighbouring countries; from the quantity used for embalming mummies, for burning as incense, or as disinfectants; for which they were in great repute. Even the names of the first and second of the three spices named—gum tragacanth, from Lebanon and Palestine generally, Armenia and Persia; balsam from the balsam-tree of Gilead; and *laudanum*—the gum collected still from the leaves of the *cistus-rose*—from Syria and Arabia, have been found in the list of two hundred drugs named in the temple-laboratory of Edfu; for each temple had its laboratory and apothecary. Even the twenty pieces of silver given for Joseph are exactly the price fixed under Moses as that of a male slave between five and twenty years of age (*Lev. xxvii. 5*); so nearly had human beings kept the same value for centuries. (*C. Geikie, D.D.*) *Sold into slavery:*—Mr. H. M. Stanley told an awful story of African slavery, in the Manchester Free Trade Hall. He said: "A slave trade was a great blight, which clung to Africa like an aggravated pest, destroying men faster than children could be born. He overtook a party of Arab marauders on the Congo in November, 1893, over 1,200 miles from the sea. They had utterly desolated a number of villages, massacred all the adult males who had not at once fled, and carried off the women and children. He never saw such a sight before. In a small camp 300 fighting men kept in manacles and fetters, 2,300 naked women and children, their poor bodies encrusted with dirt, all emaciated and weary through much misery. Here was the net result of the burning of 118 villages, and the devastation of forty-three districts, to glut the avaricious soul of a man who had constituted himself chief of a district some 200 miles higher up. Though over seventy-five years old, here he was prosecuting his murderous business, having shed as much human blood in three months as, if collected into a tank, might have sufficed to drown him and all his thirty wives and concubines. Those 2,300 slaves would have to be transported over 200 miles in canoes, and such as could not be fed would die, and perhaps 800—perhaps 900—of all the number would ever reach their destination." *From the pit to slavery:*—In Joseph's being lifted out of the pit only to pass into slavery, many a man of Joseph's years has seen a picture of what has happened to himself. From a position in which they have been as if buried alive, young men not uncommonly emerge into a position preferable certainly to that out of which they have been brought, but in which they are compelled to work beyond their strength, and that for some superior in whom they have no special interest. Grinding toil, and often cruel insult, are their portion; and no necklace heavy with tokens of honour that afterwards may be allotted them can ever quite hide the scars made by the iron collar of the slave. One need not pity them over much, for they are young and have a whole life-time of energy and power of resistance in their spirit. And yet they will often call themselves slaves, and complain that all the fruit of their labour passes over to others and away from themselves, and all prospect of the fulfilment of their former dreams is quite cut off. That which haunts their heart by day and by night, that which they seem destined and fit for, they never get time nor liberty to work out and attain. They are never viewed as proprietors of themselves, who may possibly have interests of their own and hopes of their own. In Joseph's case there were many aggravations of the soreness of such a condition. He had not one friend in the country. He had no knowledge of the language, no knowledge of any trade that could make him valuable in Egypt—nothing, in short, but his own manhood and his faith in God. His introduction to Egypt was of the most dispiriting kind. What could he expect from strangers, if his own brothers had found him so obnoxious? Now, when a man is thus galled and stung by injury, and has learned how little he can depend upon finding good faith and common justice in the world, his character will show itself in the attitude he assumes towards men and towards life generally. A weak nature, when it finds itself thus

deceived and injured, will sullenly surrender all expectation of good, and will vent its spleen on the world by angry denunciations of the heartless and ungrateful ways of men. A proud nature will gather itself up from every blow, and determinedly work its way to an adequate revenge. A mean nature will accept its fate, and while it indulges in cynical and spiteful observations on human life, will greedily accept the paltriest rewards it can secure. But the supreme healthiness of Joseph's nature resists all the infectious influences that emanate from the world around him, and preserves him from every kind of morbid attitude towards the world and life. So easily did he throw off all vain regrets and stifle all vindictive and morbid feelings, so readily did he adjust himself to and so heartily enter into life as it presented itself to him, that he speedily rose to be overseer in the house of Potiphar. (*M. Dods, D.D.*)

Vers. 29, 30. Reuben returned.—*Lessons*:—1. Under the wise providence of God, helpers may come too late to save oppressed. 2. Creatures as they intend, so may they do their utmost to save, when God will not have it so. 3. The pit, under God's disposal, giveth up to sale, when it is intended unto freedom. 4. Nature is apt to be passionate to rending cloths upon disappointments (ver. 29). 5. Brotherly affection disappointed, though not true, will make one fall upon disappointments with indignation. 6. Passion may make men judge that not to be, which is, and so may make mourners. 7. Natural affection may put men to their wits' end upon disappointments, and fears of worse events (ver. 30). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. Hypocrisy may admit trouble in some evil, but conspires willfully to do other. Reuben with them. 2. The coat of innocency may be made a cloak to cover cruelty. 3. Cruelty makes use of policy to hide itself from discovery. Kid's blood for man's. 4. Sinners' subtlety sometimes to put it off from themselves, makes evil worse than it is. Blood without blood (ver. 31.) 5. Beastly acting sinners use, to turn over their sins to beasts (so if the word be striking through). 6. The guilty have their harbingers, to conceal sin more cunningly. 7. Sin makes men shameless to bring the tokens of their wickedness to plead for them. 8. Sellers of brethren make not much to do that, which may kill their fathers. 9. Sinners use to make their refuge in lies, and so add sin to sin. 10. Impudent sinners, though they be conscious, yet make things doubtful unto others (ver. 32). 11. Good men may be deceived by sinners, upon that which they know. 12. Gracious souls may be too credulous toward the wicked, who speaks falsely to them. 13. Over much credulity makes men receive that which afterwards they find false (ver. 33). (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 33. Without doubt.—*Without doubt*:—While in relation to some things men doubt where they ought to trust, with other matters they will feel quite certain, though they have good cause for questioning. Consider the habit of taking certain notions "without doubt," as it is illustrated in the case of Jacob. I. THE HABIT IS DEPENDENT ON PREDISPOSITION. The sanguine are "without doubt" of success, where the cautious are "without doubt" of disaster. The despondent regard the world through darkened spectacles. It is no wonder that their prospects seem gloomy. II. THE HABIT IS ENCOURAGED BY APPEARANCES. To Jacob appearances were sadly significant. What more evidence could be wanted? We should remember that all appearances may be against the true facts. III. THE HABIT LEADS TO GREIVOUS MISTAKES. Jacob's verdict was "without doubt." Nevertheless, it was a wrong verdict. We talk of the evil of doubt. There are evils of positiveness. IV. THE HABIT IS POSITIVELY MISCHIEVOUS. It causes distress when we are needlessly positive of a painful surmise. It does more harm. It paralyses our efforts to better a gloomy state of affairs. V. THE HABIT MAY BE A PUNISHMENT OF FORMER UNTRUTHFULNESS. In his youth Jacob deceived his father; in his old age Jacob was deceived by his sons. He was cunning and wily. Yet he was over-reached, and suffered from the trickery of others. Worldly acuteness is no security against deception in matters that lie nearest to our heart. The fox may be outwitted, while the lamb is spared in its simplicity. Application: See how these principles work in various directions. 1. Domestic anxiety. Parents are often inclined to dread the worst of absent children lost to sight, and perhaps unheard of for years. Yet they may be as safe and prosperous as Joseph became. 2. Prospects for life. 3. Our spiritual condition. (*W. F. Adney, M.A.*)

Ver. 35. He refused to be comforted.—*Real and unreal consolations*:—Earth is so

full of sorrows, and its sorrows are so various, and its cry for their healing so piteous and so importunate, that no man who lives can always stop his ears, if he can even steel his heart, against the demand for his sympathy and his ministrations. The world itself has its forms and its phrases of consolation; borrowed, no doubt, in name, from Christianity and the Bible, but divested, in the transfer, of their efficacy for healing, by being torn (as it were) from the context, and presented bare and solitary to the aching and thirsting heart. And the Church has its ministry of comfort; its ordained and consecrated representatives in things sacred, of whose profession it is one half, and not the least anxious and difficult half, to be at the beck and call of sorrow, whatever its kind or cause, for the express purpose of conveying to it, in Christ's behalf, the consolations of the Gospel. Nevertheless, how many are they who, whether the world speaks or the Church, yet, like the patriarch in the text, "refuse to be comforted." How small a part of the suffering of mankind as a whole, even in Christendom, is healed, or sensibly mitigated, by the comfort professedly offered it. Let us ask why. Let us take a few specimens of consolation, as the word is commonly understood, and see where and why they fail, and must fail, in doing the thing attempted. We need not, for our present purpose, distinguish accurately between different kinds of distress. Pain is pain, whether it has to do with mind or body, with circumstances or affections, with conscience or the soul. And as the malady is, in this sense, one in all cases, so the idea and principle of consolation, may be the same in very various applications. 1. Thus there is one kind of consolation, the least adroit, it may be, but not the least common, which practically consists in a disparagement of the suffering. This sort of comfort fails in both the essentials. First, it is unsympathizing; and secondly, it is unreal. A man could not thus speak who felt with you. This man is just getting rid of an irksome duty. He does not enter into your case. Thus the comfort lacks sympathy, and must be refused. But it lacks reality too. It is not true that you exaggerate. Your pain is painful. 2. There is another kind of consolation, of which the characteristic is that it deals largely in false promises. The physician, conjured to be true, looks the patient in the face, and says she thing that is not. "He sees nothing to make him anxious. You may live for years." He tells the next person he meets that you are a doomed man. You are anxious—you have cause to be so—about professional success. You confide your misgiving, your apprehension, your mortification, to your friend. To save himself, or to save you, a moment's pain, he assures you that you are mistaken. "The next turn of fortune's wheel will be in your favour. He has reason to hope, he almost knows, that your name stands next for an appointment." To a third person he says plainly that you are a failure, that you have not a chance. Worse still is it, when the soul is the subject. 3. There is a still larger class of consolations which have this for their feature, that they use true words but apply them falsely. In mere carelessness, in worse than carelessness, in headlong headstrong presumption, a man has incurred a terrible, perhaps fatal, accident. There is instantly a chorus of comforters, it is the will of God. Worse than this: a son has been the plague of his home, the scourge of mother and sister, the ill example, the guide into all mischief, of brothers and schoolfellows! no change, save from worse to worse, comes over his youth; all manner of sin and wickedness is his sport and his occupation; at last he commits a crime, brings shame upon his name, reduces his family to misery and destitution—who cannot anticipate, even then, a view of the terrible history, which shall lightly and confidently bring into it, if not for the sinner yet for the sufferers, the hand and counsel of God; bidding them believe that the whole aspect of it, for them at least, is one of blessing and hope and fatherly love? And so, when at last the grave closes over one whose whole life has been a denial and defiance of the Bible, whose last breath may have been the repudiation, not only of clergyman or sacrament, but of prayer, and of Christ, and of immortality itself; there are those who can see in all this nothing more than an idiosyncrasy or a misfortune, and who, not contented (as all ought to be) with silence and sorrow, with refraining from cruel judgments and ill-omened words, are ready to offer to the survivors the most cheerful and confident of consolations, as if over a deathbed of sweet hope, crowning a life of consistent, of Christ-like devotion. Brethren, the sight and the touch of suffering is keen and sensitive; and it must revolt against all this as an offensive obtrusion of an unreal and impertinent consolation. That which we could not say without cruelty in the individual instance, or in the house darkened by the calamity itself, we can say and we ought to say in general terms, while it may yet be for the admonition of men whose day of grace is not ended.

Truth is not always comfort. We cannot always with propriety say in the moment of sorrow the word which nevertheless may be the true one, about the healing power of time, or the reparative processes of reviving interests and affections. But this has no exception; comfort cannot be without truth. Sympathy itself is dead, being alone. Let us who would be "sons of consolation," take good heed to our truthfulness. This estimate of life and the Bible will alter the language of our consolations. It will make them entirely real, and in the same degree strongly supporting. We shall ask no man to call evil good, or to write sweet for bitter. When some terrible thing happens, and we are called to minister, we shall say, "Alas, my brother!" Let us sit and weep together over the mighty power of evil. Oh, how necessary was the Gospel! Oh, how intelligible has become the Cross! Oh, how desirable that last revelation—death and hell cast into the lake of fire—the tabernacle of God come down to earth, and tears wiped from off all faces! And then, although we cannot offer the false consolation, which confounds light and darkness, receives with an impartial and indifferent complaisance alike the good and the evil, sees a God (so called) equally in both and in neither, and encourages an easy, trivial, light-hearted passage, through a world "neither clear nor dark," into another world, itself neither day nor night; yet we shall at least have realized God in His holiness, Christ in His necessity, life in its seriousness, heaven in its glory; we shall at least have renounced for ever that vile flattery which barter truth for a smile—that ignoble trafficking in great names, of which the Nemesis is the forfeiture of great realities. And the moral of it all is weighty and legible. If the battle is so sore around and within us; if good and evil are not words but things; if Christ and Satan are not phantoms but persons; if we must have a side, though we know it not, and he that is not with Christ must be against Him—let us be serious. The mere use of true words will help us. (*Dean Vaughan.*)

I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning.—*Jacob's grief for his son.*—I. IT WAS DEEP AND OVERWHELMING. II. IT WAS INCONSOLABLE. III. IT CAST HIM UPON THE FUTURE. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Jacob's mistake.*—"I will go down to the grave," or to the world of departed spirits, "mourning for my son." Jacob did not hope to see any more good in this world, when his choicest comfort in life was taken from him. He had the prospect of no days of gladness, when Joseph, the joy of his heart, was torn in pieces by wild beasts. But he did not know what joys were yet before him in the recovery of his long-lost son. We know not what joys or what sorrows may be before us in the course of our lives. Let us never despond while God's throne continues firm and stable in heaven. Jacob had the prospect of sorrow while he lived in the world. He knew, and he ought to have rejoiced in the knowledge, that his sorrows would last only during his present life. The saints of God will indeed be in heaviness through manifold temptations, whilst they continue in this bad world. But they have good reason (if they had hearts) to rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory, in the prospect of the unknown joys that lie beyond the grave. The present life is but a single night to their future life; and although sorrow may endure through the whole night, yet joy cometh in the morning. (*G. Lawson, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

VERS. 1-7. Judah.—*The character of Judah.*—I. FAITHLESSNESS TOWARDS GOD. 1. In his separation from his brethren (ver. 1). 2. In his marriage with an idolator (ver. 2). II. A strong sensual nature (vers. 12-18). III. AN UNDERLYING SENSE OF JUSTICE. IV. SELF-DEPENDENCE. (*T. H. Leale.*) *The lessons of Judah's history.*—I. GOD'S CAUSE HAS IN IT THE SEEDS OF TRIUMPH EVEN WHEN IT SEEMS TO FAIL. II. GOD'S JUDGMENTS ON THE SIN OF UNCHASTITY. III. THIS HISTORY HAS AN IMPORTANT BEARING UPON GOD'S PURPOSE OF SALVATION. Considered in regard to God's redeeming purpose, this history shows—1. That God's election is by grace. Otherwise Judah would not have been chosen as the ancestor of Christ. It shows—2. The native glory of Christ. He derives all His glory from Himself, and not from His ancestry. It shows—3. The amazing condescension of Christ. The greatest and most shameful sinners are found in His birth-register. (*Ibid.*) *Lessons.*—1. Arbitrary is the Spirit of God in recording times of events; therefore careful should we be to search

them. 2. Wanton forward youths are apt to leave their station, brethren, and fathers, where they should be ruled. 3. Such averseness from duty inclines foolish hearts to lose acquaintance. So it was here. 4. Wanton youths choose to be familiar with worldly companions in lust rather than to be with a good father. 5. Names of men and places of miscarriage by the sons of the Church are noted for instruction (ver. 1). 6. In bad company, and out of men's places usually, are offered baits of temptation. 7. Wanton hearts have wanton eyes by which they are carried out to evil. 8. Daughters of the Canaanites may please the eyes of the sons of Jacob to misguide them. 9. Violence of lust drives men to take their delights, never desiring leave of God or man. 10. Lust desires no better marriage than a carnal enjoyment of its pleasure. 11. Lust fears no law of God that forbids Jacob's seed to marry with Canaanites (ver. 2). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. Such as have been disobedient to parents are not willing their children should be such to them. 2. It is the father's right to provide and give wives to their sons. 3. It is natural for fathers to care mainly for the first-born son. 4. Providence orders wives from strangers to be registered in His Church for His own ends. 5. The first-born of men's hopes may prove most wicked, and greatest crosses. 6. It is height of wickedness to dare the Lord to His face. 7. God Himself turneth executioner to avenge Himself upon daring sinners. 3. Premature death is determined sometimes and executed upon obstinate wicked sinners. (*Ibid.*) *Judah*:—Judah had taken to wife the daughter of a Canaanite, no doubt to the grief and regret of his father (comp. xxvi. 35); he had done what hitherto every member of the chosen branches of Abraham's house had scrupulously avoided; for even the sanguinary deed of Simeon and Levi had been dictated by the desire of preserving the purity of their family. He left his brothers and went to Adullam. This is a town in the plain of Judah, south-west of Jerusalem, mentioned together with Jarmuth and Sochoh, or with Libnah and Makkedah; it is one of the most ancient cities, and enjoyed an existence of unusual duration; for in the time of the Hebrew conquest it was the seat of a Canaanitish king; a cave in its neighbourhood was the refuge of David from the persecutions of Saul; here his relatives joined him; here he assembled around his person a large number of distressed but resolute men; and here he met a part of the Philistine army. Adullam was fortified by Rehoboam; it was later counted among the important cities of Judah; it was still inhabited after the exile; and existed even in the time of the Maccabees. (*M. M. Kalisch, Ph.D.*)

Vers. 8-10. Onan.—*The sin of Onan*:—I. IT WAS PROMPTED BY A LOW MOTIVE. It was as selfish as it was vile. Onan's design was to preserve the whole inheritance for his own house. II. IT WAS AN ACT OF WILFUL DISOBEDIENCE TO GOD'S ORDINANCE. Ill deservings of others can be no excuse for our injustice, for our uncharitableness. That which Tamar required, Moses afterward, as from God, commanded—the succession of brothers into the barren bed. Somelaws God spake to His Church long ere He wrote them: while the author is certainly known, the voice and the finger of God are worthy of equal respect. III. IT WAS A DISHONOUR DONE TO HIS OWN BODY. Unchastity in general is a homicidal waste of the generative powers, a demoniac bestiality, an outrage to ancestors, to posterity, and to one's own life. It is a crime against the image of God, and a degradation below the animal. Onan's offence, moreover, as committed in marriage, was a most unnatural wickedness, a grievous wrong, and a desecration of the body as the temple of God. It was a proof of the most defective development of what may be called the consciousness of personality, and of personal dignity. IV. IT WAS AGGRAVATED BY HIS POSITION IN THE COVENANT FAMILY. The Messiah was to descend from the stock of Judah, and for aught he knew from himself. This very Tamar is counted in the genealogy of Christ (Matt. i. 3). Herein he did despite to the covenant promise. He rejected an honourable destiny. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Lessons*:—Vain parents take little knowledge of God's judgments in the death of one child when they have others. 2. Special law for the marriage of the deceased brother's wife by the brother was given of God for special ends. 3. Seed was much desirable and is so in the Church of God; for which such laws were made (ver. 8). 4. Wicked creatures are selfish in duty, therefore unwilling to seek any good but their own. 5. Self-pollution, destruction of the seed of man, envy to brethren, are Onan's horrid crimes (ver. 9). 6. Onans may be in the visible Church. 7. Such uncleanness is very grievous in God's sight. 8. Exemplary death may be expected from God by such transgressors (ver. 10). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Onan's sin*:—It must be borne in mind that the propagation of the family name formed one of the most sacred wishes of the

Israelites; that "excision" was looked upon as the most awful indication of Divine wrath; and that polygamy itself was so long maintained, because it offers a greater guarantee of offspring. The Hebrews were not a strictly practical people; sentiment and indefinite aspirations had a large share in their religious views and social institutions: at an early period embracing and fostering the hope of a Messianic time, when all the nations of the earth would be united in love and the knowledge of God, they are eminently capable of prizing the permanent existence of their families. The agrarian character of the Mosaic constitution added power to this idea. Landed property was the foundation of the political edifice, and equality its main pillar. Each family was identified with a certain portion of the sacred soil; its extinction was, therefore, more strongly apprehended by the individual, and was injurious to the prosperity of the state, as the accumulation of wealth in the hands of individuals threatened to disturb the equality of the citizens. It is, therefore, impossible to misunderstand the spirit and tendency of the law concerning the marriage with the brother's widow; it was neither dictated by the desire of preventing the abandoned condition of the widow, or of counteracting some other fancied abuse; its purport is distinctly expressed to have been to procure a descendant to the brother (ver. 8); "that the name of the deceased be preserved upon his inheritance, and that his name be not erased from among his brethren and from the gate of his town" (Ruth iv. 10). It may suffice to add, in this place, that similar customs prevailed among the Indians, Persians, and some Italian tribes, and that they are still practised by the Tsherkessians and Tartars, the Gallas in Abyssinia, the Afghans, and other nations. It was in conformity with this law that Judah commanded his second son, Onan, to marry the childless widow of his elder brother. But Onan was not more virtuous than the family to which he belonged: unwilling to maintain his brother's name, he knew how to frustrate the hopes of Judah. God took away his life for that reckless wickedness. (*M. M. Kalisch, Ph.D.*)

Vers. 11-30. **Tamar.**—*Lessons*:—1. Sinful hearts when they suffer from God's hand are apt to vent it upon creatures. 2. Carnal relations grow quickly weary of showing kindness when their aims are crossed by God. 3. Hard fathers-in-law, for their own ends, spare not to lay the hardest terms upon allies. 4. Such oppressors deal subtly, though cruelly; they pretend fair at least. 5. Wicked hearts are apt to be jealous, and transfer faults and ill successes to others that are innocent. 6. Sinful fathers are willing to save children from death, but take bad ways to do it. 7. Widowhood is a solitary condition that binds souls to sit at home. 8. God overruling, natural hearts may be content to submit to hard injunctions from others when they cannot help it. So it was with Tamar when Judah layeth hard injunctions on her (ver. 11). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. Injuries to daughters-in-law God may repay upon men's wives. 2. Days may seem many before God's visit, but visitation will come for sin. 3. God may make death to be a just recompense of men's hard dealings. 4. Vain and sinful hearts are soon comforted after the death of wives. 5. Comforts carnal hearts do seek by fleshly feasting and employments. 6. Bad companions and opportune places bad hearts delight in to enjoy their lusts (ver. 12). (*Ibid.*) *Lessons*:—1. A lustful eye will quickly turn the foot out of the way to sin. Connection (ver. 15). 2. Men of lustful hearts turn of their own accord to evil with others without invitation. 3. Digression from men's lawful way tends to transgression against God and man. 4. Lust is a hard solicitor for its unclean enjoyments. 5. Lust runs blindfold even to defile near relations, and enquireth not. 6. Sometimes lust is put to it to pay a price for its pleasure. The whorish custom (ver. 16). 7. Unclean persons stick not to lessen their flock for increase of lust, so of estates. 8. Adulterous spirits are not credible with their own paramours; a price or pledge must be given (ver. 17). 9. Wicked hearts stick not at pledge or price unto whorish women for enjoying lust. 10. Unclean creatures are subtle to have a great pledge for a small price. 11. Be it ever so great, lust will give it to the whorish woman for its pleasure. 12. Blind lust doth not only solicit but violate nearest relations when it can. 13. Providence denieth not conception sometimes to the most incestuous mixtures of men and women. 14. It is the order of providence that conception should be for Judah as well as by him (ver. 18). (*Ibid.*) *Lessons*:—1. Sinful lust, when its turn is served, makes out of sight speedily. 2. Guile and deceit are usual adjuncts to lust of uncleanness. 3. Guileful harlots stay not long in common places, where they may be discovered. 4. Lust teacheth souls to put off, and to put on, any signals which might either discover or conceal them (ver. 19). (*Ibid.*) *Lessons*:—1. Pawns may make naughty hearts careful to pay

their debts for sin. 2. Wicked affairs are best trusted to hands of wicked friends. 3. Payment of debts by sinners is accounted just to take up pawns. 4. It is no rare thing for partners in sin to deceive each other; to get out of the way when they should be found. 5. Under Providence the debt of lust is not always paid, nor the pawn of iniquity restored (ver. 20). 6. Sinners are diligent to inquire about their sinful affairs. 7. Sinners are impudent to ask openly after harlots in the high way; to bewray the worst matter. 8. Under wife providence, such inquisitors have an answer of frustration (ver. 21). 9. The trustiest messengers of sinners may return bootless to such as send them. 10. Objects of uncleanness may be found to ensnare persons to sin, but not to satisfy demands. 11. God sometimes ordereth the frustration of sinners with a witness (ver. 22). 12. By patience perforce, unclean sinners may be content to sit down with loss. 13. Fear of shame and reproach make sinners willing to be losers. 14. Uncleanness is a reproachful thing in the account of the worst adulterers. 15. A self-conceit of having done their duties make wicked ones sometimes content to sit down losers (ver. 23). (*Ibid.*) *Lessons*:—1. There is a season of bearing ordered by Providence and to be observed by us (Eccles. iii. 2). 2. Providence may order abundant fruitfulness unto incestuous mixtures. Twins to incest (ver. 27). 3. God sometimes returneth unto unclean conceptions bitter travails. 4. Cross coming of children to birth is God's ordering to mind of sin sometimes. 5. Creatures may be deceived in marking that for first which cometh last (ver. 28). 6. It is God's prerogative to make first and last in births, and other conditions. 7. Even in the fruit of the womb God makes one child retreat that the other may come forth. 8. The breaking out of the fruit of the womb is sometimes wonderful to creatures. 2. The wonders of God are reasonably prepetuated in the very names of children (ver. 29). 10. The first in man's thoughts is many times last in God's. 11. Safe births are great mercies, whether first or last; all come forth under providence. 12. Such mercies should be made known in the very names and beings of creatures (ver. 30). (*Ibid.*)

CHAPTER XXXIX.

VERS. 1-6. And Joseph was brought down to Egypt.—*The prosperity of Joseph in the house of his first master*:—I. ITS EXTRAORDINARY NATURE. Cast off by his own brethren, he rises amongst strangers to dignity and honour. II. ITS BASIS AND SECURITY. 1. His own bearing and conduct. 2. The favour of God. III. ITS LESSONS. 1. That God's blessings and grace are with His people everywhere, and under the severest trials. 2. That God's blessing and grace are manifest to others (ver. 3). 3. That God blesses others for the sake of His people (ver. 5). 4. That God is still working out His designs, even when they seem to fail. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Lessons from Joseph in captivity*:—1. We have all our captivities at some time or other in our experience. The essence of Joseph's trial here was that he was taken whither he had no wish to go, and was prevented from going back again to the home in which his father was sitting mourning for his loss. But is not interference with our comfort or our liberty still the bitter element in all our afflictions? Take bodily illness, for example, and when you get at the root of the discomfort of it, you find it in the union of these two things: you are where you do not want to be—where you would never have thought of putting yourself—and you are held there, whether you will or not, by a Power that is stronger than your own. No external force constrains you, no fetters are on your limbs, yet you are held where you are against your own liking, and you do not relish the situation—you are a captive. But the same thing comes out in almost every sort of trial. You are, let me suppose, in business perplexity. But that is not of your own choosing; if you could have managed it, you would have been in quite different circumstances. Yet, in spite of you, things have gone against you. Men whom you had implicitly trusted, and whom you would have had no more thought of doubting than you would think now of doubting your mother's love, have proved deceitful; or the course of trade has gone against you, and you are brought to a stand. You have been carried away perhaps by brothers, perhaps by Ishmaelites—for the race is not yet extinct—from the Canaan of comfort to the Egypt captivity, and you are now in helpless perplexity. It may be standing, not like Joseph, in the slave-pen, but

in the market place of labour, and condemned to do nothing, because "no man hath hired" you. Ah! there are many, too many always, in a large city like this who are in just such circumstances. What then? Let them learn from Joseph here that the first thing to do in a captivity is to acquiesce in it as the will of God concerning them. 2. But then, in the second place, we must learn from Joseph to make the best of our remaining opportunities in our captivity. If he was to be a slave, Joseph was determined he would be the best of slaves, and what he was required to do he would do with his might and with his heart. This is a most important consideration, and it may, perhaps, help to explain why similar trials have had such different results in different persons. One has been bemoaning that it is not with him as it used to be, while the other has discovered that some talents have been still left him, and he has set to work with these. One has been saying, "If I had only the resources which I once possessed I could do something; but now they have gone, I am helpless." But the other has been soliloquizing thus: "If I can do nothing else I can at least do this, little as it is; and if I put it into the hand of Christ, He can make it great"; and so we account for the unhappiness and uselessness of the one, and for the happiness and usefulness of the other. Nor will it do to say that this difference is a mere thing of temperament. It is a thing of character. The one acts in faith, recognizing God's hand in his affliction, the other acts in unbelief, seeing nothing but his own calamity, and that only increases his affliction. So we come to this: keep fast hold of God's hand in your captivity, and do your best in that which is open to you. That will ultimately bring you out of it; but if you lose that you will lose everything. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

Joseph a slave:—I. THAT A GOOD MAN IN CAPTIVITY CAN ENJOY GOD'S PRESENCE.

II. THAT A GOOD MAN IN BONDAGE CAN SHOW FORTH GOD'S GLORY. III. THAT A GOOD

MAN IN SLAVERY CAN DEVELOP THE HUMANITY OF OTHERS. IV. THAT A GOOD MAN IN

BONDAGE MAY BE TRUSTED. V. THAT A GOOD MAN IS A GREAT BLESSING WHEREVER HE

MAY BE FOUND. (*Homilist*) *Trying days*:—Notice some of the points brought

out in this trying portion of Joseph's history. 1. The fact of having parted with

the restraints and wholesome influences of home. 2. Joseph's new position also

placed him among strangers. 3. Joseph's lot was also that of inexperience

surrounded with the numerous and glaring temptations of a great city. 4. How

Joseph's new lot subjected his religious principles to the test. (*J. Leyburn, D.D.*)

The trustworthy servant:—I. JOSEPH'S FAITHFULNESS TO HIS MASTER. II. JOSEPH'S

FAITHFULNESS TO HIS GOD. III. JOSEPH'S SOURCE OF HELP AND GLADNESS. The

Lord was with him. CONCLUSION:—What shall we learn from this part of

Joseph's history? That amidst darkness—of sorrow (Joseph exiled); of trial

(Joseph tempted); of injustice (Joseph imprisoned)—there always arises

light for the faithful and pure of heart. Let us ask God to make us

from our earliest years, and in all circumstances, honest, diligent, pure-

minded, patient; and let us never lose hold of our trust in God's help. (*W. S.*

Smith, B.D.) *A kingly slave*:—Scene, Memphis. Splendid architecture, chased

in mimic forms of nature, amid feathery palms waving in the breeze. A red

quivering heat, like a baker's oven, enswathing field and city. On the horizon

gigantic pyramids of stone. Nearer to the eye calm, sleepy sphinxes, guarding the

entry to palace and to temple. On the margin of the city an open market, with

piles of fruit; bales of merchandise; slaves, for the most part, black as ebony;

noisy hucksters; groaning camels. Among the Nubian slaves a fair Syrian youth

attracts attention; realizes a high price, and passes into the hands of a pompous

potentate. To the careless traffickers Joseph was simply a question of gain or

loss—more money or less—an item of evanescent interest. But to Joseph it was a

question of joy or ruin—a matter of life or death. An awful reversal this from the

sunny atmosphere of home! Had God seen all this wrong-doing of men, and had

He allowed it so far to succeed? Could it be that God was on the side of righteous-

ness? I. RELIGION TRANSFORMS A SLAVE INTO A HERO. 1. Outward circumstance is

a trivial thing. "An officer of Pharaoh bought him of the Ishmaelites." It is a

frightful degradation to be reduced to a chattel; yet it is only external degradation.

But the man need not be degraded. Slavery may give scope for the play of noble

principles. Integrity, faithfulness, goodness, piety, love, are untouched, are free to

develop. 2. Man's judgment is often in opposition to God's. 3. In the darkest

night true piety shines the more brightly. Doubtless, Joseph was "cast down,"

yet was he "not in despair." Instead of repining, he kept a brave heart. Here in

Potiphar's mansion is one doing God's will as angels do it in heaven. There is a

noble seraph within this apparent slave. II. RELIGION BRINGS MEN INTO PARTNER-

SHIP WITH GOD. "The Lord was with him: the Lord made all that he did to prosper." 1. A good man is a mystery to onlookers. There is something about him which the world cannot understand. He is patient when others fume and fret. He is buoyant when others are submerged. An unseen Anchor hold his barque, let the storm howl as it may. 2. This superior factor in life is conspicuous. "His master saw that the Lord was with him." Such diligence, honesty, thoughtfulness, promptitude, were unusual, unconventional, superhuman. Some men have a trick of concealing their religion. Joseph allowed his light naturally to shine out. 3. God is an active Partner in honest work. The source of Joseph's prosperity is revealed: "The Lord made it to prosper." A merchant in feeble health once accounted for his successful conduct of a gigantic business by saying that God was his acting Partner. This is the fellowship of the Spirit. A true Christian is man plus God. III. RELIGION MAKES A MAN A MEDIUM OF BLESSING TO OTHERS. "The Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake." Potiphar is not even named: Joseph is everything. 1. A good man is the channel of good to others. Here is God's law of mediation. A man prospers in business through the prayers of a pious servant. A father is raised up from a bed of fever for the sake of a child. A husband is saved from moral wreck by the faith and love of a wife. The God-fearing are the salt of the earth. For Joseph's sake, the fields of Potiphar are fruitful. 2. Real prosperity embraces all the interests of mankind. "The blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house and in the field." The beneficent effect of religion is commensurate with man. It blesses domestic life, agriculture, commerce, politics, literature. It enhances all human joy: it soothes all human sorrow. It kindles a lamp in the darkness of the grave. It fills the heart with an immortal hope. (*J. Dickerson Davies, M.A.*) *Joseph in Egypt*:—Joseph, whose studied silence has unrivalled eloquence, is now in Egypt. New scenes are before him. In the far distant stretches the beauteous valley of the Nile, its fertility unsurpassed. Pyramids, hoary with years, strange mementoes of buried generations, tower towards the transparent firmament. A brief journey has brought him from a region scarcely more than semi-barbarous to one far advanced in civilization. The skilled agriculturist is in the field, the ingenious mechanic at his daily toil. The children have those rare evidences of refined state of society, toys, with which to while away the joyous hours. The judge in his court is administering statutes which even modern society might advantageously re-enact. The priest in the temple is endeavouring to propitiate the gods, and secure blessings for their erring children on earth. A written language, the laborious work of many generations, and which had passed from hieroglyphics to phonetics, meets his eye on cunningly prepared papyrus leaves. A settled religious faith, a complicated system of government, a language bearing evidence of growth through many centuries, a vast empire consolidated upon the wrecks of pre-existing nationalities, great material prosperity accompanied with the knowledge of the physical sciences, of history, of metaphysics, and even of theology; a degree of progress in the fine arts which, though different, still rivals that of the present day—these, as well as their institutions, their laws, and their brilliant achievements, unmistakably testify to the immense antiquity of the empire under whose overshadowing influence Joseph is to pass his days of servitude. Nor is he a solitary bondman among a nation of freemen, but one of a vast number of slaves—slaves from Nubia, from Ethiopia, from Asia, from many surrounding nations, all of which had witnessed, and many of which had submitted to the conquering valour of Egypt's powerful emperors. (*J. S. Van Dyke.*) *Lessons*:—1. Histories of the wicked and righteous are set together by God's Spirit to abase sin and heighten grace in the Church. So of Judah and Joseph. 2. Providence determining to bring any to greatness, leads them usually first into a low estate. Joseph dreams of dignities, but first meets with slavery. 3. Men-selling, though it be great sin in man, yet is it permitted and ordered by God. 4. God's choicest ones may be bought and sold by the hands of strangers and enemies. 5. Providence orders the slavery of His own to such men, by whom more fitly they may be preferred. 6. Egypt may be the house of bondage to God's servants in order to greater freedom (ver. 1). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Piety in unfavourable places*:—Joseph's religion overcame all obstacles because there was real life in it. The other day I slackened my step opposite a garden to notice the crocuses raising their slender heads amid the heavy gravel on the walk. The tender plants, having real life, forced their way through the hard earth and conquered the very stones. So the heavenly plant of Joseph's piety displayed all its beauty and gave out its sweet odours in the wicked palaces of Potiphar and Pharaoh.

Joseph carried down to Egypt:—I. First, then, we will contemplate THE CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH JOSEPH WENT DOWN TO EGYPT. 1. It was not by his own choice. This is intimated by the emphatic expression "he was brought down." It appears that his brethren became envious of him; and they so indulged this bad feeling of the heart (Gen. xxxvii. 18-20). In saying that it is similar to the case of some persons, I do not mean that the same treatment is experienced by them, though unhappily this is the case with many who are torn from their native shores and sold into captivity and bondage against their will; but what I mean is, that their position in life is often fixed for a time without any power on their part to shape their own course. They are governed by the force of circumstances, and find themselves fixed in situations, not because they have chosen it so to be, but because things have tended to that particular position in which they find themselves placed—without their own choice, and without their own control. On the other hand, there is a dissimilarity between the case of Joseph and some others. Time, circumstances, means, are all such that they can, apparently, make their own election, and direct their own pursuits. 2. It was with the prospect of servitude before him. The Midianites bought him to sell him as a slave. That Joseph's being a servant, distinguished as he was by only being removed two descents from Abraham, and honoured as he was also—as we shall afterwards find—by God himself, has sanctified, as it were, the employment of servitude and made it honourable. It can never be a disgrace to us to be employed as he was, especially if we pursue our calling in the way that he pursued his. And how was that? perhaps some may ask. We answer that he pursued it faithfully. While he served his master he was faithful to the confidence reposed in him. He was an honest man, and this conduct led to his services being viewed by his master with acceptance. But we mark another trait in the character of Joseph; he was attentive to his duties. But there was a principle in Joseph's conduct that we must not omit to notice—he feared God. In this was the secret of his prosperity. But in further contemplating the circumstances under which Joseph went down to Egypt, we observe that—3. He was brought down thither really, though not apparently at the time, by God. This Joseph himself acknowledged to his brethren in an interview with them some few years afterwards (Gen. xli. 7, 8). Was it God, then, who excited in Joseph's brethren that feeling of envy which existed in their breasts—the feeling which led them first to resolve on his murder, and then to agree to report to his father that some evil beast had slain him? No; it was not God who was the author of this conduct. The whole of it was sinful; and God is not the author of sin. II. What are the LESSONS WE LEARN FROM THE CIRCUMSTANCES WE HAVE BEEN CONTEMPLATING? 1. To acknowledge God in all our ways. 2. To confide in God under all circumstances. We can scarcely conceive, humanly speaking, of any circumstances being more dark and mysterious than those in which Joseph was placed. "It was good for me that I was afflicted." And, eventually, our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, shall work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. iv. 17). On this point, then, I will conclude in the words of the prophet Isaiah (1. 10), "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." 3. To repress every bad feeling of the heart. 4. That the providence of God attends those that love Him. But God does not lead all His children to degrees of honour and usefulness equal to those of Joseph. Among His people there are those who may be compared to vessels of gold, and of silver, of wood, and of earth; some to honour and some to dishonour" (2 Tim. ii. 20). (*W. Blackley, B.A.*) *Joseph in Potiphar's house*:—The name Potiphar frequently occurs on the monuments of Egypt (written either *Pet-Pa-Ra*, or *Pet-P-Ra*), and means: "Dedicated to Ra," or the sun. According to some writers, "at the time that Joseph was sold into Egypt, the country was not united under the rule of a single native line, but governed by several dynasties, of which the fifteenth dynasty of Shepherd-kings was the predominant one, the rest being tributary to it." At any rate, he would be carried into that part of Egypt which was always most connected with Palestine. Potiphar's office at the court of Pharaoh was that of "chief of the executioners," most probably (as it is rendered in our Authorized Version) captain of the king's body-guard. In the house of Potiphar it went with Joseph as formerly in his own home. For it is not in the power of circumstances, prosperous or adverse, to alter our characters. He that is faithful in little shall also be faithful in much; and from him who knoweth not how to employ what is committed to his charge, shall be taken even that he hath.

Joseph was faithful, honest, upright, and conscientious, because in his earthly, he served a heavenly Master, whose presence he always realized. Accordingly "Jehovah was with him," and "Jehovah made all that he did to prosper in his hand." His master was not long in observing this. From an ordinary domestic slave he promoted him to be "overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand." The confidence was not misplaced. Jehovah's blessing henceforth rested upon Potiphar's substance, and he "left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not aught that he had, save the bread which he did eat." The sculptures and paintings of the ancient Egyptian tombs bring vividly before us the daily life and duties of Joseph. "The property of great men is shown to have been managed by scribes, who exercised a most methodical and minute supervision over all the operations of agriculture, gardening, the keeping of live stock, and fishing. Every product was carefully registered, to check the dishonesty of the labourers, who in Egypt have always been famous in this respect. Probably in no country was farming ever more systematic. Joseph's previous knowledge of tending flocks, and perhaps of husbandry, and his truthful character, exactly fitted him for the post of overseer. How long he filled it we are not told." (*Dr. Ederheim.*) **And the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man.**—*The secret of prosperity*:—There are many ways in which the Lord is with a man. Not always by visible symbol; seldom by an external badge which we can see and read. God is with a man in the suggestion of thought; in the animation of high, noble, heavenly feeling; in the direction of his steps; in the direction of his speech, enabling him to give the right look, the right answer at the right time under the right circumstances; giving him the schooling which he could never pay for, training him by methods and processes unknown in human schools, and not to be understood except by those who have passed under them. "If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God." Ideas are the gifts of God, as well as wheat fields and vineyards and other fruits of the earth. Suggestions in business, delivering thoughts in the time of extremity, silence when it is better than speech, speech when it will do more than silence. "These also come forth from the Lord of Hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." The Lord was with Joseph and yet Joseph was under Potiphar. These are the contradictions and anomalies of life which ill-taught souls can never understand, and which become to them mysteries which torment their spirits and which distract their love. Undoubtedly this is an anomalous state of life: Joseph brought down to Egypt by his purchasers—Joseph sold into the house of Potiphar—bought and sold and exchanged like an article of merchandise. Yet, he was a prosperous man! Understand that there are difficulties which cannot impair prosperity, and that there is a prosperity which dominates over all external circumstances and vindicates its claim to be considered a Divine gift. Looking at this case through and through, one would say, it is hardly correct to assert that Joseph was a prosperous man, when he was to all intents and purposes in bondage, when he was the property of another, when not one hour of his time belonged to himself, when he was cut off from his father and from his brethren. Yet, it is distinctly stated that, notwithstanding these things, the Lord was with him and he was a prosperous man. There must be a lesson for some of us here. When men live in their circumstances they never can be prosperous. When a man has to go out into his wheat-field to know whether there is going to be a good crop before he can really enjoy himself—that man does not know what true joy is. When a man has to read out of a bank-book before he dare take one draught out of the goblet of happiness—that man's thirst for joy will never be slaked. Man cannot live in wheat-fields and bank-books and the things of the present world. If he cannot live within himself, in the very sanctuary and temple of God, then he is at the sport of every change of circumstance—one shake of the telegraph wire may unsettle him, and the cloudy day may obscure his hopes and darken what little soul he has left. If Joseph had lived in his external circumstances he might have spent his days in tears and his nights in hopelessness; but living a religious life, living with God, walking with God, identifying his very soul's life with God, then the dust had no sovereignty over him, external circumstances were under his feet. This is the solution of many of our difficulties. Given a man's relation to God, and you have the key of his whole life. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *A miniature portrait of Joseph*:—Scripture frequently sums up a man's life in a single sentence. Here is the biography of Joseph sketched by inspiration: "God was with him," so Stephen testified in his famous speech recorded in Acts vii. 9. Observe, however, that the portraits of Scripture give us not only the outer, but the

inner life of the man. Man looketh at the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh upon the heart; and so the Scriptural descriptions of men are not of their visible life alone, but of their spiritual life. Here we have Joseph as God saw him, the real Joseph. Externally it did not always appear that God was with him, for he did not always seem to be a prosperous man; but when you come to look into the inmost soul of this servant of God, you see his true likeness—he lived in communion with the Most High, and God blessed him: “The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man.” This striking likeness of Joseph strongly reminds us of our Master and Lord, that greater Joseph, who is Lord over all the world for the sake of Israel. Peter, in his sermon to the household of Cornelius, said of our Lord that He “went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him.” Exactly what had been said of Joseph. It is wonderful that the same words should describe both Jesus and Joseph, the perfect Saviour and the imperfect patriarch. This having the Lord with us is the inheritance of all the saints; for what is the apostolic benediction in the Epistles but a desire that the triune God may be with us? To the Church in Rome Paul saith, “Now the God of peace be with you all.” To the Church in Corinth he writes, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.” To the Thessalonians he saith, “The Lord be with you all.” Did not our glorious Lord say, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world”? I. First, we will run over Joseph’s life, and note the fact: “The Lord was with Joseph.” 1. God was gracious to Joseph as a child. Happy are those who have Christ with them in the morning, for they shall walk with Him all day, and sweetly rest with Him at eventide. 2. “The Lord was with Joseph” when Joseph was at home, and He did not desert him when he was sent away from his dear father and his beloved home and was sold for a slave. I think I see him in the slave market exposed for sale. We have heard with what trembling anxiety the slave peers into the faces of those who are about to buy. Will he get a good master? Will one purchase him who will treat him like a man, or one who will use him worse than a brute? “The Lord was with Joseph” as he stood there to be sold, and he fell into good hands. When he was taken away to his master’s house, and the various duties of his service were allotted to him, the Lord was with Joseph. The house of the Egyptian had never been so pure, so honest, so honoured before. Beneath Joseph’s charge it was secretly the temple of his devotions, and manifestly the abode of comfort and confidence. That Hebrew slave had a glory of character about him, which all perceived, and especially his master, for we read: “His master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand. And Joseph found grace in his sight.” 3. Then came a crisis in his history, the time of testing. We see Joseph tried by a temptation in which, alas, so many perish. He was attacked in a point at which youth is peculiarly vulnerable. His comely person made him the object of unholy solicitations from one upon whose goodwill his comfort greatly depended, and had it not been that the Lord was with him he must have fallen. Slavery itself was a small calamity compared with that which would have happened to young Joseph had he been enslaved by wicked passions. Happily the Lord was with him, and enabled him to overcome the tempter with the question, “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” He fled. That flight was the truest display of courage. It is the only way of victory in sins of the flesh. The apostle says, “Flee youthful lusts which war against the soul.” When Telemachus was in the isle of Calypso, his mentor cried, “Fly, Telemachus, fly; there remains no hope of a victory but by flight.” Wisely Joseph left his garment and fled, for God was with him. 4. The scene shifts again, and he who had been first a favoured child at home, and then a slave, and then a tempted one, now becomes a prisoner. The prisons of Egypt were, doubtless, as horrible as all such places were in the olden times, and here is Joseph in the noisome dungeon. He evidently felt his imprisonment very much, for we are told in the Psalms that “the iron entered into his soul.” He felt it a cruel thing to be under such a slander, and to suffer for his innocence. A young man so pure, so chaste, must have felt it to be sharper than a whip of scorpions to be accused as he was; yet as he sat down in the gloom of his cell, the Lord was with him. The degradation of a prison had not deprived him of his Divine Companion. Blessed be the name of the Lord, He does not forsake His people when they are in disgrace: nay, He is more pleasant with them when they are falsely accused than at any other time, and He cheers them in their low estate. God was with him, and very soon

the kindly manners, the gentleness, the activity, the truthfulness, the industry of Joseph had won upon the keeper of the prison, so that Joseph rose again to the top, and was the overseer of the prison. Like a cork, which you may push down, but it is sure to come up again, so was Joseph: he must swim, he could not drown, the Lord was with him. The Lord's presence made him a king and a priest wherever he went, and men tacitly owned his influence. In the little kingdom of the prison Joseph reigned, for "God was with him." 5. Joseph was made ruler over all Egypt, and God was with him. Well did the king say, "Can we find such a man as this is in whom the Spirit of God is?" His policy in storing up corn in the plenteous years succeeded admirably, for God was evidently working by him to preserve the human race from extinction by famine. 6. God was with him in bringing down his father and the family into Egypt, and locating them in Goshen, and with him till he himself came to die, when he "took an oath of the children of Israel, saying God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence." The Lord was with him, and kept him faithful to the covenant, and the covenanted race, even to the close of a long life of one hundred and ten years. II. We shall next review THE EVIDENCE OF THE FACT that God was with him. 1. The first evidence of it is this: he was always under the influence of the Divine presence, and lived in the enjoyment of it. 2. The next evidence is this: God was certainly with Joseph because he was pure in heart. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"; no other can do so. What fellowship hath light with darkness, or what concord hath Christ with Belial? The intense purity of Joseph was a proof that the thrice holy God was ever with him. He will keep the feet of His saints. When they are tempted He will deliver them from evil, for His presence sheds an atmosphere of holiness around the heart in which He dwells. 3. The next evidence in Joseph's case was the diligence with which he exercised himself wherever he was. God was with Joseph, and therefore the man of God hardly cared as to the outward circumstances of his position, but began at once to work that which is good. 4. But notice again, God was with Joseph, and that made him tender and sympathetic. Some men who are prompt enough in business are rough, coarse, hard; but not so Joseph. His tenderness distinguishes him; he is full of loving consideration. He loved with all his soul, and so will every man who has God with him, for "God is love." If you do not love, God is not with you. If you go through the world, selfish and morose, bitter, suspicious, bigoted, hard, the devil is with you, God is not; for where God is He expands the spirit, He causes us to love all mankind with the love of benevolence, and He makes us take a sweet complacency in the chosen brotherhood of Israel, so that we specially delight to do good to all those of the household of faith. 5. Another mark of God's presence with Joseph is his great wisdom. He did everything as it ought to be done. You can scarcely alter anything in Joseph's life to improve it, and I think if I admire his wisdom in one thing more than another it is in his wonderful silence. It is easy to talk, comparatively easy to talk well, but to be quiet is the difficulty. 6. "God was with him," and this is the last evidence I give of it, that he was kept faithful to the covenant, faithful to Israel and to Israel's God right through. Joseph stuck to his people and to their God: though he must live in Egypt, he will not be an Egyptian; he will not even leave his dead body to lie in an Egyptian pyramid. The Egyptians built a costly tomb for Joseph: it stands to this day, but his body is not there. "I charge you," says he, "take my bones with you; for I do not belong to Egypt, my place is in the land of promise." "He gave commandment concerning his bones." Let others do as they will; as for me, my lot is cast with those who follow the Lord fully. Yes, my Lord, where Thou dwellest I will dwell; Thy people shall be my people, and Thy God my God, and may my children be Thy children to the last generation. If the Lord is with you that is what you will say, but if He is not with you, and you prosper in the world, and increase in riches, you will turn your back on Christ and His people, and we shall have to say as Paul did, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." III. Thirdly, let us observe, THE RESULT OF GOD'S BEING WITH JOSEPH. The result was that "he was a prosperous man"; but notice that, although the Lord was with Joseph, it did not screen him from hatred. "The Lord was with him," but his brethren hated him. Ay, and if the Lord loves a man, the world will spite him. Furthermore, "The Lord was with Joseph," but it did not screen him from temptation of the worst kind: it did not prevent his mistress casting her wicked eyes upon him. The best of men may be tempted to the worst of crimes. The presence of God did not screen him from slander: the base woman

accused him of outrageous wickedness, and God permitted Potiphar to believe her. Nay, the Divine presence did not screen him from pain: he sat in prison wearing fetters till the iron entered into his soul, and yet "the Lord was with him." That presence did not save him from disappointment. He said to the butler, "Think of me when it is well with thee"; but the butler altogether forgot him. Everything may seem to go against you, and yet God may be with you. The Lord does not promise you that you shall have what looks like prosperity, but you shall have what is real prosperity in the better sense. Now, what did God's being with Joseph do for him? 1. First, it saved him from gross sin. He flees, he shuts his ears: he flees and conquers, for God is with him. 2. God was with him, and the next result was it enabled him to act grandly. Wherever he is he does the right thing, does it splendidly. 3. In such a manner did God help Joseph that he was enabled to fulfil a glorious destiny, for if Noah be the world's second father, what shall we say of Joseph, but that he was its foster nurse? The human race had died of famine if Joseph's foresight had not laid by in store the produce of the seven plenteous years, for there was a famine over all lands. 4. Also it gave him a very happy life, for taking the life of Joseph all through it is an enviable one. Nobody would think of putting him down among the miserable. If we had to make a selection of unhappy men, we certainly should not think of Joseph. No, it was a great life and a happy life; and such will yours be if God be with you. 5. And, to finish, God gave Joseph and his family a double portion in Israel, which never happened to any other of the twelve sons of Jacob. Those who begin early with God, and stand fast to the end, and hold to God both in trouble and prosperity, shall see their children brought to the Lord, and in their children they shall possess the double, yea, the Lord shall render unto them double for all they may lose in honour for His name's sake. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Prosperity*:—In a long sunshine of outward prosperity, the dust of our inward corruptions is apt to fly about and lift itself up. Sanctified affliction, like seasonable rain, lays the dust and softens the soul. (*H. G. Salter.*) *Prosperity and security*:—Prosperity is not to be deemed the greatest security. The lofty unbending cedar is more exposed to the injurious blast than the lowly shrub. The little pinnacle rides safely along the shore, while the gallant ship advancing is wrecked. Those sheep which have the most wool are generally the soonest fleeced. Poverty is its own defence against robbery. A fawning world is worse than a frowning world. Who would shake those trees upon which there is no fruit? (*T. Secker.*) *The prosperity of Joseph*:—This cannot mean that Joseph was entirely happy, or that he had everything he wanted. It means that he prayed to God, and knew that God heard his prayers; it means that he felt that God was good to him and was helping him gain the favour of his master; it means that he was certain that by and by he would be delivered in some way; it means that he was able to bear his troubles and to make the best of them; it means that he was getting along well. Read the text again. It doesn't say, the Lord was with Joseph because he was a prosperous man; but, the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man. 1. It was because of Joseph's simplicity. By this I do not mean that he was foolish. I mean that he was just what he seemed to be, and seemed to be just what he was. He didn't deceive folks. He had no small, mean ways. Perhaps you may say that he would have escaped the trouble that was coming if he had not had this simplicity; but he did not need to escape it; it was far better that it should come. It is best to do right, no matter what comes. Joseph's trouble did not hurt him, it did him good; and all the trouble that will ever come to you from doing right will be a blessing to you. 2. God was with Joseph, and he was prosperous, because of his obedience. When Jacob's sons had been away from home some time, their father began to be anxious. I can't make you understand the full meaning of this word anxious; but when you are men and women and have children of your own, you will know without being told. Well, Jacob was anxious about his sons; he was afraid something had happened to them, and wanted to hear from them. In those days, and in that part of the world, there was no mail, and people usually travelled from place to place in large companies called caravans. This is the way they travelled then, and the way they travel now. But there was no caravan going where his sons were, and so Jacob wanted some person to go alone, and there was no one who was so trustworthy and so fearless, who would go and come so quickly, and do his errand so well, as Joseph. So his father said to him: "Do not thy brethren feed the flock in Shechem? Come and I will send thee unto them." And Joseph answered promptly: "Here am I"; which means,

I am ready to go; send me. And his father sent him. Now Joseph's obedience is shown here, not merely in his saying, "Here am I," nor in his starting off at once, but in his going, and going until he found them. Many boys and girls say, "I will go," and some actually start, but that is all they do. They find a difficulty and come back, saying, "I can't"; or they are drawn away by bad company; or for some other reason they give it up. But see how Joseph did. When he came to Shechem, where his brothers had been, they were not there, but while he was searching for them he came across a man who told him they had gone to Dothan, fourteen miles farther. Many a lad of seventeen hearing this would have gone back, for Joseph was nearly ninety miles from home, alone, and in a dangerous country. But this was not Joseph's way. His father had sent him to find his brothers, and he was determined to do it, no matter if it did take him fourteen miles farther than he thought they were, and more than a hundred miles from the tents of Jacob in Hebron. This is obedience that is obedience, to do what you are told to, to face dangers, to overcome difficulties. I want these children to do what they are told to, whatever it costs. It cost Joseph his liberty and almost his life, but it was the foundation of all his future greatness; it was worth more than liberty or life; it was worth ten thousand times more than the coat of many colours, or his father's favouritism, or the throne of Egypt. Obedience taught Joseph how to command, and no one knows how to command who has not learned first how to obey. 3. God was with Joseph, and he was prosperous because of his moral courage. I suppose you know the meaning of courage. It is bravery, fearlessness. A boy who leaps overboard to save a drowning companion is courageous; so is a man who rushes into a burning building to save persons from being burned. This is courage. But what is moral courage? It is that which makes one do right when people will blame him, or laugh at him, or try to injure him for doing so. It is easier for many to be knocked down than to be laughed at or blamed. I don't know that Joseph ever struck a blow in his life; and we do know that when his brothers sold him he cried very hard, and begged them not to do it; for afterwards they said one to another: "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us and we would not hear." But his moral courage was shown by the way he behaved in adversity. He dared to do right wherever he was. No matter how wicked those about him were, he would not do a wrong thing. Nor is this all; he gave his reasons. He said, "How, then, can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" And then he kept away from temptation. But Joseph showed moral courage in still another way. When he was accused falsely and punished, he did not try to save himself by exposing his accuser. He said to himself: "I will suffer rather than ruin the reputation of this woman; may be she will repent"; and what was still better, he chose to go to prison rather than remain in temptation. 4. And another reason for Joseph's prosperity was his patience. To be patient is to bear quietly any evil, such as pain, toil, affliction. Joseph's affliction lasted about thirteen years. All this time he was a slave, and part of it—two years certainly—he was a prisoner. This was a long time, but he made it seem shorter by always trying to deserve something better. 5. Another reason for Joseph's prosperity was his spirit of forgiveness. It is said of the North American Indians that they never forget an injury and never forget a kindness; this may be well for a heathen savage, but it will not do for a Christian child. Christ said, forgive your enemies. 6. Once more, God was with Joseph and he was prosperous because of his trust in God. Joseph trusted in God when he was a boy, when he went away from home, and when he was sold to the Ishmaelites, when he was in the prison, and when he was on the throne. It was this that sustained him in his trials, that kept him in temptation, and that made him a wise and virtuous ruler. (*E. N. Pomeroy.*) *Prosperous days*:—When may we speak of a man as "prosperous"? As a general rule, I suppose, when he carries out his plans to a successful issue; when his business is established on a sound basis, and is in a flourishing condition; when his investments are wisely made, and largely profitable. If, with all this, he enjoys good health and lives in the midst of domestic affection and comfort, then his lot is doubly fortunate. When life is attended by these circumstances, he may be said to be "a prosperous man." I. PROSPERITY IS A LEGITIMATE OBJECT OF PURSUIT. Our great care should be to pursue it lawfully—to use none but upright and honourable means for its attainment. II. The counsels given by wise and practical men as to THE BEST MEANS OF SECURING LEGITIMATE SUCCESS are manifold—all

agreeing in the main. One writer says, "If you wish success in life, make perseverance your bosom friend, experience your wise counsellor, caution your elder brother, and hope your guardian angel." Another likens prosperity to a ladder having six steps—faith, industry, perseverance, temperance, probity, independence. This, I think, is a ladder by which you are sure to rise, and to rise safely. III. PROSPERITY HAS ITS DUTIES. Wealth always brings with itself responsibilities. Divine learning is needed for this stewardship. One of the first duties of a prosperous man is hearty gratitude to God. This will show itself in works of benevolence and religion, and cheerful consecration to God. IV. PROSPERITY HAS ITS ANXIETIES. Care disfigures its face. One of the most successful men of this century, when surrounded by immense wealth and supposed to be enjoying it, wrote to a friend: "I live like a galley-slave, constantly occupied, and often pass the night without sleeping. I am wrapt in a labyrinth of affairs, and worn out with care." V. PROSPERITY HAS ITS DANGERS. It may prove a great blessing to a man, or a great curse. Many have been ruined by success. Valerian, the Roman Emperor, before he was raised to the throne, was temperate, wise, and virtuous; but after his investment with the purple he completely changed, and was notorious for meanness, imprudence, and general incapacity. (*W. Walters.*) *Prosperity and right principle*:—That in the working out of right principles there is a natural tendency to promote prosperity, and ensure success. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*) *Tokens of God's love*:—Prosperity is not always a sign of God's special favour, yet prosperity undoubtedly comes from God, and is a fruit of God's love to His own people, when He sees that prosperity is better for them than adversity. But how did God show that He was present with Joseph, by making him to prosper? Was not Joseph's prosperity more properly his master's than his own, when all the business which he transacted was his master's, and the profit redounded to him? It is true, that Joseph's prosperity was, to outward appearance, his master's advantage rather than his own. But as "the little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked," so the benefit which Joseph derived from God's kindness to him was far greater than his master's. He saw the love of God mitigating and sweetening his sorrows, and recommending him to his master's favour, that he might spend even the days of his banishment and humiliation with comfort. The more clearly we can discern the love of God in any prosperous incidents, the more pleasure we can take in them. A temporary relief in bondage with the love of God, is worth more than all the prosperity which ungodly men can enjoy. (*G. Lawson, D.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. The greatness of God disdains not to be with the lowliness of His servants. God and Joseph are together. 2. God's special presence of grace is vouchsafed to such as are more especially humbled. 3. God's gracious presence maketh souls prosperous, wherever they be. 4. Gracious souls, though in bondage, will abide faithful unto Egyptian masters. 5. Providence in exercising saints usually proportions employment to endowment. Joseph for the house (ver 2). 6. God maketh sinful masters to see that He is present graciously with their servants. 7. Gracious servants make house, and all affairs prosper unto ungracious masters. 8. God maketh wicked men to see that they prosper by reason of His servants (ver. 2). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Joseph's good fortune*:—Our common expression, "He's a lucky fellow," is hardly a phrase that we expect to find in Scripture. But it does occur, in Wycliffe's version, in this very thirty-ninth chapter of Genesis. The second verse, as rendered by the earliest of Bible translators, runs thus: "The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a luckie felowe." Both the words "lucky" and "fellow" lost dignity between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, and King James' translators wrote instead "a prosperous man." But it is useful to refer to the older and more colloquial form, to emphasize what is really a most important though little recognized truth, namely, that a "lucky fellow" is not he that is rich, not he that makes a good stroke of business, not he that wins a coveted post, but he of whom we can truly say, "The Lord is with him." For see who it is that the Bible calls a "lucky fellow." Would any of us call Joseph "lucky"? Yes, says a sharp boy, I should; for in one day he became the greatest man in Egypt next to the king. The teacher who gets such an answer as this will himself be lucky! There is nothing like a half-wrong answer to emphasize the right one. The rejoinder will be—Very well, but look and see when it is that Joseph is called a "lucky fellow." The phrase is not used of him when he becomes virtual ruler of Egypt, but long before that. It is just when he begins his life as a slave in a strange land. And the narrative is going on to tell of his encountering sore temptation, false accusation, unjust condemnation, and the horrors of an Egyptian

prison. It is at the beginning of all this that he is called a "lucky fellow." Why? Because the Lord was with him. (*W. Stock.*) **The Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake.**—*Joseph brings prosperity to his master's house.*—Some individuals there are who carry blessings with them everywhere. Like richly-scented flowers they fill the habitations into which they enter with delicious perfume, or, like clouds surcharged with rain, they let down benefits on every hand. Thus this Hebrew captive brings with him into Egypt, and into the house of Potiphar, the captain of the guard, a *cornu copie*—"a horn of plenty," and for his sake the Egyptian's stores are multiplied to an extent he had not previously known. And cases similar to this are also often seen. Pious servants and pious slaves have frequently been blessings to their master's house. Even in instances where the slave has been treated cruelly, his prayers, offered up in secret for his owner's weal, have been answered in a manner the most remarkable, and his efforts to promote that owner's interests have been crowned with very considerable success. Generally, however, it is only when the master acts towards his servant or towards his slave with justice that the blessing of heaven descends upon his house. It was from the time that Potiphar raised Joseph from the position of a slave to one of comparative dignity and honour that the Lord blessed him. (*Thornley Smith.*) *One man blessed for the sake of another* :—One man blessed for the sake of another. Here is a great law—here is a special lesson for many. A man looks at his property, and reasons that he must be good, and approved of God, otherwise he never could have so many blessings in his possession. It never enters the man's mind that he has every one of these blessings for the sake of another man. The master blessed because he has a good servant! Would to God I could speak thunder-claps and speak lightning to many thousands in our city and throughout our land to-day upon this very matter! Here is a man, for example, who never enters a place of worship. No, no—not he. His wife is a member of the church, and if ever she is five minutes late in on Sunday, his mighty lordship foams and fumes, and is not going to be put upon in this way, and have his household arrangements upset by these canting, fanatical, religious people. What shall I call him? The wretch, the almost-devil, owes every penny he has to his dishonoured praying wife. If that woman—the only angel in God's universe that cares for his soul—were to cease praying for him, God might rain fire and brimstone upon him and his dwelling-place. He does not know it. No! He is shrewd, cunning, wide-awake, has his eyes open, knows when the iron is hot and when to strike it, and he is such a wonderful genius in business. A maniac—not knowing that it is his praying wife that saves him from ruin, meanwhile from hell! Here is another man who thinks it manly to blaspheme, swear, and use profane language upon every opportunity, and to ridicule religion and religious people. He knows that it is all wrong. He has revelations from the nasty little god that he worships that everybody in the world is all wrong but himself. And that man prospers! His fields are verdant in spring-time, his crops are rich and golden in autumn. If you speak a word to him about religion he laughs at you, and intimates, in a not very roundabout manner, that you are a fool. And he owes all he has to a little invalid girl, who believes in God and prays to Him, and connects the house with heaven! God blesses one man for the sake of another. The husband is blessed because of the godliness of the wife. The parent is honoured because of the Christianity of the child. The strong man has prospered in his way because of the poor weak creature in his house who is mighty in soul towards God and truth. Yet these are the elements and the facts which are so often overlooked when men take stock and tell what they are worth. Ten men keep that brimstone-and-fire shower back. The righteous are the salt of the earth. The true, loving and God-fearing are the light of the world. But for them would God be patient with the world? What would it be, with His great power, to crush your little world, to pulverize and throw it away on the flying winds and forget it? It is Paul that saves the vessel on the stormy Adriatic. It is Joseph that blesses the house of Potiphar. It is the ten praying men that save the Sodoms of the earth from the lightning showers of judgment. And this is God's plan all through. There is one man for whose sake all other men are blessed. This is the principle of mediation which runs through all the Divine government of man. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father." (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *A lesson to servants and masters* :—Joseph, like his father Jacob, is an example of contentment, industry, and fidelity, to servants. It is true, servants cannot command success, and God does not bind himself by an absolute promise to grant success to the best-conducted affairs. But it is undoubtedly the duty of servants to take the most

likely means to promote the prosperity of their masters, and to seek the Divine blessing upon those affairs that are committed to them. By such behaviour, they are likely to prove blessings to their masters, and to attain that favour and confidence which they take pains to deserve. But if they should be ungratefully treated by their masters according to the flesh, they have a master in heaven who will by no means suffer them to want their due reward. Masters may likewise learn from this passage, what treatment is due to faithful servants. They ought to trust, to honour, and to love them. Potiphar was a stranger to the family of Israel, and yet he loved Joseph for his fidelity, and honoured him as the instrument of God's providential blessings to himself. Christian masters have far stronger motives to honour Christian servants, whom they know to be not only servants, but above servants, brethren partakers of the same heavenly blessings and dignities with themselves. (*G. Lawson, D.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. God's favour to His servants maketh them to be favoured by men. 2. Grace in the eyes of men and rulers justly gotten, is a blessing desirable here below. 3. A gracious Joseph may be an Egyptian's favourite. 4. Favour with men of place usually draws favourites nearer to themselves. 5. Gradual is the preferment which Providence ordereth to His saints from men. 6. Grace, prudence, and fidelity win hearts of great men to trust strangers rather than their own. 7. Providence ordereth lowest slavery the way to greatest oversight in greatest charges (ver. 4). 8. The time of doing good and lifting up saints, is the time of good to them that do it. 9. Jehovah himself rewardeth the good done unto His servants. 10. All outward blessings in the house and in the field are the blessings of God. 11. The gracious ones of God are the means of procuring blessing to all where they dwell. 12. Those rulers best provide for families, and states, who commit affairs to faithful ones (ver. 5). 13. Faithfulness in servants worketh confidence in their rulers. 14. It is the rare commendation of gracious servants, that the hearts of masters may be secure in them. (*G. Hughes, B.D.*)

Vers. 9-12. How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?—Joseph's resistance:—We are accustomed to admire the mere act of resistance to temptation, by whomsoever and howsoever offered. But there is a vast difference between the ways in which temptation is resisted. Some, knowing the thing desired of them to be essentially wrong, have recourse to cowardly shifts and evasions. They are unable to comply; thus much they will answer; but for this inability they will render all sorts of secondary and insufficient reasons, and keep back the right one. How very different from this weak and ineffectual course is the refusal of one who fearlessly states at once the right and master reason why he should not yield to temptation: "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" One of the lowest advantages of the brave and decided course is that such a person has the least trouble after all. His place is ascertained; his colours are shown. He is no waverer, and the crowd of busy mischief-makers cease from him and let him alone. The noble words of our text let us into the whole secret of endurance. I. The answer of Joseph implies a SENSE OF DIRECT ACCOUNTABleness TO GOD. This sense of responsibility leads at once to a truer estimate of right and wrong. While we tarry on the level of the world's maxims and habits, and try to decide our line of conduct, many a matter seems ambiguous and difficult to determine; but rise to the throne of God, and look down from thence, and all is clear. Oh for that second and better nature, sprung from the habit of seeing God in everything, which, when doubts, when questionings, when temptations arise, asks counsel at once of Him, runs into the strong tower of His name, and is safe. II. This answer implies a SENSE OF SIN. Sin is a word of which the world knows not the meaning. Men must know what God is, or they cannot know what sin is. When Joseph spoke of sinning against God, he used this term of a positive and definite God, who had manifested Himself, and with whom he was in covenant. To sin against Him, to break His positive command, was to reject and despise his covenant God; to tread under foot His promises and His mercies. III. This reply shows that TRUE COURAGE and REASONABLE BOLDNESS which ever characterize the genuine soldier of heaven. In every occupation of life, in all intercourse, in toil and in recreation, our Christian armour should be worn, and never be laid aside. The moment our allegiance is tested, the moment that the world requires what God forbids or forbids what God requires, we must stand to our arms, and admit no thought of a surrender. (*Dean Alford.*) *The temptation of Joseph*:—I. THE STRENGTH OF IT. 1. His youth. 2. The force of opportunity. 3. The prospect of advancement which his compliance would secure.

4. The repetition of the temptation (ver. 10). II. HIS RESISTANCE OF IT. 1. He pleads the law of honour. 2. He pleads the law of chastity. 3. He pleads the law of piety. III. HIS VICTORY OVER IT. 1. Obtained by flight. 2. Obtained through loss. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Tempted but triumphant*:—I. THE MAGNITUDE OF THE TEMPTATION. 1. It came on Joseph when he was dwelling among a nation of idolaters, away from the restraints of home and the influence of his father and grandfather, by which he had been accustomed to be regulated. If, therefore, his piety had been a mere conventional thing, he would certainly have yielded, as many others in like circumstances have done. Which of us has not known cases of youths who at home were reputable and well behaved, but who, when they have gone to another city or another land, where they were entirely unknown to those by whom they were surrounded, have run riot in iniquity, and excused themselves by quoting the debasing proverb that “when we are in Rome we must do as they do at Rome”? But Joseph was not a youth of that sort. His piety was not a matter of longitude and latitude. He believed in God, and sought to serve Him in all places and in all cases; and he did in Egypt precisely as he would have done, in like circumstances, in Canaan. 2. Again, this temptation which came upon him thus, when he was away from all external support, took him in two points of his nature at one and the same time. It appealed to appetite; and if Paul thought it needful to say to Timothy, who was a young man of rather ascetic habits, devoted to the ministry of the gospel, and surrounded by all wholesome influences, “flee also youthful lusts,” we may well believe that Joseph was not insensible to its force in that particular. But that was not its most seductive aspect, as I believe, to him. For the entering into this intrigue meant also for him the putting of Potiphar ultimately out of the way, and his own elevation, in an easy and speedy fashion, to his master’s place. That must be clear to all acquainted with Eastern life. II. Nor can we help remarking on THE GROUNDS WHEREON HE BASED HIS CONDUCT, for they show as really his fidelity to man as his loyalty to God. He could not be guilty of treachery against Potiphar, or of sin against God. His own pleasure or elevation would be too dearly purchased by ingratitude to one who had placed such unlimited confidence in him, and no gratification could to him be lasting which dishonoured God. III. LESSONS. 1. When we have unusual blessing we may look for severe temptation. 2. When temptation takes us, we must resist it with a strong and decided No, and carefully take ourselves out of its range. It is dangerous to drive restive horses near the edge of a precipice; it is dangerous to bring gunpowder near the fire; it is dangerous to come near an adder’s fang; and it is equally so with these fallen natures of ours to approach temptation. Therefore “avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it and pass away.” But the merely negative attitude will, after all, be weak, and so I stay here a moment longer to add that the best means of saying “no” to sin is to say “yes” with the whole heart to the Lord Jesus Christ. If you wish to dispel the darkness you will bring in a light; if you desire to kill weeds most effectively you will sow the ground with wholesome grass; and in like manner, if you would keep evil out of your hearts you must get the Lord Jesus Christ into them. 3. We should not be surprised to find that our adherence to the right is followed at first by great hardship. But when we find ourselves in such circumstances, what is to be done? Nothing, but wait God’s time and persevere in our integrity. We must not judge God for what we see of His providence on a small scale. We must take wide views of it, and when we do that we shall find that in the long run He brings forth men’s righteousness as the light and their judgment as the noonday, so that the evil-doer is punished and the virtuous man rewarded. (*William M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Joseph’s temptation*:—I. Joseph DID WELL when he incurred his master’s displeasure, and lost his honourable and responsible situation. II. Joseph’s resistance of the temptation by which he was tried, is wonderfully instructive. HE REFUSED. He does not appear either to have parleyed with temptation, or conferred a moment with flesh and blood. III. Observe further, it was not one single temptation which Joseph had to withstand. It is said of his tempter, SHE SPOKE UNTO HIM DAY BY DAY. But it was all in vain. That principle is eminently strong which can resist repeated and continual solicitation to transgress. As the constant dropping wears away the hard stone; so the firmest resolution is sometimes worn out before never-ending temptation. But almost in every instance, where this has been the case, there has been either undue self-confidence, or a want of due circumspection and watchfulness. IV. Look, in the next place, at THE TEMPORAL CONSEQUENCES TO JOSEPH OF HIS UPRIGHT DEALING. His wicked tempter became his false accuser. V. Look now, for a moment, at

Joseph in prison. We are not told of any attempt that he made to justify himself, or to clear his character of the dark stain which so falsely had been cast upon it. HE COMMITTED HIMSELF TO HIM THAT JUDGETH RIGHTEOUSLY. (C. *Overton.*)

Joseph's great victory:—The nobleness of Joseph stands out to any one who has purity enough and heart-honesty enough to study the picture. Why not speak to Potiphar, as he had spoken to Jacob, when the sons of the bond-women tempted him? Because the man with whom God was, was a man of high honour and charity. Joseph would not rob the poor, passionate heathen woman of the last chance of regaining her own self-respect. 1. There are such monsters in society still. The origin of impurity is, indeed, much more frequently with men, but there are women who deliberately seek to compass the ruin of youths by assailing them with subtle and flattering temptations. Solomon's picture of "the strange woman" is still true to fact. All classes of society have still their Cleopatras. 2. It is God's Book that tells of Potiphar's wife. Read the first seven chapters of Proverbs at a sitting, and seek out the words, not few, of the holy Saviour touching this thing. Those who are too nice to read such pages are apt to be very nasty within; there is no impurity in the exposure of sin, but there may be plenty of impurity with the affectation of avoiding the mention of it. 3. God's greatest servants are, like Joseph, those who have preserved their purity. (A. M. *Symington, D.D.*)

Lessons:—1. Times of advance in the world may prove times of most dangerous assaults of temptation to saints. 2. God's blessings at home and abroad prove occasions of sin unto naughty hearts. 3. Unclean hearts have their times to set their eyes on wicked works. 4. Treacherous lust may turn a wife from a husband to a servant. 5. Unclean hearts and eyes will easily make unclean tongues. (G. *Hughes, B.D.*)

Lessons:—1. Grace kept to work refuseth with disdain the strongest temptations to uncleanness. 2. Gracious hearts are ready to return saving instruction for unclean suggestion to the tempter. 3. It is rational as well as Christian to all unclean tempters to consider reason. 4. Confidence and trust of lords in their servants should make them more faithful, and unwilling to injure them (ver. 8). 5. Power delegated to largest bounds should be improved to the greatest good of superiors. 6. Power despotic may be delegated to others, but marital, or husband power to none. 7. Conjugal covenant maketh the power of man and wife reciprocal. 8. Breach of marriage covenant by adultery is most grievous wickedness. 9. Treacherous adultery carrieth a special malignity against God, and is observed by Him. 10. True religion towards God makes men fear to sin, and provoke the eyes of His glory (ver. 9). (Ibid.)

Lessons:—1. The times of men's exercise about their honest employments may prove their seasons of temptation to them. 2. Absence of witnesses and such as may hinder lust is a fair opportunity for it. 3. Providence ordereth both these together sometimes, to try His own, and discry wicked hearts (ver. 11). 4. Lustful hearts upon such occasions grow impudent to tempt by word and deed. 5. Whorish lust catcheth garments, holds bodies, and ensnares souls with its temptations. 6. Gracious souls rather loose their garments, then endanger their graces. 7. Grace flieth from temptation, when it cannot cease it and make it still. 8. Grace chooseth to be out of doors with innocency rather than in the house with sin (ver. 12). (Ibid.)

Joseph: the victory of conscience and faith over impulse and opportunity:—I. THINK OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH MIGHT HAVE MADE IT EASY FOR HIM TO SUCCEED TO THE TEMPTATION. 1. He was young. 2. He was away from home.

Young men, you may escape the eye of an earthly parent, but you cannot escape the eye of God (Psa. cxxxix. 7-12). 3. Joseph might have pleaded that the consequences of his sin would be favour and advancement, while the consequences of his resistance would be, in all likelihood, irretrievable disgrace. II. CONSIDER THE WAY IN WHICH JOSEPH, INSTEAD OF YIELDING TO THE PRESSURE OF THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, MET AND OVERCAME THE TEMPTATION WHICH ASSAILED HIM. Did not allow his youth, or distance from home, or possible consequences, to blind him to the true nature of the proposal which was made to him. Did not beat about the bush and endeavour to sophisticate himself into the belief that wrong was right. Did not try to mitigate the evil by talking about sin, as if it were merely a folly, or a pardonable indiscretion. How then did he fortify himself against the enticement to evil? 1. By calling things by their right names. He had not learned to say that bitter was sweet, or darkness light. He had not so lived as to bedim or distort his spiritual vision. And so he blurted out the truth at once, and called the act to which he was invited, "This great wickedness." There is no more mischievous maxim than that which finds expression in the saying of Burke: "Vice itself lost

half its evil by losing all its grossness." It is when "Satan is transformed into an angel of light," that his power is most deadly. He who has learned to call the sin to which he is tempted "This great wickedness," has already won half the battle. 2. By remembering that all wrong-doing is sin against God. It may be sin against self also, and sin against our fellows, but this it most assuredly is—sin against God. The faith which utters itself in these words was the source at once of the insight which enabled Joseph to perceive the true nature of the temptation, and of the strength in which he was able to overcome it. A man who has cultivated the habit of referring everything to God is not easily deceived by the appearance of things. He lives and walks in the light of truth. He is able to bring all things to the one test—is it or is it not pleasing to God? This, the one adequate motive of a true life. (*J. R. Bailey.*) *Sin avoided by considerations of God:—* The meaning, the force of this language lies almost entirely in the word, God. And O how many reasons, why we should not sin against Him, are wrapped up in this one word? 1. God, you may understand the good man as saying, is a Being of perfect, of infinite excellence. His works as well as His word, assure me that He is so. 2. God is my Creator. He is the former of my body, the Father of my spirit. As such He is my nearest relative. How then can I sin against Him? 3. God is my Preserver and Benefactor. He has watched over me and preserved me every moment since my existence commenced. He has shielded me from ten thousand evils and dangers. He has preserved me, while multitudes of my coevals have perished. He is preserving me at this moment. 4. God is my rightful Sovereign. As my Creator and Proprietor, He has the best of all possible titles to control me. 5. God is the providential, as well as moral Governor of the universe, and the sole Dispenser of all blessings, natural and spiritual. As such I am constantly dependent on Him for everything which I need. I am in His hands; as He has given, so He can take away, all that I possess. 6. God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. As such He so loved our ruined race, that He gave His only begotten Son to die for its salvation. He gave Him to die for me, for my relatives, for my fellow-creatures. He has done and suffered more for us than any earthly friend would or could have done. Now if I consent to sin, I shall crucify afresh this Saviour; I shall dishonour and offend and grieve the Father who gave Him to die for me. And how can I do this? How can I requite Him evil for good? (*E. Payson, D.D.*) *The fight for social purity:—*Nothing thrills like a battle. Each man is a born fighter. The necessity of struggle is laid upon us, and therefore, our sympathies are rarely stretched to further tension than by the sight of contests, which are the types and prophecies of our own. Even the names of old fields of carnage and strife are still electric. Joseph's fight for social purity is one of the best known of "the decisive battles of the world." The grand out-leap of defiant refusal to do wrong of this young warrior has seized and held the imagination of mankind for ages. The sudden and complete moral recoil of this gallant knight of purity from the defiling touch of the depraved adulteress, who has been dogging his steps and laying her sensual bait day by day, has passed into the imperishable stores of the world's moral force. 1. "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" At once we recognise the presence of the Holy God in this scene. He is its light and glory, its power and victory. God the Holy fills the entire field of vision, and Joseph is strengthened with might in the inner man by an all-pervading awe of Him. His heart throbs with a vehement solicitude not to offend God, not to violate His will, or in the slightest particular displease Him. That is the fire that burns with such scorching heat in these words. That is the flame that leaps up in his heart in cleansing force. That is the source of the mighty passion by which in a moment, and at one throw, he flings far behind him the corrupting bait of the temptress. It is not hatred of the woman, though that might have been excused. It is not anxiety for his own reputation first and foremost, though that is not without its influence. It is not even solicitude, before all things, to maintain his integrity in his trust as the steward of Potiphar, though that too operates with great and decisive energy; but it is the recognition of God. He cannot sin against Him. There is the impassable barrier! That Sacred Presence for ever block the way! This Authority ruling in and for righteousness utterly shuts out all possibility of yielding, and impels the tempted man, at lightning speed, from the neighbourhood of danger. Whatever, then, may be our final judgment as to the place of "the fear of God," i.e., of the reverent dread of disobeying His word, in a pure, noble, and consecrated life, it cannot be denied that it is one main element in Joseph's conquering power. It is not the whole of it, by

any means; but it is one facet of the many-sided life; one source from whence he obtains his irresistible might; one auxiliary to his steadfast purity. Fellow soldiers, I cannot feel that fear of doing wrong, and dread of not doing all we ought, are obsolete as working forces in life! I know too much of the subtlety of evil, of the difficulty of working on the higher ranges of Christian service from motives absolutely pure and untainted by self-seeking and vanity, the ease with which the spirit slides into doubt and despair of God, and forgets the fulness of His promises and presence, of the possibilities of secret sins; and I have seen too much of those who "profess and call themselves Christians," not to welcome with all my soul the Divine caution, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall," by a shot from an unseen foe, by mistaking a traitor for an angel of light, by opening the gates of Mansoul to some of the King's enemies, or by collapse of power through long and wearisome watchings with an ill-fed and ill-nourished spirit. Sublime men are only made by sublime motives; and of motives, "Love is lord of all." "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God" is the first and great commandment, and the second comes a long way after it; but it does come, it must come, for love and fear are the positive and negative poles of the same electric bar, and are both forces convertible into aids to holiness. Love rules the home, and its sunshine is the life of all who dwell therein; but fear of marring the domestic peace, spoiling the domestic purity, or poisoning the domestic joy, is a temper that pervades and chastens, hallows and enlarges the household life. Our soldiers fight for the love of country; but how unspeakably they are goaded forward in the severity of battle by the dread of losing their country's flag! In the finest types of married life, it is not till years of perfect communion and character-assimilating love have made husband and wife a complete unity, and blent soul with soul, and will with will, that all fear is gone—if indeed it ever is. Certainly, in the earlier stages it is a spur to that continual and anxious attention to aid, and not to hinder, in developing the one life, which finally becomes the gracious habit and beautiful form of the domestic ministry. "Wherefore," we Christians, "having received a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have the grace of thankfulness, whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire." "Following after peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord: looking carefully lest there be any man that falleth short of the grace of God." It is not, then, too late in the world's history to fall back on the element of fear of doing wickedness and sinning against God, as an available power in the recoil from evil. Too late! Assuredly not! II. Notice, again, this passage gives evidence of a large access of energy to Joseph's conscience from his PERFECT IDENTIFICATION OF GOD WITH HIS OWN PERSONAL PURITY. "By faith," i.e., by an act of the moral imagination, he places himself instantly in the realized presence of God, and the temptation becomes appallingly hideous to him, simply because it is a solicitation to sin against his God. It is also "a great wickedness" against his kind and confiding master, a grave and irreparable wrong to himself, an unpardonable blow to the guilty woman, a crime against society; but it is first and foremost a sin against God. "How then," he reasons, his soul melted into one stream of fiery logic, "how then, can I do it? Impossible! Come what may of resistance—expulsion, imprisonment, death—all must be faced and borne rather than yield. God and Purity are one. I cannot detach myself from Him; I dare not, I will not"; and in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the battle is over, the victory won; and having taken fast hold of purity, and not let her go, she gives the light and cheer of the Divine presence in the prison, at length opens the dungeon gates, advances him to honour, and finally places this brave soldier of purity on the throne of national usefulness. Surely we may add a verse to the eleventh of Hebrews, and say, "By faith Joseph, when he was tempted in the house of his master, resisted, not fearing the consequences of his act, for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible." III. Joseph differed from Jacob in that he had no Bethel visions, and from Abraham in that hearing the Divine voice, but he had the DIVINE FACTS OF LIFE AND IN THEM HE READ THE IDEAS AND WILL OF GOD. The oldest of all Bibles, the Bible of human experience was opened before him, and he read, marked, learnt, and inwardly digested its contents, and found it profitable for correction, for discipline, for reproof, and for instruction in righteousness, furnishing him with some real aid, for his good works. It is a bad use of the written Bible which blinds us to the teaching of home, hides us from the heavenly meanings of marriage, and closes against us the libraries of national movement and history. Our Scripture, brief as it is, has this peerless excellence, that it sets all our

institutions, the Church, State, City, hamlet, marriage, and family life all in God. They are Divine; based on a Divine plan, intended to achieve Divine results. Every man's life is sacred, for there is a Divine idea to be fulfilled in it—the idea of purity, and self-control, of sweetness and strength, of character and service. Underlying marriage there is a thought of God, and in all the offices of mutual love, in the reasons for forbearance and patience, in the occasions of suffering and sympathy, this life-union is tending to inspire self-suppression, develop tender affection, nourish purity, and put ease and grace into our human life. Joseph, accordingly, read in his office of steward, God's prohibition of purity, saying, "How then; seeing the place I fill, the duty I am bound to discharge, and the confidence reposed in me, how then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God!" (*J. Clifford, D.D.*) *How is sin the most formidable evil?*—I. THAT TEMPTATIONS TO SIN, HOW ALLURING SOEVER OR TERRIFYING, ARE TO BE REJECTED WITH ABHORRENCE. There will be convincing proof of this by considering two things: 1. That sin, considered in itself, is the greatest evil. This will be evident by considering the general nature of it, as directly opposite to God the Supreme Good. The definition of sin expresses its essential evil: it is "the transgression of the" Divine "law" (1 John iii. 4); and consequently opposes the rights of God's throne, and obscures the glory of His attributes that are exercised in the moral government of the world. 2. Sin, relatively to us, is the most pernicious and destructive evil. If we compare it with temporal evils, it preponderates all that men are liable to in the present world. Diseases in our bodies, disasters in our estates, disgrace in our reputation, are, in just esteem, far less evil than the evil of sin; for that corrupts and destroys our more excellent and immortal part: the vile body is of no account in comparison of the precious soul. Therefore the apostle enforces his exhortation: "Dearly beloved" brethren, "I beseech you, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Peter ii. 11). The issue of this war is infinitely more woeful than of the most cruel against our bodies and goods, our liberties and lives: for our estates and freedom, if lost may be recovered; if the present life be lost for the cause of God, it shall be restored in greater lustre and perfection, but if the soul be lost, it is lost for ever. This being a point of great usefulness, that I may be more instructive, I will consider the evils that are consequential to sin under these two heads:—1. The evils that proceed immediately by emanation from it. And though some of them are not resented with feeling apprehensions by sinners, yet they are of a fearful nature. Sin has deprived man of the purity, nobility, and peace of his innocent state. 2. I will consider the evils consequent to sin as the penal effects of the sentence against sin, of Divine justice that decrees it, and Divine power that inflicts it. And in these the sinner is often an active instrument of his own misery. (1). The fall of the angels is the first and most terrible punishment of sin. (2) Consider the penal effects of sin with respect to man. They are comprehended in the sentence of death, the first and second death threatened to deter Adam from transgressing the law.

II. I SHALL NOW APPLY THIS DOCTRINE, BY REFLECTING THE LIGHT OF IT UPON OUR MINDS AND HEARTS. 1. This discovers how perverse and depraved the minds and wills of men are, to choose sin rather than affliction, and break the Divine law for the obtaining of temporal things. 2. From hence we may be instructed of the wonderful patience of God, who bears with a world of sinners, that are obnoxious to His justice, and under His power every day. 3. The consideration of the evil of sin, so great in itself, and pernicious to us, heightens our obligations to the Divine mercy, in "saving us from our sins," and an everlasting hell, the just punishment of them. 4. The consideration of the evil of sin, in itself and to us, should excite us with a holy circumspection to keep ourselves from being defiled with it. 5. The consideration of the evil of sin is a powerful motive to our solemn and speedy repentance. (*W. Bates, D.D.*) *Under temptation:*—I. HERE IS A GOOD MAN SEVERELY TEMPTED. Temptation suits itself to every age, to every state of mind, to every temperament. 1. There is temptation to intellectual unbelief. 2. There is temptation to flattery. 3. There is the temptation to sensual lust. In every young man there is a sharp conflict between conscience and the animal nature. The enchantress was decked in her best. Scarcely concealed among the roses was the foul serpent. II. WE SEE A GOOD MAN INVINCIBLE. 1. The source of goodness is inexhaustible. The right principle and goodness Joseph had came from God, and God can give more. The Divine supply has never failed, just as the harvest-fields of earth have never given out. 2. A sense of God's presence unmasks sin. Sin always wears some disguise. Naked sin is so ugly and repulsive that it would never succeed without gay and plausible masking. God's presence is light,

and shines through all disguise. 3. A sense of God's presence makes us valiant. It had been Joseph's habit to take God with him in every walk of life. This made him calm, contented, patient, strong. Our only safety is in God. III. WE SEE A GOOD MAN BASELY MALIGNED. The spirit of wickedness has great vitality. Like Briareus, the fabled monster of the deep, it has fifty heads and a hundred arms. Foiled in one diabolical scheme, it instantly attempts another. The passion of this gay woman was as changeful as it was base. In a moment it passes into the blackest hatred, and plots the ruin of Joseph by lying and by slander. Men would wag their heads and say, "Ah, there's something in it." He has a thousand adversaries. Only conscience and God and friendly angels are left: his good name has passed under eclipse. IV. WE SEE A GOOD MAN SACRIFICING HIMSELF FOR OTHERS. 1. Silence is dignified. Self-defence is always more or less weakness. Let men learn not to be over hasty in their judgments. Appearances often deceive; silence is hoarded strength. 2. The effect of our conduct on others ought always to be considered. Had Joseph published abroad this woman's guilt, it may have involved her in sudden death. If she had any heart left, the silence and endurance of Joseph must have touched it. 3. Self-sacrifice is a rare virtue. V. WE SEE A GOOD MAN GRIEVOUSLY OPPRESSED. (*J. Dickerson Davies, M.A.*) *Joseph's remonstrance*:—The first attack upon him is repelled with a modest but severe remonstrance, exactly suited to his situation. Let us examine it minutely. There are four things in it worthy of admiration. 1. He is silent with respect to the wickedness of the tempter. He might have reproached her for the indelicacy, the infidelity, and the baseness of her proposal; but he confines himself to what respected his own obligation, and what would be his own sin. In the hour of temptation it is enough for us to look to ourselves. It is remarkable that all our Lord's answers to the tempter, as recorded in the fourth chapter of Matthew, are in this way. He could have accused him of insolence, and outrage; but He barely refuses to follow his counsels, because thus and thus it was written. 2. He considers his obligation as rising in proportion to his high station: "There is none greater in this house than I." Some young men would have drawn a contrary conclusion from the same premises, and on this ground have thought themselves entitled to take the greater liberties; but this is the true use to be made of power, and riches, and every kind of trust. 3. He considers it as heightened by the generosity and kindness of his master, who withheld nothing else from him. Eve reasoned at first on this principle (chap. iii. 2), and had she kept to it, she had been safe. When we are tempted to covet what God has forbidden, it were well to think of the many things which He has not forbidden, but freely given us. 4. He rises from created to uncreated authority: It would not only be treachery to my master, but "wickedness, great wickedness, and sin against God." In the hour of temptation it is of infinite importance what view we take of the evil to which we are tempted. If we suffer our thoughts to dwell on its agreeableness, as Eve did concerning the forbidden fruit, its sinfulness will insensibly diminish in our sight, a number of excuses will present themselves, and we shall inevitably be carried away by it; but if we keep our eye steadfastly on the holy will of God, and the strong obligations we are under to Him, that which would otherwise appear a little thing, will be accounted what it is, a great wickedness, and we shall revolt at the idea of sinning against Him. This is the armour of God wherewith we shall stand in the evil day. (*A. Fuller.*) *Joseph's temptation*:—That the temptation was in any degree to the sensual side of his nature there is no evidence whatever. For all that the narrative says, Potiphar's wife may not have been attractive in person. She may have been; and as she used persistently, "day by day," every art and wile by which she could lure Joseph to her mind, in some of his moods and under such circumstances as she would study to arrange he may have felt even this element of the temptation. But it is too little observed, and especially by young men who have most need to observe it, that in such temptations it is not only what is sensual that needs to be guarded against, but also too much deeper-lying tendencies—the craving for loving recognition, and the desire to respond to the feminine love for admiration and devotion. The latter tendency may not seem dangerous, but I am sure that if an analysis could be made of the broken hearts and shame-crushed lives around us, it would be found that a large proportion of misery is due to a kind of uncontrolled and mistaken chivalry. Men of masculine make are prone to show their regard for women. This regard, when genuine and manly, will show itself in purity of sympathy and respectful attention. But when this regard is debased by a desire to please and ingratiate oneself, men are precipitated into the unseemly expression of a spurious manhood. The other

oraving—the craving for love—acts also in a somewhat latent way. It is this craving which drives men to seek to satisfy themselves with the expressions of love, as if thus they could secure love itself. They do not distinguish between the two; they do not recognise that what they most deeply desire is love, rather than the expression of it; and they awake to find that precisely in so far as they have accepted the expression without the sentiment, in so far have they put love itself beyond their reach. This temptation was, in Joseph's case, aggravated by his being in a foreign country, unrestrained by the expectations of his own family, or by the eye of those he loved. He had, however, that which restrained him, and made the sin seem to him an impossible wickedness, the thought of which he could not, for a moment, entertain. To disregard the rights of his master seemed to Joseph a great wickedness and sin against God. The treachery of the sin strikes him; his native discernment of the true rights of every party in the case cannot, for a moment, be hoodwinked. He is not a man who can, even in the excitement of temptation, overlook the consequences his sin may have on others. Not unsteady by the flattering solicitations of one so much above him in rank, nor sullied by the contagion of her vehement passion; neither afraid to incur the resentment of one who so regarded him, nor kindled to any impure desire by contact with her blazing lust; neither scrupling thoroughly to disappoint her in himself, nor to make her feel her own great guilt, he flung from him the strong inducements that seemed to net him round and entangle him as his garment did, and tore himself, shocked and grieved, from the beseeching hand of his temptress. (*M. Dods, D.D.*) *Joseph's arguments against sin*:—Joseph abhorred such impiety, and with most good and godly arguments repelleth the temptation. 1. The first drawn from ingratitude and unfaithfulness. As if he should have said, being trusted as I am, and preferred in my master's house as I am, it were the greatest unfaithfulness, and the foulest ingratitude that might be, in this sort to requite my master's favours, and so great favours towards me. Therefore I may not do it; for I abhor to be unfaithful where I am trusted, or unthankful where I am regarded and done for. Here then is a servant of servants, if we think of our days, here is a jewel more worth than gold, and a pearl of price for a man's house; faithful and thankful, what wish we more. 2. His second argument is drawn from the marriage knot that ought to hold till death doth part. A married woman must have a married mind, that as her body by orderly course is appropriated unto one, so her mind must be also to the same, and to none other. 3. His third argument is drawn from the nature of the sin, it is a great wickedness to touch another man's wife; and as all wickedness should be abhorred. So great wickedness greatly abhorred. 4. His last argument is drawn from the love of God. Thus should I sin, saith he, against God, which how may I do? As if he should have said, I love God who hath ever loved me, and my love admitteth no such requital. Many and many are the sweet mercies that I have found at His hand, if I should tell all, and how then should I sin against Him? (*Bp. Babington.*) *Love and trust protecting against temptation*:—You all know what affection for and trust in a person have done in common life to produce prompt decision and persistent action. Every scholar remembers the instance of that true wife, Penelope, who for long years turned away suitors for her hand, and was ultimately rewarded by the return of Ulysses, who had manifested a constancy and affection that were equal to her own. Now, if in domestic life such effects are produced by these two principles, love and trust—which are not so much two as one working in two different ways—may we not believe that by the grace of the Holy Spirit, personal attachment to the Lord Jesus Christ and implicit trust in Him, will give us quickness of sight to see what He would have us to do, and firmness of purpose to do that with our might. Nothing is so clear-sighted as love. It is on the alert at the approach of the slightest danger; and if only we take care to continue in the love of Christ, that will keep us right, for it will reveal the tempter to us even under his most cunning disguise, and give us courage and firmness to withstand him. Nay, more, let us but have the love of Christ strong within us, and we shall not think that there is anything like a sacrifice or a hardship in saying “no” to sin, for we shall have no hankering after that which He disapproves. Our refusal to sin will be, then, only the outworking of our satisfaction with Him; the consequence of our delight in Him, and not the result of any outward compulsion. Here, young man, is the key to the whole position; fill the heart with Christ, and when the tempter comes he will find it so preoccupied that there is no room in it for him and his seduction. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *The true motive for well-doing*:—Not for what we can make by it, or for what it is worth, but for what it is, and for its relationship to

God, let us do the right, and we may rest assured, however it may be now, that in the end we shall be on the winning side. We may have to go through a prison to the final issue, or we may need to step up to it from a cross, but we shall be on the winning side, for character is success—not position, not prosperity, not reputation—but character, and it is made and hardened and tempered in the fire of trial. Leave the reputation and success, then, to look after themselves, and be not disconcerted if they should both be for a time under a cloud; but look well to the character, for that is the main thing, and the life that secures that for Christ is always worth living.

(*Ibid.*) *The position and morals of Egyptian women*:—In the East females live in separate apartments, but the monuments prove that in Egypt they mingled freely in society, and were under no peculiar restraint. Egyptian parties are frequently depicted in the temples, and “in some instances,” says Wilkinson, “we find both men and women sitting together, both strangers as well as members of the same family—a privilege not conceded to females among the Greeks, except with their relations.” Nor do the monuments speak favourably of the morals of the Egyptian women. “That they were not restricted,” says the same writer, “in the use of wine, and in the enjoyment of other luxuries, is evident from the frescoes which represent their feasts; and the painters, in illustrating this fact, have sometimes sacrificed their gallantry to a love of caricature. Some call their servants to support them as they sit, others with difficulty prevent themselves from falling on those behind them; a basin is brought too late by a reluctant servant, and the faded flower which is ready to drop from their heated hands, is intended to be characteristic of their own sensations.” (*Thornley Smith.*) *Temptation resisted*:—She saw Joseph, she loved him, and said unto him, lie with me. Her eyes ensnared her heart, and she lost her modesty, as well as every other virtue. She must have been lost to all sense of shame, when she so barefacedly tempted Joseph to violate her chastity. Joseph was now in a dangerous situation. Few young men would have resisted the strong temptation which he was enabled to encounter. How easily did his brother Judah, in a more advanced period of life, fall before a temptation, which, in the comparison, was very small. We may say of Joseph, that there were few like him in all the earth. Sin spread out before him its strongest attractions—pleasure and profit. It drew up the most formidable terrors in battle-array, but none of all these things moved Joseph. He held fast his integrity, and would not let it go, for his heart was mightily fortified by the fear of God, and he was powerfully supported by that grace “which is able to keep us from falling and to present us faultless before the presence of the Divine glory with exceeding joy.” (*G. Lawson, D.D.*) *Joseph, the model realizer of God's presence*:—I. In the first place, when Joseph realized God's presence he found in it COMPANY in HIS LONELINESS. One of the best and holiest men that ever lived was Henry Martyn, the English missionary to Persia. In carrying on his work there, he had many long and lonely journeys to take. But how sweetly he realized God's presence, as giving him company in his loneliness, is seen in these beautiful lines, which were found after his death, written on one of the blank leaves of the Bible that he carried with him wherever he went.

“In desert woods, with Thee, my God,
Where human footsteps never trod,
How happy could I be!
Thou, my repose from care, my light
Amid the darkness of the night—
In solitude my company.”

And how many of God's dear children have realized His presence in just the same way! Here are some illustrations of this. This incident was told by one of our chaplains in the late war. “I went into a tent connected with the general hospital one day,” says he. “There, on one of the beds, lay a beautiful drummer-boy, about sixteen years of age, burning up with fever. ‘Where is your home, my young friend?’ I asked. ‘In Massachusetts, sir,’ was his reply. ‘And do you not feel very lonely here, so far away from your father and mother, and all your friends, and so sick as you are?’ I never can forget,” says the chaplain, “the sweet smile that lighted up his deep blue eyes, and played over his fevered lips, as he said, in answer to my question, ‘Oh, no, sir. How can I feel lonely when Jesus is with me?’” That dear boy was realizing God's presence in just the way of which we are speaking; and he found company in it. There was an old Christian gentleman, who had been for many years a successful merchant. He was once very well off, and had been sur-

rounded by a happy family. But he had failed in business, and was left very poor. His wife and children had all died. In poverty and loneliness he had to spend the closing years of his life. A Christian friend, who used to call and see him occasionally, was talking with him one day, and said, "Well, I hope Jesus visits you sometimes." "Visits me sometimes?" said the old man, "why, He lives with me at all times!" And so, in realizing the presence of that blessed Saviour, he found company in his loneliness. And if we follow the model which Joseph sets before us, it will bring this blessing to us; and we shall find company in our loneliness. II. In the second place, as he realized God's presence, Joseph found—COMFORT IN TROUBLE. And we shall find the same, just so far as we follow the model he has left us. Few persons have had such great troubles to bear as Joseph had. And yet he bore them bravely and cheerfully. And the secret of it was, he felt that God was present with him all the time, and he found comfort in this thought. This gave Joseph comfort when nothing else could have done so. And if we follow the model which he left us, and learn to realize God's presence, as he did, we shall find comfort under all our troubles, in the feeling that He is with us. Let us look at some examples of the way in which this comfort is found. A city missionary in London used often to visit a poor old widow. She lived in a garret alone by herself. All she had to live on was half-a-crown a week, allowed her from some charity. This was only a little over half a dollar of our money, and was barely enough to keep her alive. The missionary used to notice, standing on her window-sill, an old broken tea-pot, in which a strawberry-plant was growing. He felt interested in watching it, and seeing how it grew. One day he said to the old woman: "I am glad to see how nicely your plant is growing. You'll soon have some berries ripening on it." "I don't care about the fruit," she said. "It's not that which leads me to watch over this little plant. But I am too poor to keep any living creature with me. And I love to have this little plant in my room. I know it can only live and grow by the power of God. And as I look at it, from day to day, and see it growing, it makes me feel that God is here with me, and I find great comfort in that thought." III. In the third place, Joseph found STRENGTH FOR DUTY in realizing God's presence. And if we follow the model he has set us we shall find the same. A brave sailor boy:—He was a cabin-boy on board an English man-of-war. He had a pious mother, and was trying to be a Christian; and the story shows how the sense he had of God's presence strengthened him for duty under very trying circumstances, and made him eminently useful to his shipmates and to his country. The sailors called this boy "Cloudy." The incident, to which I refer, took place in the midst of a terrible naval battle between the English and the Dutch. The flagship of the English fleet was commanded by the brave Admiral Narborough. His vessel had got separated somehow from the rest of his fleet, and was drawn in the thickest of the fight. Two of its masts had just been shot away, and had fallen with a fearful crash upon the deck. The Admiral saw that all would soon be lost unless he could bring up the rest of the ships to help him. He summoned a lot of his men upon the quarter-deck. He could not send a boat, but he asked if any of them would volunteer to swim through the fight, and take an order for the rest of the fleet to come at once to his help. A dozen men offered to go; and little Cloudy made the same offer. The Admiral smiled, when he looked at him, and said: "Why, Cloudy, what can you do?" "I can swim, sir, as well as any of them. You can't spare these men from the guns, sir. It won't make much matter if I am killed. But I'm sure that God will take care of me. Please, sir, let me go." "Go, my brave lad," said the Admiral, "and may God bless you!" He thanked the Admiral, and running to the side of the ship, sprang over into the sea, and struck out bravely towards the ships, which he was to order up. The men cheered him, and then went back to their guns. The fight went on; but the Dutch were getting the best of it. The Admiral was feeling very sadly. He did not see how he could hold out much longer. He said to himself—"I have never hauled down the flag of old England yet. I'd rather die than do it now. But how can I help it?" Just then he heard a firing to the right. Looking through the clouds of smoke that surrounded him, he saw that the brave boy had got through his long and dangerous swim. He had delivered the order entrusted to him; and the expected ships were coming, crowding down upon the enemy. This turned the tide of battle. The Dutch were soon beaten, and the flag of old England was not hauled down that day. In the evening the Admiral called his men on deck to thank them for their brave conduct. And then, turning to Cloudy, who was also present, he said: "And I want especially to thank you, my brave lad, for your

noble conduct. We owe this victory to you. I hope to live to see you have a flagship of your own, some day." And it turned out just so. That cabin-boy went on realizing God's presence; and this gave him strength for duty, till he was knighted by the king, and known in the English navy as—Admiral Sir Cloudesley Shovel. And if we follow the model that Joseph has left us, we shall find that realizing the presence of God will be sure to give us strength for duty. IV. And then, when Joseph realized the presence of God, he found that it gave him—VICTORY OVER TEMPTATION. And if we follow the model he has left us, we shall find that it will do the same for us. The thought of God's eye:—Emma Gray was a Sunday-school girl, who was trying to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, and to make herself useful. As she was going to school one day, during the week, she passed a little boy, whose hand was thrust through the railings of a gentleman's front garden, trying to steal some flowers. "Oh, my little boy," said Emma kindly, "do you think it's right to take those flowers without asking leave?" "I only want two or three," said the boy, "and nobody sees me." "You are mistaken there, my boy. God is looking at you from yonder blue sky. He says we must not take what does not belong to us without leave. And if you do it He will see it, and it will grieve Him." "Then, if He's looking at me I won't do it," said the little fellow. And so, as he thought of God's eye, or realized God's presence, it gave him the victory over the temptation to steal those flowers. Spoiling his trade:—A mission Sunday-school was started in a very wicked part of London. A good many boys in that neighbourhood got their living by stealing. Some of these boys were persuaded to go to this school. One boy, who was a great thief, went there. After he had been going for some time, one of his companions asked him how he liked the school. "I don't like it at all," said he. "Why not?" asked his friend. "Because, you see, they are all the time talking about God seeing you, and the like o' that; and it just makes a fellow feel afraid. It takes all the pluck out o' me, I know. Many a time now, when I see a good chance to get a handkercher, or a nice purse of money, just as I'm going to take it, I think of that great Eye looking at me. And then I'm afraid and have to stop. So, you see, it's spoiling my trade. And I'll either have to give up going to school, or else have to learn another trade, and try and get my living in some other way." Here we see the true effect which must always follow from realizing God's presence. We cannot go on doing what we know to be wrong when we feel that God is looking at us. (R. Newton, D.D.) *Safeguards against temptation*:—An old writer observes that it is "the sublimity of wisdom to do those things living which are to be desired and chosen by dying persons." St. Bernard expresses the same thought, but in a different form, saying, "Let every man in the first address of his actions, consider whether, if he were now to die, he might safely and prudently do such an act, and whether he would not be infinitely troubled should death surprise him in the present disposition; and then let him proceed accordingly." This advice, if taken, would no doubt insure resistance to temptation, for no man, unless he were enslaved to folly, would commit a sin in the face of approaching death. But a surer help to victory over the tempter than the thought of death, is the recollection, "Thou God seest me!" and the question of the spirited-minded Joseph, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

Vers. 13-18. See, he hath brought in an Hebrew unto us to mock us.—*The false charge against Joseph*:—I. THE BOLDNESS OF IT. II. THE MALICIOUSNESS OF IT. III. THE VENGENCE OF DISAPPOINTED PASSION. IV. THE ART AND CUNNING OF IT. V. THE LESSONS OF THIS HISTORY. 1. That impurity and falsehood are closely allied. 2. That God's saints should be patient under false accusations. 3. That we should do the thing that is right in utter disregard of all evil consequences to ourselves. (T. H. Leale.) *Lessons*:—1. Disappointments of lust occasion it to rage, and turn it into madness. 2. Innocency's flight from sin may occasion its misery. 3. Sight of lust defeated by chastity stirs up the wicked to accuse the righteous (ver. 13). (G. Hughes, B.D.) *The delicate and problematical character of circumstantial proof*:—There are not a few cases, in which it is the only description of evidence which can at all be had; and sometimes it is of such a nature as to carry as full conviction to the mind as the most direct and satisfactory testimony. This was not, indeed, the case in the instance before us: for it would not be difficult to institute widely different processes of hypothetical argument on the simple fact of the mantle having been left in her possession. There are cases, however, in which it is almost irresistibly conclusive. And yet true it is that there have been

instances in which sentence has been passed on the ground of circumstantial evidence such has, at the time, appeared clear beyond controversy, and has carried the fullest conviction to counsel, and jury, and judge—in which, notwithstanding, the innocence of the party condemned has subsequently been brought unexpectedly and strangely to light. All that can be said, therefore, is that while it is a species of proof which it is impossible to discard, and which it would be the height of absurdity to speak of discarding, yet it is one which ought to be investigated with the utmost caution and minuteness, and all delay possible afforded for subjecting it to the test of time—so long as there seems any likelihood of new circumstances coming to light, or of any conscience which fear may be holding in its bonds, and by this means sealing the lips, relenting and disclosing. And wherever there is room for the slightest doubt, the benefit of it should be given to the accused. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*)

Vers. 19–23. But the Lord was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.—*Joseph in prison*:—A superior man will manifest his superiority in any situation. In slavery, in prison, in exile, his worth will be disclosed and acknowledged. Joseph was a remarkable example of this. Though a prisoner in name, he soon was the actual warden. I invite attention to some of the lessons taught us by the experience and demeanour of Joseph in prison. Consider—(1) What it is that gives one special power over men. Not great natural gifts merely, or original superiority of mind. Many people who possess these are without much influence. Neither is it the gifts of rank or fortune. Joseph had neither of these to commend him to favour. The Scriptures point to the true cause of his ascendancy: “The Lord was with Joseph, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison”; and the latter committed to him the prisoners, “because the Lord was with him, and that which he did the Lord made it to prosper.” Since he was a good man, and obviously enjoyed God’s favour, he had influence and power over men. Right is mightier than wrong. As one clear, sweet voice singing in tune will bring a whole multitude of discordant voices into harmony with it, because it is right and they are wrong, and concord is superior to discord, so one godly man will prevail over many wicked. Men are always impressed by manifestations of a good conscience. They are persuaded that one who has a conscience void of offence toward God, is more likely to have one void of offence toward men also. His fidelity to his religious convictions wins their confidence. They will honour him, even though he vexes them by his scruples. Nicholas Biddle, we have been told, once had for a private secretary a Christian young man, whom he wished to keep at work on the Sabbath. The secretary objected to working on the Lord’s Day. “I shall discharge you,” said his employer, “if you do not conform to my wishes.” The secretary was poor, and had, moreover, a widowed mother dependent upon him; but rather than violate his conscience by doing what he considered wrong, he gave up his place. A day or two after, Mr. Biddle was in the company of some gentlemen who proposed to start a new bank, and the question was, where should they find a suitable man to be its cashier? “I know of one,” said Mr. Biddle; and he recommended to them his late secretary, saying, “He had too much conscience for my work, but none too much for the more responsible office you have.” And through his recommendation the place was given to him. In no way can parents do so well for their children, or so certainly insure for them positions of power and influence, as by an early religious training. (2) Joseph’s demeanour in prison teaches the duty of patient accommodation to the situation in which God has seemed to place us. Evidently he tried to make the best of his prison life. He does not yield to despair and refuse to see any hope of good. He is cheerful and helpful to all about him, displaying there, in that uncongenial place, the same serenity of mind and the same religious faith as elsewhere. He rested in the Lord, and waited patiently for the manifestation of His will, never fretting over the peculiar hardship of his case, nor complaining because he was the innocent victim of the wicked devices of another. He believed that God would take care of him, and deliver him out of all his troubles. Though he could not see, what we see, that his prison was only a necessary way-station in his path to the lordship of Egypt, yet he knew that God was there, and that where God was it was safe for him to be, and not ill. His faith sustained him. (3) Joseph’s life in prison teaches that there is good work to be done everywhere. Joseph discovered new capabilities of service in that dismal office. He shed upon it a humane and softer light. He reformed old abuses and introduced new improvements. He

did noble work there, work animated by pity and mercy; such work as we impute to angels in their ministries of compassion among the suffering and wretched. It was work, too, which blessed his soul in the doing of it, and which paved the way to that future greatness to which he was advancing. The same thing may be true of the worst situation in which a man may be placed. He can, if he will, ennoble it by good work; make it bright by deeds of love and mercy; make it a field of great usefulness to others, and tributary to his own subsequent advancement. (4) Joseph's life in prison illustrates how all things work together for good to them that love God. "I have done nothing," he said, "that they should put me into the dungeon." It seemed a hard case. He was there through the slanderous spite of a bad woman. Falsehood and wickedness seemed to have triumphed over truth and innocence. But it was only that the person in whom they were represented might be the more exalted. Joseph's case reveals how God can make everything bend to His purpose. (*A. H. Currier.*) *Joseph in prison*:—I. AN EXAMPLE OF THE MYSTERIOUS WAYS OF PROVIDENCE. II. AN EXAMPLE OF THE STRENGTH OF GOD'S CONSOLATIONS IN THE WORST TRIALS. 1. He had a present reward (ver. 21). 2. His goodness was made manifest. (*T. H. Lcale.*) *Joseph's conduct in the dungeon*:—I. THE TENDERNESS OF HIS SYMPATHY (vers. 6, 7). Suffering is absolutely necessary to capacitate us for sympathy. II. THE PROFESSION OF HIS INNOCENCE. Of which notice the calmness and simplicity. III. THE INTEGRITY OF HIS TRUTHFULNESS. Having undertaken the office of interpreter, he fulfilled it faithfully. (*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*) *Joseph in prison; or, an epitome of heaven's rule over the world*:—I. THAT GOD'S RULE OVER THE WORLD SUFFERS THE RIGHTEOUS TO BE GRIEVOUSLY OPPRESSED BY THE WICKED. 1. Joseph was the subject of cruel envy. 2. Joseph was the subject of the vilest calumny. II. THAT GOD'S RULE OVER THE WORLD AFFORDS THE RIGHTEOUS AMPLE SUPPORT, EVEN UNDER THE GREATEST TRIALS OF LIFE. Joseph had three things in that dungeon to support him. 1. The approbation of his own conscience. 2. The respect of his circle. 3. The special presence of his God. III. THAT GOD'S RULE OVER THE WORLD WORKS OUT THE GOOD OF THE RIGHTEOUS BY EVERY VARIETY OF INSTRUMENTALITY. 1. The evil passions of men. 2. The apparent accidents of life. 3. The mental visions of men. 4. The system of material nature. Lessons: 1. The shortness of our trials compared with our destiny. 2. The unimportance of worldly condition compared with our moral character. 3. Greatness, however depressed and obscured, must rise one day through all obstructions to its rightful sovereignty. (*Homilist.*) *Life in a dungeon*:—I. THE PRISON. Literally, "the round-house." Probably at first Joseph was confined in a dark and dismal subterranean "inner-prison," where (Psa. cv. 16) he was put in irons. A gloomy condition! But this seemingly overwhelming misfortune is but one of the links by which a mysterious but all-wise Providence is to conduct him into ultimately far higher honours and far more important trusts. II. JOSEPH'S IMPRISONMENT IS WHOLLY WITHOUT CAUSE. He was really suffering for his adherence to the right. He received the reward, which many have done since, of reproach, slander, and every injury, where the highest respect and honour were justly due. Instead of the admiration and lasting gratitude of his master, he was thrust into the prison, and his feet made fast in irons. But in this unwelcome and undeserved experience Joseph was but joining that illustrious company, swelled by subsequent ages to a mighty multitude, who have been made to suffer for well doing, many of whom have had to seal their testimony with their blood. The purest of all was "numbered with the transgressors." III. HOW JOSEPH DEPORTED HIMSELF IN PRISON. True to his beautiful antecedents, even in this black midnight he was still his noble self. IV. THE LORD WAS WITH HIM. 1. Let me commend to your prayerful study the beautiful bearing and admirable spirit manifested by this young hero in this trying era in his extraordinary history. 2. Learn from this subject to be faithful under all circumstances, and to endeavour so to deport yourselves as to show forth a blameless and praiseworthy life. (*J. Leyburn, D.D.*) *Joseph in prison*:—A strange place, we might say, for a saint of God to be in! And yet a place in which the saints of God have often been found; for the world hath frequently misjudged them, deeming ill of whom it should have thought well, and instead of loving them for the example of purity and goodness which they have afforded, has made them the victims of its suspicion and hate. Thus it has come to pass that the excellent of the earth, the men worthy of thrones and palaces, have been oftentimes thrust into dark and noisome dungeons. State records have their stories of illustrious prisoners; and so also have the annals of the Church—and harrowing ones indeed they are. Samson, Micaiah,

Jeremiah, John Baptist, Peter, Paul and Silas. And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of others who, in apostolic and post-apostolic times, were "in prisons oft," and would joyfully have been there oftener, for the blessedness that they realized there from the presence of Him who can make of a prison a palace, and change dungeon darkness into heavenly light. We will now, therefore, return to Joseph, to whose imprisonment our text relates—"And he was there in the prison." I. Why was HE THERE? What crime had he committed? Against whom had he offended? How had he sinned, that he should be found in such a place as this? Listen to the answer, for it is a rare answer. There is not one prisoner of a thousand respecting whom it could be truly given. He had not sinned at all! He had wronged no one! He was guiltless of any crime whatever! Then why was he there? I will give you the answer in a positive form. He was there because he chose to suffer rather than to sin—he preferred shame, and privation, and sorrow, to guilt. He would rather be an inmate of a prison—aye, for life—with a clear conscience, than the dweller in a mansion with an accusing one. Such is the answer to the question, Why was Joseph where we now find him? And it suggests a practical remark of very considerable importance and use, namely, that the highest integrity will not protect a man always from misjudgment and oppression. The very reality of goodness is the pledge that it will be tried, and these sufferings, attendant often—I might say uniformly—on a course of spiritual integrity, are just God's way of trying it. Bear this in mind, dear friends, and you will not then be overwhelmed if, like Joseph, your fidelity to conscience and to God should bring you into circumstances of deepest humiliation and pain. II. How DID IT FARE WITH HIM THERE? And this is a question which admits, as you will see, of a twofold answer—a sad and a pleasing one. At first it seems to have gone ill enough with this young servant of God "there in the prison." He was made to suffer all the rigours of an Eastern dungeon. We learn from the one-hundred-and-fifth Psalm, that the simple record in Genesis does not tell us all that he underwent; for it is said there that his "feet were hurt with fetters," that "he was laid in iron." Indeed, it was a most trying lot, and must have been hard to bear, despite the consciousness of innocence to console and sustain the mind. And yet there was a necessity for it; a necessity, I mean, in connection with the wonderful drama which Joseph's history was designed to form. Without all this trial and suffering, so undeserved, so apparently mysterious, there would have been wanting what gives the chief interest to the final development, and makes the whole so beautiful a lesson of trust in Providence, and patient waiting for the unfolding of God's ways. And I would say, my brethren, there may be a corresponding necessity in your case for those circumstances in your lot which are most baffling and painful. It is not sent to you out of mere capriciousness on the part of your Heavenly Father; but because it is essential to the working out of His purposes of mercy in relation to you. Just as it was not only part of God's plan that Joseph should be unjustly imprisoned, but also that his sufferings in prison should take, at first, a character of special severity; so everything in the circumstances of His people is equally the result of design, pointing to a future, hidden from them now, but hereafter to unfold itself, and to display to their astonished view wonders of Divine wisdom and faithfulness in the very events of their history which they had deemed the most painful and obscure. But I said that the question as to how it fared with Joseph in prison admits of a twofold answer. What I have just spoken to may be called the sad part of the answer. Let us now look at the more pleasing aspect of it. The severity was probably only temporary. At all events, we soon find the young man enjoying a degree of liberty and consideration that mark a wondrous change in his condition. But there is something more than this. That which the spiritual mind fastens upon here with most eagerness and delight is the statement about God's regard to the suffering prisoner. This it is specially that forms the pleasing part of the answer, as to how it fared with Joseph in prison. Mark what is said at the end of the chapter—"But the Lord was with Joseph," &c. You see that the one idea here is the presence of God with His servant; the favour of God, the pro-pering blessing of God. The mind of the sacred writer seems to have been full of that. It was in his estimation the grand thing, the salient point in the story—all. Joseph found his prison-life eventually not only not sad, but happy, because God was with him. Joseph won consideration and favour from his gaoler because God was with him. Joseph succeeded so well in every business matter entrusted to him because God was with him. Friendless and

alone he could not be in that case. Inwardly cast down for long he could not be in that case. Now, the practical truth I wish to press upon you all here is the supreme value to be attached to the presence and favour of God. (*C. M. Merry.*) *Joseph in prison*:—I. "GOD WAS WITH JOSEPH"—WHERE? 1. God is no respecter of places. Men speak with bated breath of prison-houses. 2. A sample of God's faithfulness. Potiphar, from very unworthy reasons, had withheld his favour from Joseph. Very likely many in the mansion had secretly rejoiced in Joseph's fall. "He keepeth covenant for ever." II. "GOD WAS WITH HIM"—IN WHAT MANNER? 1. God's best gifts are spiritual. There was no miraculous vindication of Joseph. Yet, though unseen, God was there, with hands full of blessing. Did Joseph retain his hold on God, and often speak to Him in prayer? God nourished that faith. Did Joseph cherish a peaceful assurance, that God would over-rule this disaster for good? Then God was dwelling in him. 2. God gave him mercy, this hardship led Jacob to faithful self-examination. 3. God lightened his burden. The effect of God's presence was twofold, viz., inward and outward. The real worth of Joseph was patent to the governor of the gaol. It was soon felt by warders and prisoners alike that Joseph was an injured man. 4. God made him useful. In that grim gaol his life was not doomed to inglorious idleness. So in the prison Joseph did his very best; nobly exercised his talents; lived as a king: and prepared himself to be ruler of Egypt. There were lessons to be learnt here which he could not learn elsewhere; a good school this. III. "GOD WAS WITH HIM"—WITH WHAT RESULT? 1. There was prosperity. That is, there was order, peacefulness, good discipline. 2. Knowledge was gained. Joseph learnt how little mischief bad men and bad women can do to a good man. 3. It was a stepping-stone to sovereignty. Very likely the advantage in the formation of Joseph's character was immense. Excrescences were pruned away. Good principles were better rooted. A generous forgetfulness of self was fostered. He was daily growing into a nobler and purer man. (*J. Dickerson Davies, M.A.*) *Joseph in prison*:—I. FAITHFUL JOSEPH SUSTAINED IN PRISON BY A FAITHFUL GOD. 1. By manifestation of personal friendship. (1) "With him," to comfort him in his peculiarly trying position, his character being falsely accused. (2) "With him," to impart strength and skill for the proper discharge of duty. 2. By giving him favour in the eyes of others. (1) By God's interposition, he becomes the warden's favourite. (2) Unbounded trust is, through God's grace, placed in one whose character has been assailed. (3) It is God's prerogative to dispose the hearts of men toward His children (Prov. xxi. 1). II. THE MYSTERIOUS POWER OF DREAMS USED BY GOD IN BEHALF OF HIS WRONGED CHILD. 1. The tyranny of ancient monarchs. 2. The activity of the mind. (1) While the body sleeps, the mind continues wakeful and full of thought. (2) This mental activity during sleep, which we call dreams, God has frequently used in all ages for providential purposes. III. TO INTERPRET DREAMS A DIVINE PREROGATIVE. 1. A dream from God, like a speech in an unknown tongue, cannot be understood until interpreted by one who knows the language. 2. If a dream is designed to reveal a Divine purpose, that purpose must be distinctly explained by special communication by God. 3. The folly of assuming intelligence enough to interpret dreams without special revelation from God. Lessons: 1. The advantages of true piety in the practical affairs of life. 2. A lesson for resignation under most trying circumstances. (*D. C. Hughes, M.A.*) *Joseph in prison*:—I. If we take our whole impression of his prison-life from the Book of Genesis, our impression cannot be either accurate or complete. For, though the inspired narrative tells us that Joseph was bound; though it records his earnest entreaty that the cup-bearer, when he was released, would do his utmost to deliver him; though it represents him as speaking with a certain bitterness of having done nothing to deserve that he should be "thrust into this hole"; though, therefore, it implies that Joseph was the victim of a gross injustice, and had a keen sense of the injustice done to him, it nevertheless leaves the impression on our minds that, for a prisoner, his condition was a singularly happy one; that he enjoyed an altogether exceptional freedom, and rose to no small measure of official place and dignity. But, as we learn from a supplementary Scripture, Joseph was by no means of our mind, nor were his circumstances altogether so happy as we have supposed them to be. In Psa. cv. 17-19, we read: "He sent a man before them: Joseph was sold for a slave. They tormented his feet with fetters; his soul came into iron, until the time when his word came; the word of the Lord cleared him." The light shed by these words shines into the dark Egyptian dungeon, and enables us to see the prisoner and his condition more

distinctly. Honoured and trusted as he was, he was nevertheless "tormented with fetters." He was a prisoner, although a favoured prisoner, and thought more of his captivity than of the favour which softened its rigours. Through long bitter months he bends sad questioning eyes on a heaven no longer flushed with rosy dawns of hope, but dark with the hues of doubt and despair. Yet, as we know, the road to the throne lay through that "hole"; and but for the hateful fetters which tormented him, he would never have worn the signet from Pharaoh's hand, nor the golden chain which Pharaoh flung round his neck. The night in which he sat ushered in a long and brilliant day. II. Now, the prison experience of Joseph is by no means an exceptional experience. Its value for us lies mainly in the fact that it helps us to understand the common lot of man. It would seem to be a law of the Divine government that in proportion as men are great in capacities for service, they should have their capacities developed by bitter and long-sustained afflictions. We can be patient and hopeful when once we are assured that all our defeats and disappointments, our failures and reverses and broken illusions, are parts of the discipline by which God is training us for the work we long to do, and are qualifying us to enjoy the freedom we crave. If only our character is being moulded and hardened, and its capacities brought out by suffering, then it is not unjust of God to inflict suffering upon us. If we can become perfect only through suffering, shall we not thank Him for the suffering which perfects us? If only as we learn to rule in the prison of deferred opportunities and defeated hopes, we can become fit to rule over the "many cities" of the heavenly kingdom, shall we shrink from the prison which leads to the throne? If the iron must enter our souls that we may be strong amid the flatteries and the adversities of fortune, shall even the fetters which torment us be unwelcome to us? (*S. Cox, D.D.*) *Free though bound*.—Though his body is in fetters, Joseph's pure spirit is still free. The one, man may load with irons; the other, God alone can bind in the prison-house of torture. With integrity preserved, the prison may be a palace. With God's favour there may be happiness in a dungeon; without it, wretchedness in a royal court. There may be spiritual liberty while shackles are chafing the weary limbs, there may be the bondage of sin while no visible chains are eating into the quivering flesh. In point of fact, Potiphar's wife was the slave—the slave of sin; Joseph the freeman, the emancipated of the Lord. "He is a freeman whom the truth makes free, all besides are slaves." Many, alas! though their limbs are unshackled, are yet bound captives, to human appearance hopelessly fettered by iniquity. Who is there so lost to honour that he would not prefer Joseph's situation to that of his assailant? purity to impurity? God's favour in a prison, to God's displeasure in the decorated halls of worldly grandeur? (*J. S. Van Dyke.*) *True prosperity*.—Now, do let us all be thoroughly instructed from this, what it is that constitutes true prosperity. It is said of the soldiers of a certain king, in ancient times, that they lost a great battle by mistaking the shadows for the persons of their enemies. They discharged their arrows at the empty resemblance, instead of the living and moving ranks of men. How many make a similar mistake with regard to prosperity! They mistake the shadow for the substance; and thus they take a wrong aim. All their energies and all their efforts are directed to something short of the mark. Outward distinctions and outward blessings, considered in themselves, form only the shadow of prosperity. It does not consist in greatness, or grandeur, or riches, or plenty, or ease. These are all sometimes possessed by the wicked; and sometimes they are possessed by those, who, instead of being prosperous, have actually to groan through the very disquietude of their heart. True prosperity is something different to this, and independent of this. It can flourish without such things as these, and make us happy either with or without them. It consists in what Joseph had—the favour, and presence, and blessing of Almighty God, our heavenly Father. This can make us happy in every place, and in every state. (*C. Overton.*) *Uses of adversity*.—It is good for man to suffer the adversity of this earthly life, for it brings him back to the sacred retirement of the heart, where only he finds he is an exile from his native home, and ought not to place his trust in any worldly enjoyment. It is good for him also to meet with contradiction and reproach, and to be evil thought of and evil spoken of, even when his intentions are upright and his actions blameless, for this keeps him humble and is a powerful antidote to the poison of vain glory; and then chiefly it is that we have recourse to the witness within us, which is God, when we are outwardly despised, and held in no degree of esteem and favour among men. Our dependence upon God ought to be so entire and absolute that

we should never think it necessary, in any kind of distress, to have recourse to human consolation. (*De Imitatione Christi.*) *Providences of God*:—We are tried by our disappointments, we are tried by our successes. God heaps mercies upon men, and then takes them all away. He blesses, enriches, and establishes men, and then shuts them up, impoverishes, and subverts them. The whole train of the dealings of God with them in respect of the providential ordering of their affairs is either to break the hold of this earth upon the human soul, through its senses and passions, or else to inspire its religious faculties to take hold upon God and eternity. This is the secret of the whole round of unspeakable and so-called mysterious providences of God towards men; unspeakable and mysterious because God is acting in one way and they are acting in another. (*H. W. Beecher.*) *A prisoner kindly treated*:—It is said that when John Bunyan was in Bedford jail, some of his persecutors in London heard that he was often out of the prison; they sent an officer to talk with the gaoler on the subject, and in order to discover the fact he was to get there in the middle of the night. Bunyan was at home with his family, but so restless that he could not sleep; he therefore acquainted his wife that, though the gaoler had given him liberty to stay till the morning, yet, from his uneasiness, he must immediately return. He did so, and the gaoler blamed him for coming at such an unseasonable hour. Early in the morning the messenger came, and interrogating the gaoler, said "Are all the prisoners safe?" "Yes." "Is John Bunyan safe?" "Yes." "Let me see him." He was called, and appeared, and all was well. After the messenger was gone, the gaoler, addressing Mr. Bunyan, said, "Well, you may go in and out again just when you think proper, for you know when to return better than I can tell you." *When God commands the life all goes well*:—"In the course of my inspection of the lines that morning, while passing along Culp's Hill, I found the men hard at work entrenching, and in such fine spirits as at once to attract attention. One of them finally dropped his work, and approaching me, inquired if the reports first received were true. On asking what he referred to, he replied that twice word had been passed along the line that General McKeller had been assigned to the command of the army, and the second time it was added that he was on the way to the field, and might soon be expected. He continued, 'The boys are all jubilant over it, for they know that if he takes command, everything will go right.'" (*One Thousand New Illustrations.*) *Equanimity of character*:—The equanimity which a few persons preserve through the diversities of prosperous and adverse life reminds me of certain aquatic plants which spread their tops on the surface of the water, and with wonderful elasticity keep the surface still if the water swells, or if it falls. (*J. Foster.*) *God with His people in trouble*:—"Think not that the presence of God with His people is limited to palaces or to churches. It has been often manifestly seen that He was with them in prisons, in caves or dens, on gibbets, in fiery furnaces. Ask not, why He does not snatch away His people from such dreary places, if He is present with them? Why should you think yourself wiser than God? You know why Christ, though He was the Son of God, did not come down from the cross, that His enemies might believe in Him. The sufferings of Christ were necessary for our salvation. The sufferings of the saints are necessary for their own salvation, though in another sense. (*G. Lawson, D.D.*) *Integrity repaid by confidence*:—Joseph, diligent and trusty, finds friends even in the prison. Integrity invariably secures confidence. The conscientious, the honest, and the truthful commonly find those with whom they deal willing to exhibit the same qualities. On the other hand, the deceitful and the unprincipled are extremely liable to be paid in their own coin. Indeed, so strong is the disposition to judge others by ourselves, that we are tolerably safe in concluding that those who charge the world with want of sympathy are not themselves extremely sympathetic; that those who pronounce mankind unprincipled will bear watching. Since the world is a kind of mirror, we are quite apt to see in others only a reflection of ourselves. Since its polished hardness approaches flintiness, our treatment of the world is liable to be turned back upon ourselves—the force of the rebound as well as its nature being determined by our own conduct. If we love our fellow-men, they will love us; if we hate them, they will hate us; if we aid them, they will aid us; abuse them, and abuse returns, sometimes steeped in the poison of malice. Hence it commonly happens that he who can control himself can usually determine the treatment he is to receive from others. Joseph's kindness secured a return of kindness even from the Egyptian jailer; his integrity was repaid in confidence. He who has the love which our Saviour recommends possesses

the means of securing kindness from most persons, and respect from all (J. S. Van Dyke.)

CHAPTER XL.

VERS. 1-23. The captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them.—*Light upon Joseph's destiny*.—This chapter discovers signs that Joseph was destined to fill an important place in the history of the kingdom of God. This was now the time of his trial and preparation for his great calling as the ruler of the Egyptians, the deliverer of his nation. Some of the indications of his high destiny are these:—I. THE CONVICTION OF HIS INNOCENCE AND INTEGRITY GAINS GROUND. Joseph was, at first, thrown into a dungeon and laid in irons. Now, this severe discipline is relaxed, and he is appointed to a kind of stewardship over the other prisoners. It is highly probable, that, by this time, Potiphar was convinced of his innocence, though he detained him in custody for prudential reasons. Joseph was everywhere giving the impression of being a good and holy man. The character of Potiphar's wife could not long be concealed; and as it became more and more known, the belief in Joseph's innocence would gain ground. II. HE DISCOVERS SIGNS OF HIS TRUE VOCATION. 1. As a saint of God. Mark how Joseph refers to God in every important crisis of his history. When Pharaoh's two officers lamented that there was no interpreter of their dreams, he said, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" He was always true to his religion. Mark his temperateness and forbearance, his calmness and simplicity. He does not speak unkindly of his brethren, he does not even name them, but simply states that he was "stolen out of the land of the Hebrews," and that he had "done nothing" that they should put him "into the dungeon" (ver. 15). Here was the faith and resignation of a saint, whose life was fit to be recorded in the pages of Revelation as an eminent and worthy example to all ages. 2. As a prophet of God. As such he interprets dreams, which are here to be considered as Divine revelations to men of warning, reproof, and teaching (Job xxxiii. 14-18). 3. As a kind and just ruler of men. Joseph was clearly a man who was destined to wield a commanding, and even a regal influence over others. He was fitted for this, doubtless, by his intellectual gifts and characteristics, but more especially (1) by his sympathy. "Wherefore look ye so sadly to-day?" he said to his fellow-prisoners, whose dreams suggested the worst forebodings (vers. 6-7). He himself had been in the school of affliction, and he had learned to be tender. Though he had griefs of his own to bear, he felt for others. He cannot be a true ruler of men who has not learned sympathy. (2) By his uprightness. He was firm and faithful, even when he had to tell unpleasant truths (vers. 18-19). Such are the qualities required in a true ruler of men (2 Sam. xxiii. 3-4). III. HE RETAINS FAITH AND HOPE IN GOD IN THE MIDST OF ALL HIS ADVERSITIES. God was with him in the prison. Therefore he does not abandon himself to despair, but still trusts and hopes on. (T. H. Leale.) *Joseph and the two prisoners*.—I. We cannot but be struck with THE MINUTE PARTICULARITY OF THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD. See at how many critical points Joseph's life touches the lives of others, and is, thereby, carried so much the farther forward towards the attainment by him of the place which God was preparing for him. When I get to a great railway junction, and find trains coming in together from the east, and the north, and the south, just in time to join another that is starting from that point for the west, I should be regarded as a simpleton if I spoke of that as a wonderful coincidence. And yet on the great Railroad of Life, when I come to such a junction and meet there a train that leads me on to some significant sphere of service, I am supposed to be a simpleton if I refer that to the over-ruling providence of God. But I am not a simpleton—I am only reasoning in that department as I would in the domain of literature or daily travelling; and he who repudiates God's providence is the fool, according to that scathing utterance of the Psalmist—"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." II. We are reminded by this history also that THE CHARACTER OF THE INDIVIDUAL HAS AS MUCH TO DO WITH WHAT I HAVE CALLED THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLOT OF HIS LIFE AS THE PLAN OR PURPOSE OF GOD HAS. Providence is not fatalism. Joseph, if he had chosen to act otherwise than he did, might have thrown away all the opportunities which these places of junction in his life afforded him. The

men that fail in life do not fail for want of such opportunities as Joseph had, but for want of the character to see these opportunities, and the ability to use them. Keep near to God, therefore, form your character according to His principles, and then, even though you may be in a prison, you will find a way to serve Him, and will feel that somehow you are on the road to your success, and in training for your sphere. III. We may learn that THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN THEMSELVES UPHOLD IN TROUBLE, ARE THE MOST EFFICIENT HELPERS OF OTHERS WHEN THEY ARE IN TRIAL. Young as Joseph was, he had not seen enough sorrow to dispose him to sympathize with others in their affliction. And in the suggestive question which he put to his fellow-prisoners, "do not interpretations belong to God?" he not only expresses his own faith, but in the most delicate and skilful manner indicates to them the source whence alone true consolation comes. More than thirty years ago, just at the beginning of my ministry, I was in the house of a beloved pastor, when he was called to pass through the greatest trial that a man can know, in the death of a truly good and noble wife. Two mornings after, the postman brought in a sheaf of letters. I think there were more than twenty of them, but each was from a brother minister who had been led through the same dark valley, and who was seeking to comfort him with the comfort wherewith himself had been comforted of God. Only a few evenings ago I met a Christian lady, with whom I was comparing notes regarding the experience of the loss of little children, and she said to me, "I never see the death of a little child announced in the newspaper but I have an impulse to write to the parents and speak comfortably to them." Thus we may console ourselves under our own trials with the thought that God is endowing us thereby with the gift of sympathy, and fitting us to become "sons of consolation" to others in affliction. The price is costly, but the learning is precious. IV. THOSE WHOM WE BENEFIT HAVE OFTEN VERY POOR REMEMBRANCE OF OUR KINDNESS. Men too often write the record of grudges in marble, and of favours in water. Nay, such is the perversity of human nature, that not unfrequently men return evil for the good which has been done them. One spoke to an English statesman of the violent enmity which another evinced towards him. "Yes," was the reply, "and I cannot understand it, for I never did him any kindness that I can remember." The sarcasm was bitter, but there was enough of truth in it to give it point; and every one who seeks to be a helper of others learns, sooner or later, to give over looking for human gratitude, and to think mainly of the Lord Jesus Christ and His appreciation. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. Let no circumstances ever tempt the children of God to doubt and question the watchful care and kindness of their heavenly Father's providence. Let them bear in remembrance, that He not only works in His own way, but chooses His own time; and let them rest in the assurance that both His way and His time are always the best. Though He tarry, then, wait for Him. "Fret not thyself in any wise to do evil." 2. The source of true and constant enjoyment of that happiness which all seek and so few find must be within. It lies essentially in a sense of God's love. This is happiness. This will ever be associated with confidence in His wisdom, and faithfulness, and kindness; and consequently with contentment in all conditions. These are sources of joy of which no power can rob us, and which remain ever the same—amidst all changes unchanging. (*R. Wardlaw.*) *Joseph ministering to the comfort of others*:—It may possibly cause momentary surprise, that Joseph, who interpreted others' dreams, was left in ignorance of his own destiny. Is not this, however, the method ordinarily employed to strengthen faith and produce entire reliance upon God? Indeed, was it not communion with God produced by this sense of dependence which enabled him to interpret mysteries, which fitted him for comforting the sorrowing? It not frequently happens that those whose lives are passed in unrelieved sadness—with whom the present is an enigma, the past a memory of grief, the future a cloud of torturing uncertainty—are nevertheless the instruments in God's hand of producing joy in others' hearts. As a block of ice, chiselled into the form of a lens, can be made to concentrate the sun's rays, kindling a flame, so the believer, by gathering the scattered beams of Heaven's love, may pour cheerfulness into others' hearts while his own may remain quite cheerless. (*J. S. Van Dyke.*) *The same prison is not the same thing to good and bad*:—Too often it happens to the righteous according to the wish of the wicked. Here we find two men who had sinned against their lord, the king of Egypt, confined in the same prison with Joseph. Yet the same prison is not the same thing to a good and to a bad man. The two offenders trembled in anxious dread of some worse punishment; and the consciousness of their demerit, if they were really guilty, was more painful

to them than the irons were to Joseph, although they entered into his soul. Joseph had the testimony of his conscience to cheer him. He not only suffered without cause, but suffered for righteousness' sake, and trusted that God would bring his sufferings to a comfortable conclusion. In the world you may meet with much distress; but keep consciences void of offence towards God and man, and you shall be preserved from the sting and venom of those troubles that Providence allots you. "Let no man suffer as a thief, as an evil-doer, as a busy-body in other men's matters. But if any man suffer as a Christian," or without deserving to suffer, "let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God, who executes righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed." (*G. Lawson, D.D.*) *The butler and the baker*.—I. PRISON OCCUPATIONS. The crime is the disgrace, and not the scaffold or the prison. Good men have often been imprisoned, while many wicked have escaped. Yet, notwithstanding the prison, these sufferers are amongst our heroes and martyrs. Milton said, "there shall one day be a resurrection of names and reputations." Bunyan, Baxter, &c., are not honoured the less for the dungeons in which they suffered. Next to escaping the prison, the best thing is, like Joseph, to suffer innocently. Joseph in prison. Suffering often hardens the bad and purifies and manifests the good. Joseph's character could not be hid. Even the keepers saw how different he was from the ordinary criminals committed to their care (see Prov. xvi. 7). The prisoner becomes a keeper (so many of the captive Jews, as Daniel, Nehemiah, Mordecai, were exalted). Is so much trusted as to be freed from supervision (xxxviii. 22-23). God, who was with him in Canaan, is with him in Egypt, and in prison. He does not forsake His friends in distresses brought upon them by their fidelity to Him.

II. PRISON COMPANIONS. The butler and baker, two officers of importance in eastern and ancient courts. Yet even these were not spared by a capricious and absolute monarch. "Oh, how wretched is that poor man that hangs on princes' favours!" In a palace one day, a prison the next. In ancient times a courtier's office was often like the Bridge of Sighs at Venice, "a palace and a prison on each hand." These men may have suffered justly; like the malefactors who were crucified with Jesus (Luke xxiii. 41). The worst punishment of the good is forced fellowship with the wicked. As providence over-ruled the wrath of Joseph's brothers, so now he over-ruled the wrath of Pharaoh. One of these degraded officials shall be the instrument of Joseph's release and exaltation.

III. PRISON DREAMS. That is: the dreams of the butler and baker. The subject was so strange, and the recollection so vivid, that they were troubled. Dreamland, a mysterious region to the ancients. No interpreter of dreams in the prison, they thought. Joseph's inquiry. He thinks of his own dreams, doubtless, and the transitory trouble they had brought him into. He gives the praise to God, as the true interpreter of dreams. By the help of divine illumination, he reveals the meaning of their dreams. No doubt he saw that God had sent them those dreams for him to interpret; and that his connection with these men would work out the fulfilment of his own dreams. It is certain that what was foretold by their dreams would have occurred even if they had never dreamed at all. Hence, it was clear that there was a purpose in their dreaming, and in their relating their dreams to Joseph. Probably had not Joseph been in prison, they would not have dreamed as they did. Learn: I. If we suffer, let it be for righteousness' sake. II. When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies, &c. (*J. C. Gray.*) *Lessons*: 1. Providence keeps its method in multiplying mercy to His saints in misery. 2. The sins of others God sometimes maketh an occasion of refreshing His own servants. 3. Court officers are very prone to sin, and abuse favours. 4. Kings themselves are not secured from offences by their nearest servants (ver. 1). 5. Kings, offended, are apt to swell in wrath and displeasure. 6. Greatest wrath of kings is apt to rise against officers (ver. 2). 7. The wrath of kings usually causeth the restraint and imprisonment of their criminal subjects. 8. God orders place where the wrath of man imprisons, and that for His own ends. 9. Innocents and malefactors may lie together in the same prison (ver. 3). 10. God inclineth the hearts of chief commanders for imprisonment, more to the innocent than guilty. 11. Innocent prisoners under Providence may have the charge of malefactors. 12. Good souls trusted in any capacity, do execute it faithfully. 13. Set times and seasons of restraint God appoints to His own and others for His own ends. 14. All these Providence orders to be occasions of glorifying His grace in His saints (ver. 4). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*)

Ver. 5. *They dreamed a dream.*—*The wise interpreter*.—I. THE DREAMS. II. THE INTERPRETATION. Notice how honestly Joseph tells the truth—gives his

message faithfully—does not hide what God has given him to say. **III. THE FULFILMENT.** It all came true. Joseph had the comfort of feeling that he had been taught of God, and that so God was caring for him. Lessons: 1. God knows all things. 2. God foreknows all things. 3. God wisely orders all things. (*W. S. Smith, B.D.*) *Importance attached in Egypt to dreams.*—Numerous inscriptions show the great importance attached by the Egyptians to dreams. In one, the Prince of Bachtan is recorded as having sent back to Egypt, in consequence of a dream, the god Chunsu, which the Pharaoh had sent him to cure his daughter. Another states how King Menephtah had a dream before a battle, in which the god Ptah placed himself before him, and forbade him to advance. An inscription discovered in the ruins of Napata, relates how the Pharaoh Miamum, in the year of his elevation to the throne of Egypt and Ethiopia, dreamed that he saw two serpents; one on his right hand and the other on his left. Awakening, he demanded that his wise men should come and interpret it on the moment, and this they did as follows: "You possess the south, and the north will submit to you. The diadems of the two will shine on your head, and you will rule over all the land in its length and in its breadth." Dreams were regarded as sent by the god Thoth, and it was so great a matter to obtain them that recipes are still extant telling how they may be secured. It was natural, therefore, that the two disgraced officials should be greatly excited to find out the meaning of the supposed Divine communications that had been sent them. Cut off as they were by the prison walls from the priests who alone interpreted dreams, they would doubtless be only too glad to avail themselves of such irregular help as the presence of Joseph promised to afford. (*C. Geikie, D.D.*) *Divine influence over the mind in sleep.*—1. We all allow that God may and does influence the workings of our minds through the operation of the laws of suggestion or association while we are awake; for it is impossible to hold in any intelligible fashion the doctrine of the agency of the Holy Spirit unless we make such an admission. But if God can thus influence our minds when we are awake, it is equally easy for Him to do so while we are asleep, so that there is no antecedent impossibility against the view that He may speak to men in and through the visions of the night. 2. Again, the providence of God must take cognizance of our dreams as well as of our waking thoughts, and must be equally in and over both, otherwise it is not really universal. Hence there is nothing either absurd or unphilosophical or impious in supposing that God may avail Himself of the phenomena of dreams for the purpose of turning the mind to His truth, or leading it into some particular direction. How He does that it is impossible to say. Sleep is a mystery, and dreams are a mystery, and to them both we may apply the words of Hamlet, "There are more things in heaven and earth than have been dreamed of in philosophy"; while, whatever may be said of dreams in general, we are probably not wrong in believing that the visions here recorded were from the Lord. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *An interpreter.*—**I. TWO PICTURES WHICH NEEDED AN INTERPRETER.** Dream pictures. Prison walls can't shut out the sights which come to men in sleep. 1. The picture which the butler saw. 2. The picture which the baker saw. **II. THE INTERPRETER AND HIS INTERPRETATIONS.** If we want to know what a picture means, the best person to tell us is the man who painted it? Who had painted these dream pictures? Sometimes see a plate on which child has been rubbing paints; a quantity of colour smudges, blue, red, green, yellow, all mixed up together! Many dreams something like this, just a quantity of thought smudges. The butler thinks about grapes and cups; the baker about bread and confectionery; no wonder that in their dreams they should see pictures which remind them of such things. Once a great artist, Turner, got his grandchildren to rub their fingers about in the colours on his palette. When they had made a great mess he said, "Now stop." And then from their smudges he painted a most beautiful picture. God sometimes does this with our thought-smudges. So here, with the butler and the baker; He took their confused thoughts and made clear pictures out of them. In the prison was a man who trusted God, and because he trusted God, therefore God trusted him. He understood what the dream pictures meant; God taught him to interpret them. Conclusion: Some people like to have dreams, but dreams are not much good if they have no meaning, or if we can't find out what the meaning is. God sometimes teaches men by dreams, but He has many other ways of teaching them; the world itself is a great picture-book full of meaning for those who can interpret it. Better to be an interpreter than a dreamer. If we can interpret, not dreams only but all nature will bring us messages from God. Can we be interpreters? Yes, if we are like Joseph, pure,

simple, trusting God, trying to obey Him. Everything about us has a meaning if only we could understand. The seeds growing say to the interpreter, "Don't be in a hurry; first the grain, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." The wind says, "Ye know not whence I come or whither I go, and God's spirit is like me." The moon says, "I am so bright and beautiful because I reflect the light of the sun; if you want to be bright and beautiful, you must reflect the glory of Christ." We need not mind dreams, good or bad; let us learn to trust and obey God, so that He may teach us to be good interpreters. (*C. A. Goodhart, M.A.*) *Pharaoh's butler and baker advent types*:—The king of Egypt's servants, it seems, have incurred his displeasure; they are in prison, bound, waiting for punishment, utterly in his power, quite helpless to atone for their sin, or appease his anger. Now here surely there is pictured for us in parable the state of man since the Fall. He has incurred the wrath of God; this world is his prison, and there is a still more fearful prospect of judgment and fiery indignation in the world to come; and nothing can be done, no man can atone for his own sins, nor for those of any one else; he has, indeed, bread to eat and raiment to put on, but he lives ever in the fear of death, for he has lost the favour of God, the great King. These prisoners dream each a dream in the dismal night of their imprisonment. They are filled with strange thoughts and fears which they cannot interpret; they desire above all things to know their fate, but none can tell them. Just so is man by nature; just like this were the thoughts and forebodings of the Greeks and Romans and other heathen nations, who had lost the knowledge of God, and yet were ever "feeling after Him, if haply they might find Him"; if, perhaps, they might learn what they were, whence they came, and whither they were going. As we read their writings we feel as if we could almost look into their faces, and see them bewildered and sad; for their life is to them but a dream, a riddle, a puzzle, and there is no interpreter of it for them. Now there is another person introduced. He is a servant like the others, in prison like them, yet invested with authority, endowed with Divine wisdom, able to tell them all that they so much desire to know. He has done no wrong, yet he is disgraced and punished; he suffers for another's fault; he might have escaped and lived in honour, but he would not. "Is not this the Christ?" He entered the prison, that he might set the prisoners free. Yet not all; for now we must notice that there are two prisoners, with different dreams, and very different fates. So it is all through the Bible. "One is taken, the other left;" Abel and Cain, Jacob and Esau, David and Saul; down to Peter and Judas, and the two thieves crucified with our Lord. The first dreamer, the king's butler, or more correctly his cupbearer, dreams of his life; he sees a vine, it buds, it blossoms, till clusters of ripe grapes hang thick upon it. Pharaoh's cup is in his hand, he plucks the grapes, he presses the juice into the cup, and humbly presents it to Pharaoh, who accepts it. This dream is a life, and what sort of a life? An active, faithful, watchful, dutiful life. The cup of the Great King is in our hand, to tell us what He expects of us, fruit, good fruit, sweet, ripe, mature fruit, fruit at the due season, when He comes to seek it, that He may drink the new wine with His chosen servants in His kingdom. Jesus, the better Joseph, came to tell glad tidings to those who thus diligently did the will of God, that their labour was not in vain, that their work should be accepted, that they should soon be brought out of prison, be freed from the bondage of this death, and after three days, that is the time of Christ's resting in the grave, they should have a joyful resurrection, and so their high calling should be restored to them which Adam's sin had lost them; and thus should they be evermore with the Lord. Thus did Christ tell men their dreams. This brings us to the second dreamer; he too dreams of his life; he is Pharaoh's baker, and his duty is to provide baked meats for the king. But what does he do? He prepares baked meats indeed; but he puts them into "Baskets with holes;" for, as the margin tells us, this is the true force and meaning of the words. And he puts these baskets on his head; that is, in a place where he can neither see them nor protect them. The consequence is that the wild birds light upon the baskets, and devour the meats, and he does not notice them; or the meats drop through the holes, for he cannot see them; and so they are lost, and become an easy prey. The butler and baker both worked, the former acceptably, the latter in vain. And his punishment is noteworthy. The birds that devoured his work that should have satisfied his master, presently devour his flesh as he hangs dead upon a tree. May we not see his fault indicated by his punishment? For, Job says, "They that plough iniquity and sow wickedness, reap the same." A man's sins are their own punishment; what he sows he reaps.

These careless people work and labour and toil; they clutch fast that which they can gather for themselves, be it little or much; but the things of God are put into a "basket with holes," out of sight, above their heads, and their eyes are toward the earth; and so they lose all; and when they come before the King, they will have nothing to present to Him. The birthday of our King is near; the birthday in humility and poverty, yet He will make a feast to all His servants, a spiritual feast, to which He bids all "that are religiously and devoutly disposed"; all His servants, not a few but all; the feast is provided for all; He expects all. And yet we must not think only of His birthday, but of the great second coming, when, like Pharaoh, He will reward and punish His servants according to their works. But, in the meantime, He sends a Joseph to us; He tells us our dreams, shows us ourselves, our life, and our end, in the mirror of the word of God, as St. James calls it. (*F. C. Woodhouse, M.A.*) *The dreams of the butler and the baker:—* Human society is a system of mutual interdependence. Very early men discovered that a division of labour was a common advantage. The king can no more do without the ploughman than the ploughman can do without the king. I. HUMAN LIFE IS FULL OF MYSTERIES. 1. Where there is partial knowledge there must be mystery. A man must be a mystery to his dog. Civilized men are mysteries to barbarians. A field-marshal is a mystery to his valet. A locomotive engine is a mystery to a ploughboy. There are more mysteries within ourselves than we can solve in a lifetime. Mysteries without us need not therefore stagger us. 2. Temporary miscarriage of justice is a mystery. Clever intrigues of wickedness often succeed. A lie may bring large gain, while the candid statement of the truth may bring ill-fame and worldly ruin. Pharaoh's chief butler and chief baker—men of rank and position in the Court—may have been both innocent. Or, one may have been innocent, and one guilty. Yet both are committed to the same prison. Is not this a mystery? 3. That human destiny is revealed in dreams is a mystery. If one cannot, with the most wakeful sagacity, foresee clearly his earthly fortune and destiny, it is a strange thing that it can be indicated in a dream. Yet God has sometimes revealed to men coming events in their dreams. II. THE MYSTERIES OF LIFE REQUIRE AN INTERPRETER. 1. The office of interpreter is useful to mankind. That is a narrow and erroneous view of human life that regards mechanical labour as alone profitable. The man who examines into the forces and movements of the human soul is as great a benefactor of his race as he who searches into the arcana of material nature. The interpreter of life's mysteries fulfils a noble task. 2. The power to interpret comes from large personal experience. Joseph was well aware that his course of life had been wholly shaped by his dreams. 3. The interpreter must be a man full of sympathy. Joseph's manifold sufferings had developed in him intense sympathy with the unfortunate. III. THE REVELATIONS OF THE INTERPRETER WILL BE BOTH PLEASANT AND PAINFUL. 1. The true interpreter must be the ally of truth. He has no personal end to serve. Because Jesus was essentially the truth, therefore He was the teacher, the interpreter, the wonder-worker, the life. 2. It is a joy to bring glad tidings. Nevertheless, he will rejoice in the butler's joy: it will be a delight to turn sadness into song in another's heart. 3. The interpreter may be commissioned to carry sorrowful news. To do a man good service is a greater kindness than to give him pleasure. Joseph was the best earthly friend that chief baker ever had, though he announced, "in three days thou wilt be hanged." Joseph obtained for that man three precious days of preparation for the great change. (*J. Dickerson Davies, M.A.*) *Joseph is again brought into connection with dreams:—*It is not surprising that three nights before Pharaoh's birthday these functionaries of the court should have recalled in sleep such scenes as that day was wont to bring round, nor that they should vividly have seen the parts they themselves used to play in the festival. Neither is it surprising that they should have had very anxious thoughts regarding their own fate on a day which was chosen for deciding the fate of political or courtly offenders. But it is remarkable that they having dreamed these dreams Joseph should have been found willing to interpret them. One desires some evidence of Joseph's attitude towards God during this period when God's attitude towards him might seem doubtful, and especially one would like to know what Joseph, by this time, thought of his juvenile dreams, and whether in the prison his face wore the same beaming confidence in his own future which had smitten the hearts of his brothers with impatient envy of the dreamer. We seek some evidence, and here we find it. Joseph's willingness to interpret the dreams of his fellow-prisoners proves that he still believed in his own, that among his other qualities he had this characteristic

also of a steadfast and profound soul, that he "reverenced as a man the dreams of his youth." Had he not done so, and had he not yet hoped that somehow God would bring truth out of them, he would surely have said: "Don't you believe in dreams; they will only get you into difficulties." This casual conversation, then, with his fellow-prisoners was for Joseph one of those perilous moments when a man holds his fate in his hand, and yet does not know that he is specially on trial, but has for his guidance and safe-conduct through the hazard only the ordinary safeguards and lights by the aid of which he is framing his daily life. A man cannot be forewarned of trial, if the trial is to be a fair test of his habitual life. He must not be called to the lists by the herald's trumpet warning him to mind his seat and grasp his weapon; but must be suddenly set upon if his habit of steadiness and balance is to be tested, and the warrior-instinct to which the right weapon is ever at hand. As Joseph, going the round of his morning duty and spreading what might stir the appetite of these dainty courtiers, noted the gloom on their faces, had he not been of a nature to take upon himself the sorrows of others, he might have been glad to escape from their presence, fearful lest he should be infected by their depression, or should become an object on which they might vent their ill-humour. But he was girt with a healthy cheerfulness that could bear more than his own burden; and his pondering of his own experience made him sensitive to all that affected the destinies of other men. Thus Joseph, in becoming the interpreter of the dreams of other men, became the fulfiller of his own. Had he made light of the dreams of his fellow-prisoners because he had already made light of his own, he would, for aught we can see, have died in the dungeon. And, indeed, what hope is left for a man, and what deliverance is possible, when he makes light of his own most sacred experience, and doubts whether, after all, there was any Divine voice in that part of his life which once he felt to be full of significance? (*M. Dods, D.D.*)

The vine in Egypt:—In Egypt, wine was used for medicinal purposes; it was employed in the offerings made to the deities; Osiris was popularly believed to be identical with the Greek Bacchus, and was represented to have been the first who found the vine and taught men its cultivation; wine was imported into Egypt from Greece and Phœnicia; it formed a part of the daily rations allowed to the soldiers of the king's guard; it was not even interdicted to the priests, except, perhaps, to those of Heliopolis, though but a limited quantity was permitted to them to ensure their constant efficiency for their sacred functions; and wine was plentifully served at banquets and other social meetings to both men and women; even if, as some believe, the frightful skeleton, usually exhibited to the guests, with the words, "Eat and drink, for soon you will be like this," was a symbolical exhortation to temperance, it did not always produce the desired effect; but it is much more probable that it was intended to invite to a free and full enjoyment of the pleasures of the table, since inexorable death will not fail to pay its unwelcome visit. The vine occurred in Egypt in a great variety of species, of which that grown in the Thebaid was so agreeable and light that it was, without injury, given to invalids; the wine of Mareotis was most esteemed and plentiful, and possessed the advantage of keeping to a great age; while that of Tenia was renowned for its richness and aromatic fragrance. The vine flourishes in Egypt even in the water, like an aquatic plant; it is, therefore, not injured by the inundations of the Nile, which, moreover, never commence, in Lower Egypt, before the middle of August, when the vintage is, in most cases, almost entirely completed. Vineyards, very tastefully arranged, were either combined with, or contiguous to, orchards, furnished with tanks, and often with reservoirs, with summer-houses, and reception-rooms, with avenues of trees and grass-plots, and always with a building for the wine-press (*Isa. v. 1, 2*). "The vines were trained on trellis-work, supported by transverse rafters resting on pillars," which were, in many instances, gaily coloured, and divided the vineyard into numerous avenues; many vines were allowed to grow as standing bushes, and, on account of their lowness, required no support; while others were formed into a number of beautiful bowers. At the season of the vintage, from the end of June, boys were engaged to frighten away the birds by a sling or the sound of the voice: in gathering the fruit, the precarious aid of trained monkeys was more curiously than profitably employed; and after the conclusion of the vintage, kids were allowed to browse upon the vines. The simplest mode of pressing the wine was by putting the grapes into a bag, and turning the latter by two poles in contrary directions, or by some other contrivance based on the same principle, but more remarkable is the foot-press; the workmen trod the grapes with naked feet, supporting themselves by ropes suspended from the roof. We possess several beautiful representations of

such wine-presses, remarkable for elaborateness and tastefulness. After some other liquid was probably added to the juice, it was clarified by sieving, and perhaps by the application of eggs. The dream of the chief butler describes in rapid but comprehensive outlines the different stages in the growth of the vine; how it produces buds and blossoms, forms clusters, and matures ripe grapes, which the butler then presses into the goblet (ver. 10). This completeness seems to be the principal object of the narrative; it may be that only in order to shorten the whole process, and to compress it within the narrow frame of a vision, the juice, after having just been pressed out with the hand, is stated to have been placed before the king; whereas, in reality, it might have been allowed to ferment the usual time, as it is represented in numerous frescoes; but it is as probable that sometimes temperate persons (as it was later ordained in the Koran) abstained from fermented wine on account of its more intoxicating power, and that, at some period, the priests who regulated the king's table, as they controlled all his public and private affairs, prescribed to him the use of the unfermented juice of the grape. (*M. M. Kalisch, Ph.D.*) **Think on me when it shall be well with thee.**—*Joseph's plea for remembrance*:—The first bit of humanity we have seen in Joseph: human nature is in this little plea. He would have been far too great a man for me if I had not seen this little touch of human nature coming out after all. I have wondered, as I have read along here, that he did not protest and resent, and vindicate himself, and otherwise come out as an injured man. He has been almost superhuman up to this point. Now the poor lad says, "The chain is very heavy, this yoke makes me chafe. I cannot bear this any longer." And he tells the butler, who has good luck before him, that he would like to be taken out of the dungeon. There are times when we want to find a god even in the butler; times when our theism is too great for us, and we want to get hold of a man—when our religion seems to us to be too aerial, afar off, and we would be glad to take hold of any staff that anybody could put into our poor trembling hands. This is natural, and I am not about to denounce Joseph, to reproach him, as though he had done some unnatural and unreasonable thing. I am glad of this revelation of his nature; it brings me near to him. Though God will not substitute himself by a butler, and will give him two more years' imprisonment, yet God will make it up to him somehow. He shall not want consolation. It was very human to seek to make a half god of the butler to get out of that galling bondage. We shall see, in the course of our reading, whether God be not mightier than all creatures, and cannot open a way to kingdoms and royalties, when we ourselves are striving only for some little, insignificant, and unworthy blessing. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. Sad and seduced souls may be brought to open their troubles to such as may truly answer them from God. 2. Things seen in dreams sent by God may signify matters of another nature. So the vine, &c. (ver. 10). 3. Actions are presented in some dreams by God to presage the like really to come (ver. 11). 4. God's gift of interpretation of dreams is a sure oracle. 5. God alone determines the truth to every sign. Three branches, three days (ver. 12). 6. Under symbols God may infallibly teach restitution, and advancement to imprisoned creatures. 7. God's prophets may declare that to others, which they cannot to themselves for good. 8. Restitution of evil-doers to favour must carry orderly ministration therein (ver. 13). 9. God's goodness to sufferers by His prophets, requireth good to them. Remember me (ver. 14). 10. It is not unbecoming God's prophets to desire their own good. 11. It is reasonable to desire to be known to them who can help them. 12. Liberty is desirable by saints in their restraints. 13. It is just for God's innocents to complain of wrongs. 14. It is equal for God's afflicted ones to plead their own innocency. 15. It is fit for saints to desire freedom from dungeon calamities (ver. 15). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Joseph's request*:—He very naturally throws in a request on behalf of himself. There is no symptom of impatience in this; but patience itself may consist with the use of all lawful means to obtain deliverance. The terms in which this request are made are modest, and exceedingly impressive. He might have asked for a place under the chief butler, or some other post of honour or profit: but he requests only to be delivered from this house. He might have reminded him how much he owed to his sympathetic and kind treatment; but he left these things to speak for themselves. In pleading the exalted station in which the chief butler was about to be reinstated, he gently intimates the obligations which people in prosperous circumstances are under, to think of the poor and afflicted; and Christians may still farther improve the principle, not to be unmindful of such cases in their approaches to the King of kings. This plea may also direct us to make use of His name and interest, who is exalted at the right hand of the

Majesty on high. It was on this principle that the dying thief presented his petition : Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom ! A petition which the Lord of Glory did neither refuse nor forget : and still He liveth to make intercession for us. (*A. Fuller.*) *Fellow-sympathy*.—1. The principle of this request. It is this : that those who have themselves suffered are able to enter into the feelings of others who are called upon likewise to suffer. Men are prepared for the ministry of help and consolation by suffering. 2. Illustrations of this principle. (1) The children of Israel were required to show kindness to the stranger, because they understood the feelings of a stranger when they were strangers in the land of Egypt. (2) Joseph might assume that the butler knew the feelings of a prisoner, and that he would be ready to help his poor companion in bonds. (3) It was thus that the Son of Man was trained to be the Captain of our salvation (*Heb. ii. 10*). **Bake-meats for Pharaoh.**—*The confectioner's art in Egypt*.—The confectioner's art obtained in Egypt a large share of attention, and the very various operations which it involves are, with the usual minuteness, reproduced on the monuments. Here we see how the flour was sifted and purified ; how the paste was either kneaded with the hands or the feet ; was formed into rolls, upon the surface of which certain seeds were sprinkled ; and how the dough, mixed with fruits, and other ingredients, received the shape of an ox, a sheep, or a fish, of a triangle, a star, or a disk, or of other favourite objects. The ancient Egyptians made bread the chief article of their food ; they were, hence, by way of derision, called by the Greeks "bread-eaters" ; the poorer classes baked it usually from spelt, or barley, or the flour of the *doora* or *sorghum* ; but wheat also was extensively cultivated, freely used by the wealthier part of the population, and frequently offered to the gods. Sometimes other vegetable productions, for instance the middle part of the lotus-plant or lentils, were baked into bread. The burdens, as is generally known, were carried by the Egyptian men on their heads, while the women bore them on their shoulders, though we learn from the monuments, that this custom was by no means uniformly observed. Two or three baskets with pastry, one above the other, were frequently carried together on the head. (*M. M. Kalisch, Ph.D.*) *Sanguine expectations*.—The chief baker had very little reason to hope for a favourable interpretation to this dream. It was a very different one from that of the butler. The butler pressed the grapes into the king's cup, and put it into his hand ; but the bake-meats which the chief baker carried in his basket, never went to the king's table ; they were eaten from off his head by the hungry birds. Yet the poor man hoped that his dream might have as favourable a meaning given to it as his neighbour's. We have no reason to be surprised at his vain expectation, the fruit of his fond wishes for life and prosperity. How often do we see sick persons promising themselves life, when their physicians see nothing but symptoms of approaching death ! (*G. Lawson, D.D.*) *The folly of prying into the future*.—Men are ordinarily desirous to know what shall befall them. They are fools if they indulge this desire. Who could bear the assurance that in a few days he shall die, or meet with some trouble that shall embitter his life ? Had the baker known what interpretation was to be given of his dream, would he not rather have continued willingly ignorant of its meaning ? what would he not have given for a draught of the waters of oblivion, if they had existed ? He died three days before his time. The thoughts of the fatal moment, and of the birds feeding on his carcase, took possession of his soul. Sleeping or waking his heart was dead within him. (*Ibid.*) *Lessons*.—1. Good tidings to companions in misery is apt to make others also hope for the like. 2. Good hopes may encourage men to open their minds more freely, though a sad return be made unto them. 3. Dreams of different kinds God hath given men to different ends ; some for evil, others for good. 4. Men usually desire God's revelation in hope of good. 5. God may use the common things of a man's calling to show him sad events, as the baker's basket, &c. 6. God hath given sufferings in dreams to discover sufferings indeed (*vers. 16, 17*). 7. God's resolution of dreams sent is infallible. 8. God's servants must deliver saddest returns faithfully. 9. A short time doth God set to the lives of malefactors when they hope for longer. 10. Powers of the world are apt to lay the most ignominious death upon such whom they reject. 11. God orders all these sentences from men to the magnifying of His name and gifts to His saints (*ver. 19*). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Why did Joseph inform the baker beforehand of his fatal end ?*—1. Joseph was laid under a necessity to interpret the dream. He had in effect promised to do it. If he had now refused to satisfy the baker's ardent desire, his silence would have been little better than the words in which the fatal sentence was pronounced ; and it is not to be supposed that the pious youth would

speaking lies in the name of God. He professed to have his knowledge from above, and faithfully delivered to the two prisoners what he had received from the Lord. 2. But there was another reason why Joseph declared plainly what he had learned from God. He wished to have it known amongst the Egyptians that interpretations belonged to the God of the Hebrews, and that he alone could show things that were to come to pass. Joseph afterwards received the name of Zaphnath-paaneah, the revealer of secrets; but it was his desire to have it known that his God was the fountain of all his knowledge, and that confidence in any other God, or in any other way of coming to the knowledge of futurity, but by revelation from Him was vanity and the work of error. (*G. Lawson, D.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. God keeps time punctually in making good His word for good and evil unto creatures. 2. Man's day and God's may meet together for fulfilling God's will revealed. 3. The birthday's celebration is a heathenish practice and invention (ver. 20). 4. Such times worldly powers used to give out favours or frowns, to kill and keep alive. 5. Where God hath spoken of restitution to liberty and honour, there it is done (ver. 21). 6. Where God hath foretold of death and destruction, there it surely comes to pass (ver. 22). 7. Men restored to liberty and prosperity are apt to forget adverse conditions. 8. Carnal men usually prove *unthankful* for and unmindful of good done to them in misery. 9. God useth the forgetfulness of creatures to bring about His gracious end to His saints. 10. Unkindnesses from creatures are but to make His saints learn more patience toward God (ver. 23). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Infamous ingratitude*:—We all reprobate the conduct of the chief butler. His memory will be held in detestation while the world lasts. The Word of God hath recorded his infamy, that other men may be warned to show proper returns of gratitude to their benefactors. We can indeed be under no apprehensions that the Book of God will transmit our character to future ages. The chief butler felt as little fear of that perpetual dishonour to which his memory was to be subjected by a book that should be read to the end of the world. But do we not know that there is another book of God, which contains the records of every individual's life—a book which shall be opened before the assembled world? What confusion will then cover the faces of those who are found to have been insensible to the favours done them, either by their fellow-men or by their Maker! The unthankful and the unholy are kindred characters (2 Tim. iii.). Those who are unthankful to benefactors of their own race are likewise unthankful to their Maker and Preserver. If they were duly sensible of the blessings conferred upon them by God, they would not be ungrateful to those whom He is pleased to employ as the instruments of His benefactions. If all men abhor those who return not good for good, when it is in the power of their hands to do it; if they are justly accounted no better than publicans or heathens, who love only them who love themselves, how black is our ingratitude if we are not penetrated with grateful love to Him, who not only pitied us in our low estate, but wrought redemption for us by a life of sorrow, and by an accursed death? (*G. Lawson, D.D.*)

Ver. 20. The third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday.—*Birthdays*:—I. WE SHOULD MAKE IT A DAY OF THANKSGIVING. The birth of a human soul is a wondrous miracle, and for weal or woe is an event which will be felt through all eternity. Surely, such is a special season of praise. And thanksgiving is mainly united to joy. Pharaoh rejoiced and instituted a feast. We can show our thanksgiving in no better way than in a practical method of doing good to our fellows and dependents, and causing them to rejoice with us. II. WE SHOULD MAKE IT A DAY OF RECTIFICATION. Pharaoh, with his little light, did so. The chief butler had been falsely accused, and the chief baker justly. The one he restored to his proper position, and the other was put to death. We all of us make mistakes, we form many harsh judgments, we misinterpret the feelings and actions of others, we shape our course wrongly. Surely, it is well then to make reparation for the past, and to put our lives on a new footing, and to make this part straight. III. WE SHOULD MAKE IT A TIME FOR HUMILIATION AND PRAYER. It is true that God made us, but what have our lives been worth? What have they been worth to Him? Have we fulfilled the glorious objects for which we are created? And this humiliation should lead to prayer—prayer for Divine guidance and help, prayer for forgiveness and pardon. IV. WE SHOULD MAKE IT A DAY OF REFLECTION AND RESOLUTION. "There is a time to be born," says the wise man, but "There is also a time to die." The one must necessarily remind us of the other. The season is indeed full of solemn thoughts. Can we bless the day we were born, or is it to us only the beginning of a long and terrible curse? (*Homilist.*)

CHAPTER XLI.

VERS. 1-8. Pharaoh dreamed.—*Pharaoh's dream*:—I. THAT APPARENTLY INSIGNIFICANT EVENTS MAY OFTEN GROW INTO AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE WORLD'S HISTORY. II. THAT GOD CHOOSES THE INSTRUMENTS OF REVELATION ACCORDING TO HIS OWN GOOD PLEASURE. III. THAT GOD CAN SUDDENLY ARREST THE ATTENTION OF THOSE WHO ARE THE FARTHEST REMOVED FROM EVERY EARTHLY FEAR. (*T. H. Leale*). *Pharaoh's dream and its interpretation*:—I. THE SUMMONING OF JOSEPH TO INTERPRET PHARAOH'S DREAM. 1. The long waiting of Joseph before he attained his emancipation. 2. The wisdom of this delay in respect of Joseph's circumstances. 3. Pharaoh's prophetic dream. 4. The chief butler's forgetfulness. II. THE INTERPRETATION OF THE DREAM. 1. The graceful way in which Joseph refers all to God. 2. Joseph's calmness, produced by the consciousness of God's presence. 3. Joseph's plan in the interpretation of the dream. It was simply a providential foresight for the future. (*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*) *The dream of Pharaoh*:—1. The dream was formed of elements with which the dreamer was somewhat familiar. 2. The dream was a Divine communication to the mind of a heathen. 3. The dream brought trouble into the heart of a monarch. 4. The dream could only be interpreted by a devout Theist. I. THE REVOLUTIONS OF PROVIDENCE. Alternations mark the earthly history of the human world. 1. They tend to promote our spiritual discipline. 2. They remind us of the activity of God. 3. They tend to inspire us with a sense of our dependence upon Him. 4. This method tends, moreover, to give a meaning to the Bible. 5. This method often prepares the mind to receive the truths of the Bible. II. THE ADVANTAGES OF WISDOM. 1. It invested Joseph with a chastened humility of soul. 2. It enabled Joseph to solve the distressing inquiries of the monarch. 3. It exalted Joseph to supremacy in the kingdom. III. THE DUTY OF RULERS. They should be—1. Philanthropic. 2. Forecasting. 3. Economical. Lessons: 1. How great is the Governor of the world. 2. How worthless the world is without religion. 3. How important to be in fellowship with the great God. (*Homilist*). *An episode in a nation's history*:—Imperfect as human monarchs are, and sometimes corrupt, they are beneficial to society. A government must be very rotten if it is not better than anarchy. Hence, for the most part, God designs to act through kings, and permits them to be His ministers. God has a secret to make known to Egypt, viz., tidings of approaching scarcity; and since Pharaoh is on the throne, the communication shall be made to him. I. A MAN-MADE KING IS, AT THE BEST, IMPOTENT. 1. A dream is enough to terrify him. Yet is not this cowardly? Why should the great Pharaoh be alarmed by a night-vision? Has he not an enormous army at his back? Ah, verily, there is another Power, active, mightier, more august, hedging him on every side! What if this strange Power should be unfriendly! No wonder that Pharaoh's knees tremble. He is like a fly upon the unseen mechanism of the universe. He is but a waif upon the stormy Atlantic. What is this all-surrounding Power? Possibly it may be God! 2. Further, he is a very dependent man. He cannot do without astrologers, magicians, butlers, and bakers. No; it would not do for the king to be independent. The temptation to play the tyrant would be irresistible. He is only one part of the social system, though it may be the most prominent. 3. The king is dependent upon the most obscure in his kingdom. On an imprisoned slave Pharaoh and all Egypt have to depend. Verily nobleness and worth may be found in the lowliest lot! II. THE REAL KING IS AN ALLY OF GOD. 1. Joseph's first utterance was to acknowledge God. In substance he says, "I am powerless; God can meet the case." Here was a great opportunity for ostentation, self-display. His bearing is calm, princely, royal. Of himself he can do nothing; but he has brought the true God into court, and "with God nothing is impossible." 2. This was an act of heroic faith. Joseph stood alone in that awestruck assembly. Magnates, officers, stewards, magicians, all were worshippers of Egypt's countless idols. To disparage the ancient idols, powerful for long ages, were perilous to a young man and a foreigner. III. THE REAL KING IS TRAINED IN ADVERSITY. 1. It is clear that Joseph was master of the situation. Etymologically, the word king means "the man that knows." It was this that made Elijah great and powerful in the face of idolatrous Israel. This gave Daniel sovereign influence in the Chaldean court. This made Luther a monarch among men. "Them that honour Me, I will honour." 2. For this royal position Joseph had been skilfully trained. IV. THE REAL KING IS SUPREME IN EVERY EMERGENCY. Most sailors can steer the ship in

fine weather; it requires a real pilot to steer safely through a storm. Pharaoh might do well enough at the helm of affairs, so long as harvests were copious, and the nation was well fed. But in presence of a night-vision, Pharaoh lost his balance; in presence of a famine, Pharaoh was staggered. (*J. Dickerson Davies, M.A.*) *Kine and corn*.—I. THE VICISSITUDES OF LIFE. Prosperity and adversity succeed each other. Life generally is as variable as an April day. If a man has seven years of uninterrupted happiness, he must not expect that it will continue much longer. The most prosperous men are liable to surprises. Families that have for years been free from sickness or bereavement may suddenly be overshadowed by the angel of death. Hopes may be blighted when they are near fulfilment, and pleasure may be followed by severe and protracted trial. II. THE OVER-RULING PROVIDENCE OF GOD. Whatever may be the opinions held by some, we say unhesitatingly that God has the affairs of all nations and of all men under His immediate control; that He gives or withholds, as seemeth good unto Him, but always in a way consistent with human freedom. And He invites our confidence. III. THE DUTY OF USING THE PRESENT WELL. Although we are not to be over-anxious about the future, we are not to disregard it altogether. We cannot tell what demands may be made upon our resources. We must provide, as far as possible, against sickness and adversity. We must not ignore the claims of others. (*F. J. Austin.*) *A perplexing dream*.—This dream will appear to many but a jumble of incoherent ideas, which no wise man would retain in his memory. What other man ever thought, even in a dream, of kine, or of ears of corn, eating one another? Yet it is certain that this dream came from God, and that it was an intimation of future events, of exceedingly important consequence, both to the Egyptian nation, and to all the neighbouring nations, and even to the church of God. "God's ways are not as our ways," nor ought we to measure His providential administration by our own rules. He discovers His mind in the manner best fitted to serve His purpose. It was not the will of God that Pharaoh should understand his own dream, till it was explained by a heaven-taught interpreter. If the meaning had been so plain, that it could have been explained by the wise men of Egypt, the design for which it was sent to Pharaoh would not have been gained. It was for Joseph's sake, and for the sake of his father's house, that Pharaoh dreamed, and that his dream required such an interpreter as Joseph. There are dreams and visions recorded in many places of the Bible, that appear to our narrow minds as dark as this dream of Pharaoh. God hath His reasons for choosing to deliver many parts of his mind in dark figures, which we would need, as Joseph to interpret. But to allege that any part of Scripture ought to have been plainer than it is, would be daringly presumptuous. Every part of it was dictated to the holy men of God by that wisdom which cannot err. Every censure of the Divine wisdom must be folly and blasphemy. The darkest portion of Scripture was not written in vain. (*G. Lawson, D.D.*) *Importance attached to dreams*.—It cannot be surprising that men in all ages and countries should have attached a great importance to dreams. When the functions of the soul seem fettered, and the images of the mind appear dissolved in floating phantoms, it was thought that the direct interference of the Deity alone could give strength and direction to the relaxed faculties; that if in such a state distinct and clearly circumscribed forms were perceived, they must have a higher tendency; and that their meaning is as mysterious as their origin is supernatural. Eastern nations especially, endowed as they are with a luxurious imagination, and carried away by a love of symbolism, searched the import of dreams with eager and serious anxiety. The Egyptians and Chaldeans were foremost in the cultivation of this branch of knowledge; they developed the explanation of dreams into a complete science; the interpreters of dreams were held in the most distinguished honour; they were regarded as being favoured with the highest order of wisdom, and even with divine inspiration; they surrounded the throne of the king, accompanied the expedition of the general, and often exercised a decisive influence in the most important deliberations. But the Greeks and Romans were not less scrupulous in this respect. That dreams come from Jupiter, is a maxim already pronounced by Homer; but they were considered significant only if occurring in the last third of the night, when dawn is near; persons in distress or difficulties slept in temples, in the hope of obtaining prophetic dreams which might indicate the means of rescue; men afflicted with illness especially resorted to this expedient, in the belief that *Æsculapius* would reveal to them the proper remedies; and Alexander the Great actually fancied he saw, in a dream, the herb which cured the wound of Ptolemy, his friend and relation. But

how deeply the faith in the reality of dreams were rooted among the ancient nations is manifest from the views entertained by the Hebrews on this subject. Dreams grew in importance among the Hebrews in the course of centuries, and after the Babylonian captivity they were classified in a complete system; they were regarded either as auspicious or ominous; harassing or frightful visions were expiated by fasts and prayer; and Philo wrote an elaborate treatise, in two books, to prove that dreams are sent by God. It could not fail, that these decided notions, on a subject so vague and uncertain, caused serious abuses, chiefly from two sides; from weak-minded dreamers, who were often tortured by visionary misfortunes, and from cunning interpreters, who knew how to take advantages of such imbecility; but sometimes, also, from wicked schemers, who made real or pretended dreams the pretext of base and selfish plans; as Flavius Josephus did, when, by treachery and cowardice, he saved his life by passing over into the camp of the enemies. Jesus Sirach, therefore, though acknowledging that some dreams are sent by God, censured severely the folly of attributing weight to all; he impressed upon his readers that many dreams are idle and empty, like the wind and the shadow, a delusion to the fool, and a phantom of deceitful hope; just as Artabanus had, long before, said to king Xerxes: "The visions of dreams are not Divine; they most commonly hover around men respecting things which engaged their thoughts during the day"; although the superstition of his time is reflected in the legend which he narrated, how he yet was forced to acknowledge the awful sanctity of dreams. Nor has the interest in dreams ceased since that time; they have occupied the pen of many a modern psychologist; they have given rise to some of the most beautiful works, replete with profound thought and shrewd observation; and the peculiar mystery which surrounds those remarkable phenomena, too aerial to permit of the rigid analysis of the philosopher or the man of science, will always exercise an excusable charm over the human mind. (*M. M. Kalisch, Ph.D.*)

Vers. 9-13. I do remember my faults this day.—*Pharaoh's butler; or, The power of memory, association, and conscience.* :—I. THE POWER OF MEMORY. "I do remember." Memory, a faculty of mind, wonderful, varies in its strength and exercise, accompanied by pains as well as pleasures. The effect depends upon the state of the soul, and on the character of the things remembered, whether good or evil, painful or pleasant (see Job xxi. 6; Psa. lxxvii. 3, cxxxvii. 1; Ezek. xvi. 61, xx. 43; Eph. ii. 11; Luke xvi. 25; Rev. xiv. 13.) Beware. Do some evil deed, commit some wrong against your neighbour or your God; and, try as you will, you cannot quite forget. Memory may slumber for a while, but will some day awake. II. THE POWER OF ASSOCIATION. "This day." Why then? For two years all had seemingly been forgotten. Now chord of association touched: Pharaoh's dreams. This power is often appealed to in Scripture. Type, symbol, parable, all recognize, and receive much of their value from association. In the special case before us, behold the hand of God. The great designs of Providence are ripe for execution. Hence the butler is roused to action. It needs but a touch of association, and the long-forgotten promise is recalled. Joseph's release immediately follows. III. THE POWER OF CONSCIENCE. "My faults." Mark the power conscience: 1. In exciting a sense of personal blame-worthiness. (1) Infidelity. (2) Ingratitude. 2. In exciting a feeling of painful remorse. (1) Shame. (2) Regret. (3) Atonement. (*Homilist.*) *Faults remembered*:—I. WE ARE ALL CHANGEABLE WITH FAULTS (Eccles. vii. 20; Rom. iii. 12; Psa. xix. 12; cxliii. 2; James iii. 2; 1 John i. 8; Rom. iii. 23). Yet "did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him." It was forgetfulness most inexcusable; it was ingratitude most unkind! But what are our faults? We have offended, not the king of Egypt, but the King of kings, the King of heaven, the Greatest and Best of all beings. We have forgotten, not the son of Jacob, but the Son of God, the Lord of life and glory. II. WE ARE LIABLE TO FORGET OUR FAULTS. 1. The evidence of this. Men have convictions of sin, but they stifle them. 2. The causes of this. (1) Ignorance of the true nature and malignity of sin. (2) Partiality to self, strengthened by the deceitfulness of the heart. (3) The hurry of business. (4) Elevation in worldly circumstances. III. Various circumstances are adapted to REMIND US OF OUR FAULTS. 1. Providential occurrences. Some of these regard ourselves, the affliction of our persons, or our immediate connections. Other providential occurrences regard the condition of those about us: they strike our observation. We witness sometimes the difficulties in which others are involved; we think of what occasioned such difficulties, and are reminded of similar causes

in ourselves, which might have produced similar effects. 2. The ministry of God's Word. IV. When we are reminded of our faults we should be ready to confess them (1 John i. 8, 9). What, then, have we to confess to God? What are the faults which "this day" we remember? We must go to Him with all our faults, with all our follies, and with all the iniquity of our sin. V. Confession of faults should always be attended with REAL AMENDMENT. (*T. Kidd.*) *Pharaoh's butler* :—There are some truths in this verse which I wish you to understand and remember. I shall name and illustrate five of these. I. THE POWER OF INGRATITUDE. Joseph's request to the butler, and the butler's reply. How easily he might have kept his promise! Have you been ungrateful to any one—parents, teachers, Jesus? If so, repent at once. II. THE POWER OF MEMORY. As the bridge spans the river, so the butler's memory went back over two years. He saw Joseph in prison and his broken promise. How kind God has been in giving us such a wonderful faculty! Use it well in connection with pure objects, good books, and godly persons. You will then have always excellent and instructive companions. III. THE POWER OF A SINGLE EVENT. What caused the butler to remember Joseph? The king's dream. How suggestive often are little things! A book, a portrait, a stone, a shoe. IV. THE POWER OF CONSCIENCE. The butler began to think about his faults. V. THE POWER OF INTERCESSION. The butler interceded with the king for Joseph. This led to Joseph's freedom and exaltation. Do not forget this. Act upon it. The good which you may secure for others in this way. (*Homiletic Review.*) *Have you forgotten Him?*—No single power or faculty of man escaped damage at the Fall: while the affections were polluted, the will was made perverse, the judgment was shifted from its proper balance, and the memory lost much of its power and more of its integrity. Our memories, like ourselves, have done the things which they ought not to have done, and have left undone the things which they ought to have done, and there is no health in them. Among other things, it is not always easy to recollect our faults. We have special and particular reasons for not wishing to be too often reminded of them. If, however, the grace of God has entered into a man he will pray that he may remember his faults, and he will ask grace that if he should forget any excellences which he once supposed he had, he may not forget his defects, his sins, his infirmities, and his transgressions, but may have them constantly before him, that he may be humbled by them and led to seek pardon for them and help to overcome them. I. We shall first call your attention to the BUTLER'S FAULTS, for his faults are ours, only ours are on a larger scale: "I do remember my faults this day." His particular fault was that he had forgotten Joseph; that, having promised to remember him when it should be well with him, he had altogether overlooked the circumstances which occurred in the prison, and had been enjoying himself, and leaving his friend to pine in obscurity. 1. Here, then, is the first fault—the butler had forgotten a friend. That is never a thing to be said in a man's praise. We ought to write the deeds of friendship as much as possible in marble; and that man is unworthy of esteem who can readily forget favours received. Ah, I never shall forget when, at the foot of the Cross, I saw the interpretation of all my inward griefs; when I looked up and saw the flowing of my Saviour's precious blood, and had the great riddle all unriddled. My brethren, what a discovery was that when we learned the secret that we were to be saved not by what we were or were to be, but saved by what Christ had done for us! Happy day! we see Jesus as the cluster crushed until the heart's blood flows, and can by faith go in unto the King, with Jesus Christ's own precious blood and offer that, just as the butler stood before Pharaoh with the wine-cup in his hand. I bear a cup filled not with my blood, but His blood: not the blood from me as a cluster of the vine of earth, but the blood of Jesus as a cluster of heaven's own vintage, pouring out its precious floods to make glad the heart of God and man. 2. Here lies our fault: that we have forgotten all this—not forgotten the fact, but forgotten to love Him who gave us that soul-comforting, heart-cheering interpretation. 3. We have not, however, quite done with the case of the butler and Joseph. The request which Joseph made of the butler was a very natural one. He said, "Think of me when it is well with thee." He asked no hard, difficult, exacting favour, but simply, "Think of me, and speak to Pharaoh." What the Saviour asks of us, His servants, is most natural and most simple, and quite as much for our good as it is for His glory. Among other things, He has said to all of you who love Him, "This do in remembrance of Me." 4. I have stated the butler's case, but I shall want to pause a minute or two over this head just to go into the reason of his fault. Why was it that he did not recollect Joseph? There is always a

reason for everything, if we do but try to find out. He must have been swayed by one of the three reasons. (1) Perhaps the butler was naturally ungrateful. We do not know, but that may have been the case: he may have been a person who could receive unbounded favours without a due sense of obligation. I trust that is not our case in the fullest and most unmitigated sense, but I am afraid we must all plead guilty in a measure. (2) Perhaps, however, worldly care choked the memory. The chief butler had a great deal to do: he had many under-servants, and, having to wait in a palace, much care was required. He who serves a despot like the king of Egypt must be very particular in his service. It is very possible that the butler was so busy with his work and his gains, and looking after his fellow-servants and all that, that he forgot poor Joseph. Is it not very possible that this may be the case with us? We forget the Lord Jesus to whom we are bound by such ties, because our business is so large, our family so numerous, our cares so pressing, our bills and bonds so urgent, and even because perhaps our gains are so large. (3) I am half ashamed to have to say one thing more. I am afraid that the butler forgot Joseph out of pride; because he had grown such a great man, and Joseph was in prison. I do not suppose that this operates with many of you, but I have known it with some professed believers. When they were little in Israel, when they first professed to have found peace, oh how they acknowledged Jesus! But they got on in the world and prospered, and then they could not worship among those poor people who were good enough for them once—they now drive to a more fashionable place of worship, where the Lord Jesus is seldom heard of. They feel themselves bound to get into a higher class of society, as they call it, and the poor despised cause of Jesus is beneath them, forgetting, as they foolishly do, that the day will come when Christ's cause shall be uppermost; when the world shall go down and the faithful followers of the Lord Jesus shall be peers and princes even in this world, and reign with Him; He being King of kings and Lord of lords, and they sitting upon His throne and sharing in His royal dignity. I hope none of you have forgotten Christ because of that. II. The second point is this—WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES BROUGHT THE FAULT TO THE BUTLER'S MIND? The same circumstances which surround us this morning 1. First, he met with a person in the same condition as that in which he once was. King Pharaoh had dreamed a dream, and wished for an interpretation. Joseph could interpret; and the butler remembered his fault. Brothers and sisters in Christ, there are those in the world who are in the same state of mind as you were once in. They once loved sin and hated God, and were strangers and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel; but in some of them there has been the mysterious working of the Holy Spirit, and they have dreamed a dream. They are awakened, although not yet enlightened. Salvation is a riddle to them at present, and they want the interpretation. Do you not remember how the gospel was blessed to you? Do you not desire to send it to others? If you cannot preach yourself, will you not help me in my life-work of training others to preach Jesus? 2. The next thing that recalled the butler's thought was this: he saw that many means had been used to interpret Pharaoh's dream, but they had all failed. We read that Pharaoh sent for his wise men, but they could not interpret his dream. You are in a like case. Do not you feel a want, if you cannot go and preach yourselves, to help others to do so? 3. Then, again, if the butler could have known it, he had other motives for remembering Joseph. It was through Joseph that the whole land of Egypt was blessed. Joseph comes out of prison, and interprets the dream which God had given to the head of the state, and that interpretation preserved all Egypt, yea, and all other nations during seven years of dearth. Only Joseph could do it. Oh, brethren, you know that it is only Jesus who is the balm of Gilead, for the wounds of this poor dying world. You know that there is nothing which can bless our land, and all other lands, like the Cross of Jesus Christ. 4. Once more, surely the butler would have remembered Joseph had he known to what an exaltation Joseph would be brought. Think of the splendour which yet will surround our Lord Jesus! He shall come, beloved, He shall come in the chariots of salvation. The day draweth nigh when all things shall be put under Him. Kings shall yield their crowns to His superior sway, and whole sheaves of sceptres, plucked from tyrants' hands, shall be gathered beneath His arm. You by testifying of Him are promoting the extension of His kingdom, and doing the best that in you lies to gather together the scattered who are to be the jewels of His crown. III. In the last place, I have some few things to say by way of COMMENDATION OF THE BUTLER'S REMEMBRANCE. It is a pity he forgot Joseph, but it is a great blessing

that he did not always forget him. It is a sad thing that you and I should have done so little; it is a mercy that there is time left for us to do more. 1. I like the butler's remembrance, first of all, because it was very humbling to him. 2. I commend his remembrance for another thing, namely, that it was so personal. "I do remember my faults this day." What capital memories we have for treasuring up other people's faults, for once let us keep to ourselves. Let the confession begin with the minister. "I do remember my faults this day." 3. The best part of it, perhaps, was the practical nature of the confession. The moment he remembered his fault, he redressed it as far as he could. Now, dear friends, if you recollect your fault to the Lord Jesus, may you have grace not to fall into it again! If you have not spoken for Him, speak to-day. If you have not given to His cause, give now! If you have not devoted yourselves as you ought to have done to the promotion of His kingdom, do it now. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Confession of sin difficult*:—Many years ago, a minister put up for the night with a man who was supposed to possess but little of what people call "common sense." Just as he was about to retire for rest, the man said: "Tell me, sir, what three words in the English language it is the most difficult to pronounce?" "I don't know that I can," was the reply. "Well," said the man, "I'll give you till to-morrow morning to answer me." The minister thought no more of the question till it was proposed to him again in the morning, when he carelessly said he had not thought of it. "Then," said the man, "I will tell you. They are—I am wrong."

Vers. 14-16. Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph.—*Joseph summoned into Pharaoh's presence*:—I. HIS LONG WAITING FOR NOTICE AND DELIVERANCE. The religious mind will see in this the wisdom of God. 1. In regard to the education of character. 2. In its adaptation to the circumstances of the individual. 3. In its elevation above all human infirmities. II. THE MANIFEST HAND OF GOD IN IT. It was wisely ordered that Joseph should be under no obligation to Pharaoh for his deliverance. It is for his own sake that Pharaoh sends for Joseph. The chief butler was suffered to forget his friend, the prophet of his deliverance, and was forced to remember him only by circumstances. To neither of them was Joseph indebted. Thus it was God's design that the chosen family should be under obligations to none. Their calling was to impart blessings to mankind, and not to receive. III. HIS PIETY THROUGHOUT THE INTERVIEW. 1. His simplicity of character. He makes no long speech. He does not use the opportunity to glorify himself, or to plead for liberty and reward. His manner was dignified and respectful, yet marked by great openness and simplicity of character. Joseph is the same in the palace or in the prison. 2. His humility. He indulged in no spirit of boasting, though this compliment from the king would have tempted weaker men to be vain and proud (ver. 15). Joseph never forgot his character as a witness for God. 3. His calmness. He was conscious of God's presence and of his own integrity, so he could afford to be calm before the rulers of this world. 4. His kindly consideration for others. Pharaoh might have reason for the worst fears when he heard of the interpretation of the baker's dream. Though a king he was not exempt from the common evils of human nature; nor from death—the chief calamity. But Joseph hastens to remove all fear of an unfavourable interpretation from his mind, by assuring him that the future had in it nothing but what would make for the peace of Pharaoh. (*T. H. Leale.*) *The turning-point in Joseph's career*:—It is a very difficult thing to let patience have her perfect work. Who has not felt again and again the truth of the proverb, Hope deferred maketh the heart sick? I. This sickness would, no doubt, again and again be felt by Joseph, when his patience was so long and so severely tried. II. Look now at the means by which the deliverance of Joseph was brought about. III. The perplexity of Pharaoh would only be increased by the inability of his wise men to resolve his doubts. IV. Look now at Joseph's introduction to Pharaoh. V. See now what Joseph did, after interpreting Pharaoh's dream. He did not stop there. He suggested the practical use to be made of the Divine revelation which was now granted. (*C. Overton.*) *The prime minister*:—I. OBSERVE JOSEPH'S SUDDEN ELEVATION. 1. The elevation was unanimous. The imprisoned Hebrew had surprised king and statesmen with his high and noble qualities. By subtle methods God moved their hearts, and in a short hour Joseph was raised from prison to the highest pinnacle of power. 2. His main recommendation was spiritual. Pharaoh recognized him at once as a man in whom dwelt the Spirit of God. The power of the Spirit is available for any emergency. 3. He was entrusted with

supreme authority. Such was the high estimate of Joseph, created in all minds, that they felt he was worthy of the largest trust. They could trust him as they trusted the law of gravitation. A Christian will never abuse his power. Now, Joseph's early dreams begin to be realized. II. MARK HIS EXISTENT CHARACTER. 1. It was transparent with honesty. Looking down into the clear waters of an Italian lake at night, you may see every star of heaven faithfully reflected; so, looking into Joseph's character, every grace and virtue of heaven seemed there to shine. His mind was the mirror of an honest purpose. 2. It was a character marked by energy. Indolence, so common among Orientals, found no place in him. Soon as duty was discovered, it was discharged. 3. He was as religious in prosperity as in adversity. This is solid worth; this is rare piety. That tree is well-rooted which can bear the scorching heat of summer, as well as the cold blast of a winter's storm; so that man's soul is well-rooted in God who is as prayerful in a mansion as he was in a prison. When children were born in Joseph's house the God of his fathers was not forgotten. III. CONSIDER HIS SAGACIOUS POLICY. 1. Joseph was a great economist. In His administration God is a great economist, and Joseph followed God. Our spiritual riches should supply the lack in others. 2. Joseph was a man of order. Nothing was left at hap-hazard. In an enterprise so vast order was essential to success. 3. Joseph's policy turned disaster into blessings. In Potiphar's house, and in the State prison, Joseph had been learning daily the kind of administration prevalent in Egypt. His vigorous mind detected its weak points. He saw how easily discontent and sedition might arise; he saw where corruption and misrule crept in. And now he found an opportunity for applying a remedy. As the Prime Minister for Pharaoh, he made the sceptre of the king everywhere more powerful. (*J. Dickerson Davies, M.A.*) *Great changes in life*:—There are great changes in life. Some of our lives amount to a succession of rapid changes; and it takes a man of some moral nerve and stamina to stand the violent alternations of fortune. Some men cannot bear promotion. It is dangerous to send little boats far out into the sea. Some men are clever, sharp, natty, precise, wonderfully well informed, newspaper fed and fattened, and yet, if you were to increase their wages just a pound a week, they would lose their heads. That is a most marvellous thing, and yet nobody ever thought he would lose his head with such an increase of fortune. But it is a simple fact, that some men could not bear to step out of a dungeon into a palace: it would kill them. What helps a man to bear these changes of fortune, whether they be down or up? God—He can give a man gracefulness of mien when he has to walk down, and God can give him enhanced princely dignity when he has to walk up; a right moral condition, a right state of heart, the power of putting a proper valuation upon prisons and palaces, gold and dross. Nothing but such moral rectitude can give a man security amidst all the changes of fortune or position in life. His information will not do it; his genius will not do it. Nothing will do it but a Divine state of heart. It is beautiful to talk to a man who has such a state of heart, when great changes and wonderful surprises come upon him—when Pharaohs send for him in haste. It is always a good and stimulating thing to talk to a great man, a great nature, a man that has some completeness about him. It must be always a very ticklish, delicate, and unpleasant thing to talk to snobs and shams and well-tailored mushrooms; but a noble thing to talk to a noble man, who knows what prison life is, who knows what hardness of life is, and that has some notion of how to behave himself even when the greatest personages require his attendance. Few men could have borne this change. None of us can bear the great changes of life with calmness, fortitude, dignity, except we be rightly established in things that are Divine and everlasting. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 17-32. Behold there come seven years of great plenty.—*Joseph as a prophet*:—In interpreting Pharaoh's dream, Joseph shows himself a true prophet of the Lord. He has all the marks of those who are called to reveal the Divine mind to man. I. BOLDNESS. The true prophet has no fear of man. He speaks the word which God hath given him, regardless of consequences. He is ready to reprove even kings—to utter truths, however unwelcome. It required some courage to enter upon the perilous task of announcing to this Egyptian despot a famine of seven years. But Joseph had all the boldness of a man who felt that he was inspired by God. II. DIRECTNESS. Joseph spoke out at once, without any hesitation. There was no shuffling to gain time; no muttering—no incantations, after the manner of heathen oracles and prophets. This simple and clear directness is

the special characteristic of Holy Scriptures; and by which they are distinguished from the literature of the world, which upon the deepest and most concerning questions never reaches a stable conclusion. III. POSITIVENESS. Joseph's interpretation was throughout explicit and clear. There are no signs of doubt or misgiving. This Divine certainty is the common mark of all God's prophets. (T. H. Leale.)

Vers. 33-36. Let them gather all the food of those good years that come, and lay up corn.—Joseph as the adviser of Pharaoh.—I. HIS PRESENCE OF MIND. Equal to the situation. II. THE KINDNESS AND OPENNESS OF HIS NATURE. III. HIS SELF-COMMAND. IV. HIS PRACTICAL GOOD SENSE. (T. H. Leale.) *Providence for the future*:—1. His wisdom and prudential sagacity in counsel. The interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams was from God. Joseph knew it to be so. He had, therefore, the most assured and unshaken confidence of the correspondence of the coming facts with the Divine pre-intimation; and in this confidence he tenders his advice to the king, in the prospect of what was before him, without hesitation. The word of the God of truth is always sure. The counsel of Joseph was obviously wise and excellent. Like many similar counsels, it commends itself, when suggested, to instant approbation, while yet to many minds it might not at once occur. How very difficult it is, both in public and in private life, to get men to judge and to act with single-eyed simplicity, according to the real merits of measures, when these measures happen not to be their own! If they chance to originate with political opponents—or, in more private life, with those who are not in the number of their friends—how difficult it is to get them treated with fairness! Another important practical lesson is suggested by the counsel of Joseph: the general lesson of providence for the future. This is a duty incumbent on all. It is virtuous prudence; the "prudence which foreseeth the evil and hideth itself." The remark has a special bearing on the labouring classes of the community. This laying up for the time of scarcity bore a close resemblance to the principle of friendly societies and provident or savings banks. There is such perpetual alteration and exchange of conditions, that no man can say with certainty to-day what his own circumstances, or those of any other person, may be to-morrow. 1. There may, surely, be providence, without over-anxiety. 2. But surely there may be providence, without covetousness. 3. The duty of providence, then, must not be an excuse for refusing the claims of benevolence. There may be scriptural providence, without cold-hearted and close-handed selfishness. (R. Wardlaw, M.A.) *Providence and forethought*:—"Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth," says our Lord, "where moth and rust do corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal." But this rule is not intended to prohibit us from providing in the time of plenty for a time of scarcity, as far as it can be done without neglecting the necessary duties of charity and piety, according to our circumstances. The poor ought not to want what their present necessities demand; but a provident care, in public governors, to guard against the mischiefs of famine, is requisite, chiefly for the sake of the lower ranks in society. If the superfluous produce of the earth had been given to the poor in the years of plenty, they must have been starved in the time of famine. No liberality to the poor ever deserved greater praise than Joseph's care to secure needful supplies both to the poor and rich. It was well ordered by the providence of God, for the safety of the people, that the years of famine were preceded by the years of plenty. If the seven years of famine had come before the years of plenty, few men would have been left to enjoy them. But from the years of plenty a sufficiency could be reserved to maintain life with comfort in the years of famine. (G. Lawson, D.D.) *Lessons*:—1. Seek from above wisdom and prudence for the discreet guidance of all your own affairs, and of those of others still more especially, when they are entrusted to your management. "The Lord giveth wisdom." 2. Be thankful for the blessings of plenty and of freedom, in the measure in which providence has, in this favoured land, seen meet to bestow them. 3. The marvellous and lamentable difference between the manner in which mankind in general are affected by what relates to the life of the body and what relates to the life of the soul—to temporal and to eternal interests. Oh, how much in earnest about "the life that now is"—and about the means of its sustenance and prolongation, though it can last at the longest but for a few years, and, even in the midst of the abundance of all that is fitted to support it, may not last a few days. (R. Wardlaw, D.D.) *Storing harvests against famine years*:—Mr. Scarlett Campbell has contributed some information concerning the mastery of famine conditions in Bohemia in the years 1770-71, which may illustrate the plan which

Joseph recommended to the King of Egypt. In those years the Bohemian harvests totally failed, and over a million human beings died of hunger. In order to prevent such a catastrophe in the future, a law was made, obliging every commune to keep a large store of corn, each landowner being obliged to contribute a certain quantity; in times of scarcity he could borrow corn from the public granary, but had to pay it back after the ensuing harvest. This system was kept in force till within a few years ago, but, owing to the introduction of roads and railways, it is no longer necessary. (*Things not Generally Known.*)

Vers. 37-45. Pharaoh said unto his servants: Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?—*Pharaoh and Joseph*.—In examining this narrative we find a most remarkable parallel in the relations of Joseph and Pharaoh to the relations of Christ and the sinner. I. Following this line of thought, then, we notice PHARAOH AS REPRESENTING THE MAN OF THE WORLD DISCOVERING HIS NEED. Not one is there but sees that his resources are sure to vanish at some future day and leave him poverty-stricken and famine-pinched. What were the millions of Vanderbilt as he lay in the agonies of an apoplectic stroke? The day is coming when the man of largest wealth, of greatest intellect, of supremest power, shall be like a great steamer adrift in mid-ocean with its shaft broken, rolling in the trough of the sea and signalling for help. II. Under such circumstances EVERY MAN DESIRES TO PUT HIS RELIANCE IN SOME ONE WHOSE QUALITIES FIT HIM TO GIVE HELP. 1. Joseph was a man in whom was the Spirit of God. Joseph was remarkably free from selfishness: he was not plotting for his own advancement. He was pure, controlled by the Spirit. 2. Joseph was a man who was discreet and wise. 3. Now, to trace our parallel, the qualities which distinguished Joseph are pre-eminently those which make Christ the one above all others to whom men turn for help. His character is beyond reproach. The Spirit of God is in him. He impresses the world with his purity, his unselfishness, his sinlessness, his inspiration. He is manifestly the messenger of God to men. He knows just what to do in the awful emergency in which we are placed. He inspires confidence in his wisdom as never has another. III. Following the parallel, notice THE SUPREME AUTHORITY WHICH PHARAOH GAVE TO JOSEPH. Our relation to Christ is not one of abject dependence; it is not slavish; it is more like that of Pharaoh to Joseph: one of dignity, of co-operation. We yield to Christ because He has a right to be supreme; because He can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. We do not lose our individual wills. We do not yield the dignity of the individual choice. Sometimes children travel by express. They are labelled with a suitable tag; are cared for, fed, and sent along as merchandize would be; have no care, or responsibility, or duty. Not so do we pass on through life to heaven. There are those, indeed, who think that, having been once properly labelled by church membership, they have nothing further to do, but that the church or the clergy will assume all responsibility and guarantee them heaven. But such is not the gospel scheme. With our own clear understanding and deliberate decision, we step on board the gospel train and trust our Conductor. He knows best. He tells us what to do, and we intelligently and gladly do it. IV. Another parallel is found in THE EXALTATION OF JOSEPH. (*A. P. Foster, D.D.*) *Joseph, the wise ruler*.—I. THE QUALITIES DEMANDED IN A WISE RULER. 1. Natural ability. 2. The ability to bear up under troubles. 3. Inspired wisdom. II. THE CHARACTER OF JOSEPH'S ADMINISTRATION. 1. It was characterized by a wise economy. 2. It was characterized by a wise method. Frugality was to be enforced by lawful means. The amount received as taxes and purchased at a fair price, was not to be given away, but must be sold again. The nation must protect itself against the free expenditures of its citizens. The government, notwithstanding its despotism, was made the servant of the people. And Joseph and his officers, scattered over all the empire, outgeneraled all the ignorance of the realm. For this he was as truly inspired as ever was Isaiah. (*D. O. Mears.*) *Pharaoh accepts Joseph's advice*.—In which he shows.—I. HIS WISDOM AND PRUDENCE. 1. In acting upon the best advice he had. 2. In choosing a fit man for the crisis. 3. In removing all social disabilities from this foreigner. New name. Marriage with daughter of priest of Ori. II. HIS PIETY. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Joseph's exaltation*.—I. EXALTED FROM BONDAGE. 1. A true basis of merit (ver. 38; see Numb. xxvii. 18; Dan. iv. 18; Acts vi. 5; xi. 24). 2. A natural fruit of godliness (ver. 39; see John xiv. 26; Acts vi. 3; 1 John ii. 20). 3. A grand field of usefulness (ver. 40; see 2 Sam. xxiii. 3; Psa. cv. 21; Matt. xxv. 21; Acts vii. 10). 1. "Can we find such a one as this?" (1) High qualifications needed; (2) High qualifications found. 2. "God

hath showed thee all this." (1) A Divine teacher; (2) A susceptible pupil; (3) A blessed result. 3. "Only in the throne will I be greater than thou." (1) Extensive jurisdiction allotted; (2) Supreme jurisdiction reserved. (a) Joseph's sway; (b) Pharaoh's reservation. II. INVESTED WITH AUTHORITY. 1. The royal ring (ver. 42; see Esther iii. 10; viii. 2; Luke xv. 22). 2. The royal robe (ver. 42; see 1 Chron. xv. 27; Esther viii. 15; Ezek. xvi. 10; Rev. xix. 14). 3. The royal rulo (ver. 44). 1. "Ring, . . . vestures, . . . chain, . . . chariot." (1) Symbols of royalty; (2) Symbols of honour; (3) Symbols of authority. 2. "He set him over all the land of Egypt." (1) To rule it; (2) To save it.—(a) To gather in its plenty; (b) To support it in its poverty. 3. "I am Pharaoh." (1) Sovereignty recognized; (2) Sovereignty asserted; 3. Sovereignty delegated. III. RULING WITH WISDOM. 1. Planning the work (ver. 45). 2. Gathering the food (ver. 48). 3. Providing for emergency. (*American Sunday School Times*.) *From prison to palace*:—I. Joseph's elevation is a concrete instance of the great doctrine of Providence which runs through the whole Old Testament. We may almost take this history as a type of the ideal history of the good man as set forth there, and as a shadowy anticipation, therefore, at once of the fortunes of Israel as a nation, and of his course who is the realized ideal of the Old Testament righteous man, and of Israel. A late psalm (Psa. 105) gives the key-note when it says "Until the time that his word came: the word of the Lord tried him." No man's freedom is interfered with, and yet all is carried out according to the plan in the mind of the great Architect. Thus God builds in silence, using even sins and follies. "I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me." Not less clearly do we learn the uses of adversity, and see the law working which leads men into the pit, that they may there learn lessons which shall serve them on the heights, and that their lives may be manifestly ordered by God. The steel out of which God forges His polished shafts has to be

"Heated hot with hopes and fears,
And plunged in baths of bissing tears,
And battered with the shocks of doom,"

before it is ready for His service. So, in the apparent remoteness and real presence of God's guiding hand in the moulding of the separate deeds into a whole, in the leading of His servant through suffering to authority, and making the sorrow, like emery-paper, the occasion of bringing out a finer polish, this history embodies God's law of dealing with men. II. This history points the lesson THAT THE BEST WAY TO BE FIT FOR, AND SO TO GET INTO, A WIDER SPHERE, IS TO FILL A NARROWER AS WELL AS WE CAN. Joseph served his apprenticeship to governing a nation in governing Potiphar's house and the prison. The capacities tested and strengthened on the lower level are promoted to the higher. With many exceptions, no doubt, where pretenders are taken to be adepts, and modest merit is overlooked, still, on the whole, this is the law by which position and influence are allotted. The tools do, on the average, come to the hand that can use them. III. We may learn, too, THAT THE MEANING OF ELEVATION IS SERVICE. Foolish ambition looks up and covets the outside trappings; a true man thinks of duty, not of show, and finds that every crown is a crown of thorns, and that place and influence only mean heavy responsibility and endless work, mostly repaid with thanklessness. IV. This story teaches us, too, THE PLACE OF RELIGION IN COMMON LIFE. It is possible to keep unbroken communion with God amid the roar of the busy street, as in the inmost corner of his secret place. The communion which expresses itself in the continual reference of all common actions to his will, and is fed by constant realizing of his help; and by lowly dependence on him for strength to do the prosaic tasks of business or statesmanship, is as real as that which gazes in absorbed contemplation on his beauty. True, the former will never be realized unless there is much of the latter. Joseph would not have been able to hold by God, when he was busy in the storehouses, if he had not held much intercourse with him in the blessed quiet of the prison. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Joseph's promotion in Egypt*:—I. IT WAS UNEXPECTED II. A PROMOTION WHICH DID NOT DESTROY THE MAN. III. A PROMOTION FOR WHICH HE HAD BEEN TRAINED. IV. A PROMOTION HIGHLY BENEFICIAL TO OTHERS. (*Homilist*.) *Joseph, the wise ruler*:—I. JOSEPH'S UNEXPECTED PROMOTION. II. JOSEPH'S WISE ADMINISTRATION. 1. The trust now committed to Joseph was vast in its responsibility. 2. The manner in which he met the responsibility, and performed his official duty, proves him to have been as well qualified in mental ability as he was in moral character. (1) He gave personal attention to his duty. (2) He wisely

prepared, during the years of plenty, for the years of want. III. JOSEPH'S RECOGNITION OF GOD IN HIS HOME-LIFE. Seen in names of sons. LESSONS: 1. If children of God, we should learn from Joseph's promotion not to be discouraged under any circumstances. 2. The personal attention of Joseph to his onerous and important duty, and his wisdom in organising his work, contain very wholesome and timely lessons for the young men of to-day. 3. Joseph's recognition of God in his home, in the very flush of abundant prosperity and honour, not only reveals the beautiful symmetry of his character, but proves that neither positions of honour, nor the accumulation of wealth, need dim the light of piety or interrupt our relations with God. (*D. C. Hughes, M.A.*) *Pharaoh's prime minister*:—I. PHARAOH'S DREAMS. II. JOSEPH'S ADVICE. 1. He informs Pharaoh that the dreams were (1) A warning; (2) A benevolent warning. 2. He advises the king (1) to choose a discreet man to undertake the special management of the measures which must be taken in view of the threatened period of "scarcity"; (2) To make provision for one-fifth part of the land to be "taken up" (*i.e.*, handed over to the king for "governmental" use); (3) To store up the produce of the plentiful years that it might be in readiness for the coming time of dearth. III. JOSEPH'S ELEVATION. LESSONS: 1. Patience of hope. 2. Assurance of hope. We may always—we should always—look forward confidently to the fulfilment of God's promises which "exceed all that we can desire." (*W. S. Smith, B.D.*) *Joseph's exaltation*:—I. THE FORGOTTEN PRISONER. Forgotten by man, but remembered by God. While the butler was forgetting, God was thinking about Joseph, and so ordering events that even the forgetful butler should be presently of use. II. THE TROUBLED MONARCH. Even king's have their troubles. It is often true that uneasy lies the head that wears the crown. Joseph in prison, and Damiel in the lion's den, more to be envied than Pharaoh and Darius. Pharaoh's visions. Both different in machinery, but evidently the same in meaning. The great magicians, &c., summoned. Their wisdom is perfect folly. They knew not the mind of God. Could not explain visions that came from a Deity they did not serve. III. THE EXALTED CAPTIVE. Joseph's advice sounds wise and prudent in the ears of Pharaoh. Learn: 1. To remember those who have benefited us. 2. Jesus the great deliverer of the prisoner. 3. Let us prepare to enter the presence of the great King. 4. There is a palace in heaven for all who love, serve, and trust God. (*J. C. Gray.*) *Governor of Egypt*:—The position given to Joseph in the Egyptian Empire was one seldom attained by foreigners, however distinguished. Still, an old papyrus relating to the story of Saneha tells of a similar exception. Joseph, as first officer under the king, was "Tate," chief of the entire administration. It is probable that he bore the title so often found on the Egyptian monuments, where the rank claimed by this dignitary is "the leader of the Lords of South and North; the second after the king in the vestibule of the palace." The position of tate was usually bestowed on a chief priest, hereditary prince, or even on one of the sons of the reigning monarch, and was eagerly sought after as long as it existed. The duties and powers of the office varied during different dynasties. In the so-called Old Empire (beginning about 2800 B.C.), as well as the Middle Empire (beginning about 2100 B.C.), and during the New Empire (beginning about 1530 B.C.), the tate—or governor, as we may call him—was also at the head of the department of justice, holding the office of supreme judge. Imitating their sublime pattern, Thot, the god of wisdom, who was believed to be the governor under the sun-god Ra, as they were under the Pharaoh, these earthly lords ruled "with wisdom and mild heart." "They gave laws, promoted subordinates, set up boundary stones, and settled the disputes of their officers. . . . They made all people walk in their light, satisfied the whole land, proved themselves men of probity in both countries, and witnesses as true as the god Thot." Indeed, the respect felt for these governors and supreme judges of the Pharaoh's was so great that the blessing, "life, health, and happiness," usually uttered by the Egyptians in connection with the royal and princely names, was often added to the name of the governor. No one was allowed to address the governor directly, but was permitted to speak or to lay a letter before him. During the middle Empire, the unity of the state was weakened, and a number of smaller states were organized under the control of independent monarchs. "The governor under the god Horus" took this opportunity to extend his authority, and frequently held what formally had but occasionally been allowed, the office of lord-high treasurer, and sometimes in addition, what became the rule under the New Empire, the office of commander of the royal chief town. As treasurer, the governor was often described on the monuments as "principal of the silver magazine," or "chief

of the corn-houses"—titles which describe two most important positions. From what we can learn from the record in Genesis, we may believe that Joseph united in himself the three offices of governor, supreme judge, and the lord-high treasurer. Soon after his investiture, Joseph rode publicly in the second royal chariot (Gen. xli. 43), that the people might see him and show their respect. He doubtless wore all the insignia of his high position: rich garments, the golden chain, ring, and sceptre, and ostrich feather, so frequently represented on the monuments. How such a pageant appeared as that in which he was now the central figure, is well illustrated by an old Egyptian picture in the tomb of Mry-Ra at Tell el Amarna. This picture represents Kiug Chueneten paying a visit to his god Ra. His majesty reclines in an elegant chariot drawn by richly comparisoned horses. Two heralds run before him swinging wands, to make a way through the curious crowds which press on to see the monarch. To the right and left, servants can be seen, scarcely able to keep up with the fiery stallions. The royal personage himself is attended on each side by his body-guard, with their standards, behind whom, in carriages, ride high officials, in richly coloured dresses. Directly behind the king's chariot rides the queen, and after her the little princesses, two together in one chariot. The elder governs the horses, which are decked with beautiful tufts of feathers, while the younger clings lovingly to her sister. Six court chariots filled with ladies, and as many more on each side occupied by chamberlains, close the procession. On the right and left of the entire party, servants swing their staffs. (*Prof. Hilprecht.*)

The secret of Joseph's elevation:—The way of preferment is never permanently closed against any man. If one does not—as the phrase is—get on in life, it is not his circumstances but himself that is to blame. Occasionally, indeed, there may come reverses of fortune for which he cannot be held responsible, but the man who is always out at elbows and unfortunate must have something amiss in himself. Either he has not fitted himself to take advantage of his opportunities, or there is a leak somewhere in his character, through which his energies and abilities are drained off into useless or expensive directions. In the England of to-day, and especially in these United States, no man needs be for ever a hewer of wood or a drawer of water; and though sudden elevations like this of Joseph are not common in these days, yet there are men continually appearing among us who have come up from an obscurity as great of Joseph's to a position just as exalted as that which he ultimately reached. Both of our martyr-presidents may be referred to as cases in point. Let young men, therefore, be encouraged. Do not sink into despair; do not imagine that the world is in league against you; but "learn to labour and to wait." Two things especially you ought to bear in mind: first, that the true way to rise to a higher position is to fill well the lower which you already occupy. To borrow here from Thomas Binney: "Remember that to do as well as ever you can what happens to be the only thing within your power to do, is the best and surest preparation for higher service. Should things go against you, never give way to debilitating depression, but be hopeful, brave, courageous, careful not to waste in vain and unavailing regret the power you will need for endurance and endeavour. Learn well your business, whatever it be; make the best of every opportunity for acquiring any sort of knowledge that may enlarge your acquaintance with the business in general, and enable you to take advantage of any offer or opening that may come." Then, again, take note that piety is no hindrance to the right sort of success. Joseph did not hide his allegiance to God or his faith in God, and these even commended him to Pharaoh. So there are many heads of great establishments or corporations in the world who, though they care nothing for religion themselves, would prefer that their trusted servants should be godly men. Sometimes, no doubt, inflexible adherence to the right and the true may cost a man his place, even as here resistance to temptation sent Joseph for awhile to prison; but in the end I do not think that any man ever lost by his religion, provided his religion was the real thing, and not a make-believe. It may lengthen the road a little; it may add to the difficulties of the journey; it may take him through some very dark passages, but it will lead him generally at last to honour and influence; for "godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come." But there is a success higher and better than that of outward position and wealth, and even when riches are not gained that is always attainable. You cannot all become millionaires, or merchant princes, or political leaders, or governors of states, or presidents of the Republic—that is an impossibility; but you can all be good and noble men, if you will. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

Joseph's qualification for ruling:—Joseph was inspired in the highest and

truest sense. Not only was he spiritually gifted to rule the nation, but he had also that higher gift which enabled him to refer the lower gift to God. Now there are three things required to fit a man to rule : intellectual power, a sense of dependence upon God, and unselfishness. All these were combined in Joseph ; we are told that there " was none so discreet and wise as he." In the interpretation that he gave to Pharaoh's dreams we see how he referred all to God ; his unselfishness we see in his forgiveness of his brethren. Without these qualities there can be no real rule ; for it is these which make up saintliness, and saintliness alone fits a man to rule perfectly. But saintliness in the sense we use it must take in intellectual power. For mere spiritual goodness alone does not make a good ruler. Eli was a good man, he had the two latter qualities which go to make up a ruler ; but he was wanting in the first, he was a weak man, and this it was which caused such troubles to his country. But it is a mistake still greater to suppose that intellectual power alone qualifies for rule. There must also be moral goodness and unselfishness. These are the qualities which clarify the intellect and purify the character. (*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*) *High endowments qualify for respect* :—Does any man appear plainly to have the Spirit of God enlightening his mind and sanctifying his heart ? He is entitled to our warm regard as a member of that body of which Christ is the Head. Is a man furnished by the Spirit of God with endowments that eminently qualify him for service to his fellow-men, whether in the Church or State ? He is entitled to a degree of respect proportioned to the gifts which he hath received. Office-bearers in the Church are to be chosen out of those whom the Spirit of God hath qualified for public usefulness. No man is called to fill any office in the house of God for which he is not fitted by the Divine Spirit. And none are fit to serve their generation by public offices in the state, unless the Spirit of God has adorned them with endowments suited to the stations which they are called to occupy. Although Cyrus was a heathen, he received from the Spirit of God those extraordinary qualifications by which he was enabled to accomplish the subversion of Babylon, that he might let go God's captives and build His temple. That great prince was the Lord's anointed at a time when he did not know the Lord (*Isa. xlv. 1, 5*). " Can we find such a man as this, a man in whom the Spirit of God is ? " What had Joseph that he had not received ? There was none like him in the land, because the Spirit of God had communicated to him an uncommon measure of wisdom. (*G. Lawson, D.D.*) *Ability discovered* :—In 1831 there was a musical society in Milan which was preparing to bring out Haydn's " Creation," when all of a sudden the *maestro* in charge took fright at the difficulty of his task, and laid down his bâton. One Massini, a singing teacher, who was to direct the choral part, said to the committee, " I know but one man here who can help us out of our plight." " Who is he ? " said Count Borromeo, the president. " His name is Verdi, and he reads the most puzzling scores at sight," was Massini's answer. " Well," said the count, " send for him." Massini obeyed, and Verdi soon made his appearance. He was handed the score of " The Creation," and he undertook to direct the performance. Rehearsals commenced, and the final rendering of the oratorio was set down as most creditable to all concerned. From that time Verdi's reputation was assured. (*One Thousand New Illustrations.*) *Leaders of men* :—The greatest part of men live by faith in powerful men. A small number of individuals lead the human race. (*Vinet.*) *Egyptian fine linen* :—It is generally supposed that the " fine linen " of Scripture must have been very coarse in comparison with that now produced from our looms. There is, however, no sufficient ground for such a supposition. Sir Gardener Wilkinson says : " The fine texture of the Egyptian linen is fully proved by its transparency, as represented in the paintings (where the lines of the body are often seen through the drapery), and by the statements of ancient writers, sacred as well as profane ; and by the wonderful texture of a piece found near Memphis, part of which is in my possession. In general quality it is equal to the finest now made ; and, for the evenness of the threads, without knot or break, it is far superior to any modern manufacture. It has in the inch 540 threads, or 270 double threads in the warp, and 110 in the woof. Pliny mentions four kinds of linen particularly noted in Egypt—the Tanitic, the Pelusiac, the Butiric, and the Tentyritic ; and the same fineness of texture was extended to the nets of Egypt, which were so delicate that they could pass through a man's ring, and a single person could carry a sufficient number of them to surround a whole wood. (*Things Not Generally Known.*)

Ver. 45. Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-paaneah. — Joseph's new

name.—Besides other marks of honour, Joseph received a new name from the king—analagous to those which Daniel and his friends received, in a later age, from Nebuchadnezzar, and having some special appropriateness to the work which he was to perform. Different explanations have been given of its meaning. Some, like those who drew up the marginal readings of our Bible, understand by it “a revealer of secrets,” but others, viewing the term as really an Egyptian word in Hebrew letters, have put it back again into its Egyptian form, getting, according to Brugsch, the meaning, “the governor of the abode of him who lives”; or, according to Canon Cooke, whose dissertation in the “Speaker’s Commentary” on the Egyptian words in the Pentateuch is of very great value, “the food of life,” or “the food of the living.” I am, of course, incompetent to judge between these scholars, but I wish you to note, as a mark of the age of this history, that we have here imbedded in the Hebrew text Egyptian words in Hebrew letters, to which, in this late day, our Egyptologists, who have learned the language from the inscriptions on the monuments, are able to give very definite and intelligible translations—a fact which scarcely comports with the notion now so popular with some, that this book is only a production of a very late date, composed, perhaps, eight hundred years after the events. But similar conformation of the age of this record may be found in the description of Joseph’s investiture with office as compared with the representation of such ceremonies found upon the monuments. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Joseph’s adoption of Egyptian manners*.—A question may arise in reference to the complete adoption by Joseph of Egyptian manners. His name is changed. According to the high authority of Brugsch, his new name means “governor of the district of the dwelling-place of the living one,” and thus includes as one of its elements the name of an Egyptian god, Ankh, worshipped at Pithom. Other Egyptian scholars, however, render it “storehouse of the house of life.” But, in any case, the Egyptian name implies a complete identification with Egypt. His marriage to the daughter of a priest may not have involved adoption into the sacerdotal caste, nor participation in idolatrous worship, but is another mark, at least, of naturalization. It is difficult to recognize a son of Abraham in Pharaoh’s minister; and his action sounds unpleasantly like that of the unworthy Englishmen whom one hears of in the Turkish service, with “pasha” at their names. But we may easily exaggerate the extent of Joseph’s assimilation, and overrate the sharpness of the separation between that generation of the sons of the promise and the rest of the world. The Pharaoh with whom Joseph had to do was not a full-blooded Egyptian; and his predecessors, at all events, were not orthodox worshippers, according to Egyptian standards. He appears in verse 38 as recognizing one God; and we know that, in the opinion of competent authorities, the religion of Egypt had a monotheistic basis beneath all “the wood, hay, stubble” of legend and animal worship. Possibly we may see in this Hyksos king another instance, like those of Abimelech of Gerar and Melchizedek of Salem, which widens our conceptions of the extent of the early faith in one supreme God, and surprises with twinkling light where we had thought darkness reigned; but, whether this be so or no, Joseph did not give up his religion because he became an Egyptian in name, and married an Egyptian wife. The old faith in the Divine promise to his fathers lived on in his heart, and flamed out at last when he “gave commandment concerning his bones.” So he teaches us the lesson of willing co-operation, so far as may be, in the charities and duties of life, with those who do not share our faith, and shows us that the firmer our hold of the truth and promise of God, the more safe and obligatory is it to become “all things to all men,” that we may by all means help and “save some.” No doubt that principle is often abused, and made an excuse for unhallowed mingling with the world; but it is a true principle for all that; and as long as Christian people seek to assimilate themselves to others, and to establish friendly relations for unselfish ends, and not from cowardice or a sneaking wish to be of the world, after all no harm will come of it. “Ye are the salt of the earth.” Salt must be rubbed into the substance which it is to preserve from putrefaction. So Christian men are to go among those whom they would save; and remember that a greater than Joseph was called “a Friend of publicans and sinners.” (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Vers. 46-52. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt.—*Joseph advanced to power*.—I. THE RIPENESS OF HIS AGE AND EXPERIENCE. Providence, which prepares events, also prepares men for them. II. THE PRACTICAL CHARACTER OF HIS MIND. Not puffed up by

pride. At once betakes himself to business. III. THE CHEERFUL AND HOPEFUL CHARACTER OF HIS PIETY (vers. 51, 52). 1. He desires to forget all that is evil in the past. 2. He is thankful for present mercies. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Outgoing:*—1. "Joseph went out over the land of Egypt." (1) The man; (2) The land; (3) The outgoing. Went out—(a) To survey the field; (b) To organize the work; (c) To initiate his gatherings. 2. "The earth brought forth by handfuls." (1) To fulfil Joseph's interpretation; (2) To fill Joseph's granaries; (3) To feed Joseph's dependants. (4) To honour Joseph's God. 3. "Laid up the food in the cities." (1) Food abundant; (2) Food gathered; (3) Food garnered; (4) Food convenient. (*American Sunday School Times.*) *Joseph's stewardship in Egypt:*—I. THAT HE WAS CONSCIOUS OF THE GREAT RESPONSIBILITY RESTING UPON HIM. This is indicated to us—1. In his superintending the work personally. 2. In his sparing no trouble in the execution of the work. 3. In the regard he paid to justice. II. THAT HE MANIFESTED GREAT WISDOM IN THE EXECUTION OF THE WORK. 1. Inasmuch as he commenced it without delay. 2. Inasmuch as he persevered to the end. 3. Inasmuch as his arrangements answered the best purpose. III. THE SUCCESSFUL ISSUE OF THE UNDERTAKING. 1. It conferred incalculable benefits on his fellow-creatures. 2. He gained the approbation of the king. (*J. Jones.*) *The in-gathering:*—What a busy scene must the valley of the Nile have presented at the time of harvest! Multitudes would be engaged, in the very first year of plenty, under Joseph's direction, in gathering in the abundant crops, and in storing such of the produce of the country as was not required for immediate consumption. The process of cutting the corn, and depositing it in granaries, is exhibited on the monuments. "Wheat," says Wilkinson, "was cut in five, barley in four months. The wheat, as at the present day, was bearded, and the same varieties, doubtless, existed in ancient as in modern times; among which may be mentioned the seven-eared quality mentioned in Pharaoh's dream. It was cropped a little below the ear with a toothed sickle, and carried to the threshing floor in wicker baskets upon asses, or in rope nets, the gleaners following to collect the fallen ears in hand baskets." It was threshed out by oxen, the peasants who superintended them relieving their toil by singing songs, one of which Champollion found in a tomb at Eilethya, written in hieroglyphics, to the following effect:

"Thresh for yourselves,
Thresh for yourselves;
O oxen, thresh for yourselves,
O oxen, thresh for yourselves;
Measure for yourselves,
Measure for your masters."

The granaries are likewise frequently represented on the monuments. They appear to have been public buildings, usually of vast extent, and divided into vaults, some of which had arched roofs. Immediately at the entrance was a room in which the corn was deposited when brought from the threshing floor. A flight of steps led to the vault, whither it was carried, in baskets, on men's shoulders. (*Thornley Smith.*)

VERS. 51, 52. **Manasseh: for God, said he, hath made me forget.**—*Memorial names:*—I. GOD'S KINDNESS TO JOSEPH. 1. A blessed oblivion. 2. A rich fruitfulness (ver. 52). II. JOSEPH'S GRATEFUL MEMORIAL OF GOD'S KINDNESS. (*J. Willcox.*) *The names of Joseph's children:*—His attitude towards God and his own family was disclosed in the names which he gave to his children. In giving names which had a meaning at all, and not merely a taking sound, he showed that he understood, as well he might, that every human life has a significance and expresses some principle or fact. And in giving names which recorded his acknowledgment of God's goodness, he showed that prosperity had as little influence as adversity to move him from His allegiance to the God of his fathers. His first son he called Manasseh. "Making to forget," "for God," said he, "hath made me forget all my toil and all my father's house"—not as if he were now so abundantly satisfied in Egypt that the thought of his father's house was blotted from his mind, but only that in this child the keen longings he had felt for kindred and home were somewhat alleviated. He again found an object for his strong family affection. The void in his heart he had so long felt was filled by the little babe. A new home was begun around him. But this new affection would not weaken, though it would alter the character of,

his love for his father and brethren. The birth of this child would really be a new tie to the land from which he had been stolen. For, however ready men are to spend their own life in foreign service, you see them wishing that their children should spend their days among the scenes with which their own childhood was familiar. In the naming of his second son Ephraim he recognizes that God had made him fruitful in the most unlikely way. He does not leave it to us to interpret his life, but records what he himself saw in it. It has been said: "To get at the truth of any history is good; but a man's own history—when he reads that truly, . . . and knows what he is about and has been about, it is a Bible to him." And now that Joseph, from the height he had reached, could look back on the way by which he had been led to it, he cordially approved of all that God had done. There was no resentment, no murmuring. He would often find himself looking back and thinking, Had I found my brothers where I thought they were, had the pit not been on the caravan-road, had the merchants not come up so opportunely, had I not been sold at all or to some other master, had I not been imprisoned, or had I been put in another ward—had any one of the many slender links in the chain of my career been absent, how different might my present state have been. How plainly I now see that all those sad mishaps that crushed my hopes and tortured my spirit were steps in the only conceivable path to my present position. Many a man has added his signature to this acknowledgment of Joseph's, and confessed a Providence guiding his life and working out good for him through injuries and sorrows, as well as through honours, marriages, births. As in the heat of summer it is difficult to recall the sensation of winter's bitter cold, so the fruitless and barren periods of a man's life are sometimes quite obliterated from his memory. God has it in His power to raise a man higher above the level of ordinary happiness than ever he has sunk below it; and as winter and springtime, when the seed is sown, are stormy and bleak and gusty, so in human life seed-time is not bright as summer nor cheerful as autumn; and yet it is then, when all the earth lies bare and will yield us nothing, that the precious seed is sown; and when we confidently commit our labour or patience of to-day to God, the land of our affliction, now bare and desolate, will certainly wave for us, as it has waved for others, with rich produce whitened to the harvest. There is no doubt, then, that Joseph had learned to recognize the providence of God as a most important factor in his life. And the man who does so gains for his character all the strength and resolution that come with a capacity for waiting. He saw most legibly written on his own life that God is never in a hurry. And for the resolute adherence to his seven years' policy such a belief was most necessary. (*M. Dods, D.D.*) *Joseph's recognition of God in all things*.—We too commonly look no farther than the instruments employed by Providence in conferring upon us the benefits which we enjoy, or in inflicting the evils we suffer. But Joseph saw that all his adversities and all his prosperity came from God. He was grateful to Pharaoh, but he was grateful chiefly to God, for the happy change in his condition. "God hath made me to forget all my toil, and all my father's house." It was God that brought him into Egypt. It was by Divine permission that he was for many years confined within the walls of a prison. It was God that brought him out of it, and advanced him to the dignity and power which he now possessed. All things are of God. If we do not refer the happy changes in our condition to His good providence, we lose the benefit and pleasure of them, and cannot be sensible to the duties which our Benefactor requires to testify our gratitude. (*G. Lawson, D.D.*) *Misery banished*.—Joseph called his first-born son Manasseh, because God had made him to forget all his toil. He did not mean that the remembrance of his toil was obliterated from his mind. His mention of it when he gave a name to his son was a proof that in one sense he still remembered it. It was his duty to remember it. How could he have retained just impressions of the Divine goodness if he had forgotten the evils from which he was delivered! If we must forget none of God's benefits, we must forget none of those evils from which we have been relieved by His gracious providence. But Joseph, in another sense, forgot his misery. He remembered it as waters that pass away, and leave no trace behind. There is a bitter remembrance of our affliction and misery, and of the wormwood and the gall of our affliction. This is banished by Divine providence when it saves us from all distresses; but it gives place to pleasant remembrance of them, in a contrast to that happiness by which they are succeeded. (*Ibid.*) *Joseph's faithfulness*.—He had formerly been like the heath in the desert, but now he was like a tree planted by the rivers of water, which brings forth abundance of fruit, and whose leaf does

not wither. This happy change he ascribes to the Divine goodness. When changes and war are against us, we must be dumb, not opening our mouth, for it is God that does it. When changes are in our favour, our mouths ought to be opened to the praises of Him who turns the shadow of death into the morning, and makes the desert to rejoice and blossom as the rose. Joseph was fruitful in comfort, in good works, in children. He had, indeed, at this time only two children, but might expect that a troop was coming; and although that hope was uncertain, he was thankful for what God had already given him. Perhaps it was by a Divine suggestion that the name Ephraim was given to Joseph's second son, rather than his first. Joseph, as far as we know, had no more children of his own body: but he was fruitful in his remote progeny, especially by Ephraim. "Joseph was a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall." Manasseh was great, but truly Ephraim was greater than he; for the horns of Joseph were like the horns of an unicorn, and they were the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they were the thousands of Manasseh. Where was it that Joseph became fruitful? Not in the land of his nativity, but in the land of his affliction. And all his afflictions wrought together under the all-wise providence of God to bring about his exaltation. (*Ibid.*) *Significance of the names Joseph gave his children*:—Two sons were born to Joseph during the seven years of plenty. Manasseh: God made him forget his toil and his father's house. Neither absolutely. He remembered his toils in the very utterance of this sentence. And he tenderly and intensely remembered his father's house. But he is grateful to God, who builds him a home, with all its soothing joys, even in the land of his exile. His heart again responds to long untasted joys. "Fruitful in the land of my affliction." It is still, we perceive, the land of his affliction. By why does no message go from Joseph to his mourning father? For many reasons. First, he does not know the state of things at home. Secondly, he may not wish to open up the dark and bloody treachery of his brothers to his aged parent. But, thirdly, he bears in mind those early dreams of his childhood. All his subsequent experience has confirmed him in the belief that they will one day be fulfilled. But that fulfilment implies the submission, not only of his brothers, but of his father. This is too delicate a matter for him to interfere in. He will leave it entirely to the all-wise providence of his God to bring about that strange issue. Joseph, therefore, is true to his life-long character. He leaves all in the hand of God, and awaits in anxious, but silent hope the days when he will see his father and his brethren. (*Prof. J. G. Murphy.*) *Use of troubles*:—"When in Amsterdam, Holland, last summer," says a traveller, "I was much interested in a visit we made to a place then famous for polishing diamonds. We saw the men engaged in the work. When a diamond is found it is rough and dark like a common pebble. It takes a long time to polish it, and it is very hard work. It is held by means of a piece of metal close to the surface of a large wheel, which is kept going round. Fine diamond dust is put on this wheel, nothing else being hard enough to polish the diamond. And this work is kept on for months and sometimes several years before it is finished. And if a diamond is intended for a king, then the greater time and trouble are spent upon it." Jesus calls His people His jewels. To fit them for beautifying His crown, they must be polished like diamonds, and He makes use of the troubles He sends to polish His jewels. (*Old Testament Anecdotes.*)

Vers. 53-57. Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold unto the Egyptians.—The seven years of famine:—I. JOSEPH'S ADMINISTRATION. 1. It showed great prudence and skill. 2. It showed a spirit of dependence upon God. 3. It was the exhibition of a character worthy of the highest confidence. II. Lessons: 1. How quickly adversity awaits upon prosperity. 2. What an advantage to have a true and powerful friend in the day of calamity. 3. God often brings about His purposes of love and mercy by affliction. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Joseph opening the storehouses*:—I. JOSEPH OPENED THE STOREHOUSES BY ROYAL AUTHORITY. 1. The king was only to be approached through Joseph (ver. 55). So with Jesus (John xiv. 6). 2. The king commanded that Joseph should be obeyed (ver. 55; see John v. 23). 3. In all the land no other could open a storehouse save Joseph (see John iii. 35). II. JOSEPH WAS A FIT PERSON TO BE THUS AUTHORIZED TO OPEN THE STOREHOUSES. 1. He planned the storehouses, and was justly appointed to control them (vers. 33-36, 38). 2. He carried out the storage, and so proved himself practical as well as inventive (ver. 49). 3. He did it on a noble scale (ver. 49). 4. He had wisdom to distribute well (see Col. i. 9; John i. 16). III. JOSEPH ACTUALLY OPENED THE

STOREHOUSES. 1. For this purpose he filled them. Grace is meant to be used. 2. To have kept them closed would have been no gain to him. 3. He opened them at a fit time (vers. 55, 56). 4. He kept them open while the famine lasted. IV. JOSEPH OPENED THE STOREHOUSE TO ALL COMERS. Yet Joseph did but sell, while Jesus gives without money. V. JOSEPH ACQUIRED POSSESSION OF ALL EGYPT FOR THE KING. Full submission and consecration are the grand result of infinite love. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Lessons*:—1. Providence puts an end to plenty at His will, however sensual men think not of it. 2. The fruitfulest land becometh barren if God speak the word; even Egypt. 3. Periods of full conditions are observable by men; God's Spirit notes them (ver. 54). 4. In the design of Providence, wants succeed plenty at the heels. 5. Entrance of dearth, though grievous, yet may make but small impression on souls. 6. Not a word of God falleth to the ground, but as He saith, so it is. 7. Providence orders lands for scarcity as well as plenty. 8. God can give bread to Egypt when He denieth it to other nations for His own ends (ver. 54). (G. Hughes, B.D.) *Lessons*:—1. Providence orders some countries to depend on others for their sustenance. 2. Wants make nations stoop and seek about for the support of life. 3. Grace can make poor captives become preservers of nations. 4. Sore plagues may be made to make men inquire after and prize abused mercies. 5. General judgments are sent to manifest God's special ends of grace to His (ver. 57). (*Ibid.*) *Egypt's indebtedness to Joseph*:—Egypt's indebtedness to Joseph was, in fact, twofold. In the first place he succeeded in doing what many strong governments have failed to do: he enabled a large population to survive a long and severe famine. Even with all modern facilities for transport and for making the abundance of remote countries available for times of scarcity, it has not always been found possible to save our own fellow-subjects from starvation. In a prolonged famine which occurred in Egypt during the middle ages, the inhabitants, reduced to the unnatural habits which are the most painful feature of such times, not only ate their own dead, but kidnapped the living on the streets of Cairo and consumed them in secret. One of the most touching memorials of the famine with which Joseph had to deal is found in a sepulchral inscription in Arabia. A flood of rain laid bare a tomb in which lay a woman having on her person a profusion of jewels which represented a very large value. At her head stood a coffer filled with treasure, and a tablet with this inscription: "In Thy name, O God, the God of Himyar, I, Tayar, the daughter of Dzu Shefar, sent my steward to Joseph, and he delaying to return to me, I sent my handmaid with a measure of silver to bring me back a measure of flour; and not being able to procure it, I sent her with a measure of gold; and not being able to procure it, I sent her with a measure of pearls; and not being able to procure it, I commanded them to be ground; and finding no profit in them, I am shut up here." If this inscription is genuine—and there seems no reason to call it in question—it shows that there is no exaggeration in the statement of our narrator that the famine was very grievous in other lands as well as Egypt. And, whether genuine or not, one cannot but admire the grim humour of the starving woman getting herself buried in the jewels which had suddenly dropped to less than the value of a loaf of bread. But besides being indebted to Joseph for their preservation, the Egyptians owed to him an extension of their influence; for, as all the lands round about became dependent on Egypt for provision, they must have contracted a respect for the Egyptian administration. They must also have added greatly to Egypt's wealth, and during those years of constant traffic many commercial connections must have been formed which in future years would be of untold value to Egypt. But, above all, the permanent alterations made by Joseph on their tenure of land, and on their places of abode, may have convinced the most sagacious of the Egyptians that it was well for them that their money had failed, and that they had been compelled to yield themselves unconditionally into the hands of this remarkable ruler. It is the mark of a competent statesman that he makes temporary distress the occasion for permanent benefit; and from the confidence Joseph won with the people, there seems every reason to believe that the permanent alterations he introduced were considered as beneficial as certainly they were bold. And for our own spiritual uses it is this point which seems chiefly important. In Joseph is illustrated the principle that, in order to the attainment of certain blessings, unconditional submission to God's delegate is required. (M. Dods, D.D.) *Christ's storehouse*:—William Bridge says: "There is enough in Jesus Christ to serve us all. If two, or six, or twenty men be athirst, and they go to drink out of a bottle, while one is drinking, the other envies, because he thinks there will not be enough

for him too ; but if a hundred be athirst, and go to the river, while one is drinking, the other envies not, because there is enough to serve them all." *Riches in Christ*.—Dr. Conyers was for some years a preacher before he had felt the power of the gospel. As he was reading his Greek Testament he came to Eph. iii. 8: "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." "Riches of Christ!" said he to himself; "'Unsearchable riches of Christ!' What have I preached of these? What do I know of these?" Under the blessing of the Spirit of God he was thus awakened to a new life and a new ministry. Are there not some yet living who might put to their own consciences similar questions? (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Spiritual blessings by Christ*.—All the spiritual blessings wherewith the Church is enriched are in and by Christ. The apostle instances some of the choicest (Eph. i. 3). Our election is by Him (ver. 4). Our adoption is by Him (ver. 5). Our redemption and remission of sins are both through Him. All the gracious transactions between God and His people are through Christ. God loves us through Christ; He hears our prayers through Christ; He forgives us all our sins through Christ. Through Christ He justifies us; through Christ He sanctifies us; through Christ He upholds us; through Christ He perfects us. All His relations to us are through Christ; all we have is from Christ; all we expect to have hangs upon Him. He is the golden hinge upon which all our salvation turns. (*Ralph Robinson.*) *Christ the only source of supply*.—If any of the people of Egypt had refused to go to Joseph, they would have despised not Joseph only, but the king, and would have deserved to be denied that sustenance which he only could give them. Are not the despisers of our great Redeemer in like manner despisers of His Father, who has set Him as His King upon the holy hill of Zion? . . . If Joseph had thrown open his storehouses before the Egyptians felt the pressure of hunger, they might soon have wasted the fruits of his prudent care. . . . Hunger, though very unpleasant, is often more useful than fulness of bread. They were very willing to give the price demanded for their food as long as their money lasted. What is the reason why so many are unwilling to come and receive wine and milk without money and without price? They feel no appetite for it. They are not sensible of their need of it. (*George Lawson, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XLII.

VERS. 1, 2. Now when Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt.—*The famine in the house of Jacob*.—I. CONSIDERED IN ITS BEARING UPON THE DIVINE PURPOSES CONCERNING THE CHOSEN PEOPLE. II. CONSIDERED IN ITS EFFECT UPON JACOB'S SONS. "Why do ye look one upon another?" This sad question revealed—1. The utmost distress. 2. Great perplexity. 3. Forebodings of conscience. (*T. H. Leale.*) *The famine; or, good out of evil*.—I. THE WIDESPREAD CALAMITY. II. THE ERRAND TO EGYPT. III. THE DOUBTFUL RECEPTION. Learn: 1. When distresses and trials come, we should be ready to trust that God means to do good by them in some way, though we may not know how. 2. When difficulties occur, we should still hope on. 3. When disappointments are our lot, we should remember that they come not without God's knowledge and permission. 4. Humility and faith will always lead to renewed hope. (*W. S. Smith, B.D.*) *Corn in Egypt*.—We have here a picture of man's lost estate, he is in a sore soul-devouring famine. We discover here man's hope. His hope lies in that Joseph whom he knows not, who has gone before him and provided all things necessary, that his wants may be supplied. And we have here practical advice, which was pre-eminently wise on the part of Jacob to his sons in his case, and which, being interpreted, is also the wisest advice to you and to me. Seeing that there is mercy for sinners, and that Jesus our brother has gone before us to provide for us an all-sufficient redemption, "Why sit we here and look one upon another?" There is mercy in the breast of God, there is salvation in Christ; "get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die." I. A PITIFUL FLIGHT. These sons of Jacob were overtaken by a famine. They were cast into a waste, howling wilderness of famine, with but one oasis, and that oasis they did not hear of till just at the time to which our text refers, when they learned to their joy that there was

corn in Egypt. Permit me now to illustrate the condition of the sinner by the position of these sons of Jacob. 1. The sons of Jacob had a very great need of bread. But what is this compared with the sinner's needs! His necessities are such that only Infinity can supply them; he has a demand before which the demands of sixty-six months are as nothing. 2. Mark, again: what these people wanted was an essential thing. They did not lack clothes, that were a want, but nothing like the lack of bread; for a man might exist with but scanty covering. Oh that men should cry for bread—the absolute necessary for the sustenance of the body! But what is the sinner's want? Is it not exactly this? he wants that without which the soul must perish. 3. Yet again: the necessity of the sons of Jacob was a total one. They had no bread; there was none to be procured. Such is the sinner's case. It is not that he has a little grace and lacks more; but he has none at all. Of himself he has no grace. It is not that he has a little goodness, and needs to be made better; but he has no goodness at all, no merits, no righteousness—nothing to bring to God, nothing to offer for his acceptance; he is penniless, poverty-stricken; everything is gone whereon his soul might feed. 4. But yet worse: with the exception of Egypt, the sons of Jacob were convinced that there was no food anywhere. In speechless silence they resigned themselves to the woe which threatened to overwhelm them. Such is the sinner's condition, when first he begins to feel a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, he looks to others. "There is no hope for us; we have all been condemned, we have all been guilty, we can do nothing to appease the Most High"; what a wretched world were ours, if we were equally convinced of sin, and equally convinced that there was no hope of mercy! This, then, was the condition of Jacob's sons temporally, and it is our condition by nature spiritually. II. Now we come, in the second place, to the good news. Jacob had faith, and the ears of faith are always quiet; faith can hear the tread of mercy, though the footfall be as light as that of the angel among the flowers. Jacob had the ears of faith. He had been at prayer, I doubt not, asking God to deliver his family in the time of famine; and by and by he hears, first of his household, that there is corn in Egypt. Jacob heard the good news, and communicated it as speedily as possible to his descendants. Now, we also have heard the good news. Good news has been sent to us in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. "There is corn in Egypt." We need not die. Now, we have better news than even Jacob had; although the news is similar, understanding it in a spiritual sense. 1. We are told to-day, by sure and certain witnesses, that there is corn in Egypt, there is mercy in God. Jacob's messenger might have deceived him—idle tales are told everywhere, and in days of famine men are very apt to tell a falsehood, thinking that to be true which they wish were so. The hungry man is apt to hope that there may be corn somewhere; and then he thinks there is; and then he says there is; and then, what begins with a wish comes to be a rumour and a report. But this day, my friends, it is no idle talk; no dream, no rumour of a deceiver. There is mercy with God, there is salvation with Him that He may be feared. 2. There is another thing in which we have the start of Jacob. Jacob knew there was corn in Egypt, but did not know who had the keeping of it. If he had known that, he would have said, "My sons, go down at once to Egypt, do not be at all afraid, your brother is lord of Egypt, and all the corn belongs to him." Nay, more, I can readily imagine that he would have gone himself, forthwith. Sinner, the mercies of God are under no lock and key except those over which Christ has the power. The granaries of heaven's mercy have no steward to keep them save Christ. He is exalted on high to give repentance and remission of sins. 3. There is yet another thing which the sons of Jacob knew nothing of. When they went to Egypt, they went on hap-hazard. If they knew there was corn, they were not sure they would get it. But when you and I go to Christ, we are invited guests. 4. But one other remark, and I will have done with this second point. The sons of Jacob were in one respect better off than you are apparently, for they had money with which to buy. Jacob was not a poor man in respect of wealth, although he had now become exceedingly poor from lack of bread. His sons had money to take with them. Glittering bars of gold they thought must surely attract the notice of the ruler of Egypt. You have no money, nothing to bring to Christ, nothing to offer Him. You offered Him something once, but He rejected all you offered Him as being spurious coins, imitations, counterfeits, and good for nothing. And now utterly stripped, hopeless, penniless, you say you are afraid to go to Christ because you have nothing of your own. Let me assure you that you are never in so fit a condition to go to Christ as when you have nowhere else to go

to, and have nothing of your own. III. Thus I have noticed the good news as well as the pitiful plight. I come now to the third part, which is good advice. Jacob says, "Why do ye look one upon another?" And he said, "Behold I have heard that there is corn in Egypt; get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die." This is very practical advice. I wish people would act the same with religion as they do in temporal affairs. Jacob's sons did not say: "Well, that is very good news; I believe it," and then sit still and die. No, they went straightway to the place of which the good news told them corn was to be had. So should it be in matters of religion. We should not be content merely to hear the tidings, but we should never be satisfied until by Divine grace we have availed ourselves of them, and have found mercy in Christ. Lastly, let me put this question: "Why do ye look one upon another?" Why do ye sit still? Fly to Christ, and find mercy. Oh, says one, "I cannot get what I expect to have." But what do you expect? I believe some of our hearers expect to feel an electric shock, or something of that kind, before they are saved. The gospel says simply, "Believe." That they will not understand. They think there is to be something so mysterious about it. They can't make out what it is; but they are going to wait for it and then believe. Well, you will wait till doomsday; for if you do not believe this simple gospel, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," God will not work signs and wonders to please your foolish desires. Your position is this—you are a sinner, lost, ruined; you cannot help yourself. Scripture says, "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." Your immediate business, your instantaneous duty is to cast yourself on that simple promise, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that as He came into the world to save sinners, He has therefore come to save you. What you have to do with, is that simple command—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." In conclusion, I make this last remark: Did you notice the argument Joseph used why the sons should go to Egypt? It was this—"That we may live, and not die." Sinner, this is my argument with thee this morning. My dear hearers, the gospel of Christ is a matter of life and death with you. It is not a matter of little importance, but of all importance. There is an alternative before you; you will either be eternally damned, or everlastingly saved. Despise Christ, and neglect His great salvation, and you will be lost, assure as you live. Believe in Christ; put your trust alone in Him, and everlasting life is yours. What argument can be more potent than this to men that love themselves? (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The famine in Canaan:—*

I. FAMINE. 1. A dire calamity. Perhaps none greater. One which human wisdom cannot foresee. Affects all classes. Animal life depends on vegetable life, vegetable life on seasons, light, heat, rain, temperature, &c. These under the control of God. The lawmaker may suspend the operation of natural laws, moderate their influence, or affect their course. 2. Usually unexpected. In this case there was a warning given, and preparations made. Men cannot foresee the suspension or deviation of natural laws. Hopes for the future built on productiveness of the past. 3. Often over-ruled for good. In this case conspicuously so. Promotes human sympathy (thus the Irish famine, 1846-7, besides evoking much individual benevolence, was responded to by Parliamentary grants of, in the whole, £10,000,000. *III. Indian famine, 1861.* Provokes scientific inquiry into "supply and demand" of food. Leads to emigration and breaking up of new ground. 4. Always possible and near. World at any time only a harvest off starvation. 5. Generally local (*Gen. viii. 22*). "All countries" (*xli. 57*), those adjacent to Egypt. Kindness of Providence in this. Nations in their turn dependent on each other. Each "offers something for the general use."

II. PLENTY. 1. Where? In Egypt. A storehouse of plenty for hungry nations. Always food in some place, and will be while the earth lasts. He who feeds the ravens knows what man has need of. 2. Why? Does it seem strange that the promised land should suffer, rather than be the favoured spot? (1) It was a small country. (2) Had other nations gone thither they would have conquered it. (3) Chiefly: it was part of the Divine plan that Israel should go down into Egypt, and the famine necessitated this. 3. How? By the extraordinary productiveness of seven preceding years, and the storing of the surplus corn. This effected by the instrumentality of Joseph. His mind supernaturally illuminated. Favour given him in the sight of the king of Egypt. His appointment to office, including the absolute control of the produce of the land.

III. BUYING FOOD. 1. Want in the house of Jacob. 2. The ten sent out to buy corn in Egypt. 3. They arrive in Egypt, and visit the royal granaries. 4. Joseph recognizes them, and they bow before him, and thus fulfil the dream. 5. To disarm suspicion,

and to discover the temper of their minds, and the history of their family, they are charged with being spies, and cast into prison. 6. After three days they are liberated, and a hostage required for their return with the younger brother of whom they have spoken, and of whose existence Joseph affects to doubt. 7. Mutual recriminations respecting Joseph. 8. Joseph is affected by what he hears. 9. Simeon bound and left in prison, while they betake themselves away to Canaan. **Learn:** However great the dearth of the bread that perisheth, there is always sufficient of the "bread of life," and it is always accessible. (*J. C. Gray.*)

Vers. 3-20. Joseph's ten brethren went down to buy corn in Egypt.—*Providence working in men's lives:*—I. The story of Joseph is a good example of what is meant by Providence working for the best in the lives of men. Look at the young foreigner, as he comes to a land not his own; see how he resists the one great temptation of his age and station; observe how, through means not of his own seeking, through good report and evil, through much misunderstanding of others, but by consistent integrity and just dealing on his own part, he overcomes all the difficulties of his position, and is remembered long afterwards in his adopted land as the benefactor of his generation and the deliverer of his country. II. The story of Joseph is, perhaps, of all the stories in the Old Testament, the one which most carries us back to our childhood, both from the interest we felt in it as children, and from the true picture of family life which it presents. It brings before us the way in which the greatest blessings for this life and the next depend on the keeping up of family love pure and fresh, as when the preservation and fitting education of the chosen people depended on that touching generosity and brotherly affection which no distance of time, no new customs, no long sojourn in a strange land, could extinguish in the heart of Joseph. Home is on earth the best likeness of heaven; and heaven is that last and best home in which, when the journey of life is over, Joseph and his brethren, Jacob and his sons, Rachel and her children, shall meet to part no more. (*Dean Stanley.*) *The first journey of Jacob's brethren into Egypt:*—I. **THEY SHOW EVIDENT SIGNS OF FEAR.** Therefore they go together in a company, ten strong, that by their numbers they might encourage and support one another (ver. 3). II. **THEIR WORST FOREBODINGS ARE FULFILLED.** They dreaded Egypt, and events justified their fears. 1. They are received roughly (ver. 7). 2. They are suspected of evil designs (ver. 9). 3. They are threatened with the prospect of imprisonment and death. III. **GREAT PRINCIPLES OF GOD'S MORAL GOVERNMENT ARE ILLUSTRATED IN THIS HISTORY.** 1. That pride is sure to meet with a fall. In verse 6 we are told that "Joseph's brethren came and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth." Where were now those lofty looks, and that contemptuous tone with which they said—when Joseph had told them of his dreams—"Shalt thou then indeed reign over us, or shalt thou have dominion over us?" 2. That nothing can hinder the counsel of God from taking effect. 3. That the crisis will arrive when the wicked must appear before the judgment-seat of the pious. 4. That retribution, even in kind, follows sin. 5. That throughout the severity of God's righteous anger against sin there runs a purpose of mercy. (*T. H. Leale.*) *The first journey of Joseph's brethren into Egypt:*—I. **THE FAMINE IN CANAAN.** II. **THE OFFICE OF CONSCIENCE** (ver. 21). Where sin is voluntary wrong-doing, the language of the human heart inevitably connects the penalty with the wrong-doing. In every temptation that comes upon you, think what it will be in the hour of death to be free from the recollection of it. Refrain, refrain, remember the hereafter. III. **OBSERVE THE SEVERITY IN THE LOVE OF JOSEPH** (ver. 7). He did not allow his personal feelings to interfere with what seemed to him his duty. Joseph's love to his brethren was a noble love. God's love to us is still nobler, and severity accompanies it. It does not shrink from human suffering, for suffering is necessary for the man's well being. IV. **Lastly, we remark on THE RETURN HOMEWARDS OF JOSEPH'S BRETHREN.** Jacob expected corn to relieve their necessities; he got the corn, but with it came sorrow upon sorrow. Bereaved of Joseph, he is now bereaved of Simeon also. In Jacob's answers to his sons, in the close of the chapter, we find a depth of querulousness and despondency. Job was tried with sorrows far more severe, and yet they only served and contributed to the purifying of his spirit. In order to understand the cause of Jacob's despondency we must go far back. Jacob was a selfish man; his very religion was selfish; he would become religious only on condition that God would protect and guide him. To that selfish origin may be traced all the evils of his after life. Throughout it seems to have been his principle to receive as much as possible, and to give as

little as he could. He who lives in this world for his own personal enjoyment, without God and His Christ, will by degrees find, like Jacob, that he has no rock to rest his soul upon, but that he must go down in sorrow to the grave. (*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*) *The retributions of Providence*:—Men troubled by memory of former sins, not because they doubt mercy of God, but because they doubt themselves. Jacob's sons better men than formerly, yet the retribution follows. I. The vengeance of TIME. The sin of twenty years ago. Time no friend to the sinner. Time gives the harvest opportunity and room to develop. Years of Joseph's imprisonment. Years of torture to brethren. II. The vengeance of CIRCUMSTANCES. Every link in chain, strong and connected with next link. "Remarkable series of coincidences," very. The plots and counterplots of fiction: cf. with Scripture. III. The vengeance of MEMORY. Joseph's cries wrought into the mental texture of these men. Hetfy, in "Adam Bede," The baby's cry: "Son, remember." Memory, a cup of blessing, or devil's scourge. IV. The vengeance of CONSCIENCE. Memory may exaggerate, extenuate, add, subtract, &c. But conscience is a just judge. Hamlet, "The play's the thing," &c. Adonibezak, conscience-stricken wretch. V. The vengeance of PUBLICITY. Evildoers clever in blocking up ninety-nine avenues of discovery. The 100th. The shame. The collapse. Conclusion: Vengeance, not last word in relation to sin. "We know that He was manifested," &c. "Better to fall," &c. "Faithful and just." "Though your sins as mountains rise," &c. (*A. P. Watson.*)

Ver. 8. Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him.—*The betrayers confronted with the betrayed*:—I. AN INSTANCE OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE. II. A PREPARATION FOR GRACE. III. A FORESHADOWING OF GRACE. (*St. J. A. Frere.*) *Known and watched*:—I. BOTH OPEN AND SECRET SINNERS ARE KNOWN AND WATCHED BY GOD. II. BOTH TRUE AND FALSE PROFESSORS ARE KNOWN AND WATCHED BY THE WORLD. (*J. Henry Burn, B.D.*)

Vers. 11-17. We are true men.—*True life*:—I. THE MISTAKEN ESTIMATE. "We are true men." Were they? They spoke for themselves, they spoke for one another; but had they a good report of the truth itself? You know better than that—they were not true men, anything but true men. How came it to pass that they formed such a mistaken estimate of themselves? How comes it to pass that men now-a-days form similarly false estimates of themselves? 1. They dwelt on their superficial goodness, and forgot their deeper wickedness. "We are no spies." No; they felt hurt by the very suspicion; they would have scorned the thing. But there are worse things than going forth to see the nakedness of the land, worse men than spies. And these very men were guilty of far greater wickedness (see Gen. xxxvii. 2, 4, 5, 11, 18, 20). They were guilty of malice, falsehood, treachery, murder. Their conduct was unmanly, unbrotherly, unfilial. They were not spies, but they were liars, impostors, kidnappers, fratricides, monsters. But they ignored the profound wickedness, and dwelt fondly upon a goodness which was not very good. Is not this a very common method with us still? We think how blameless we are in matters on the very surface of life, and forget how guilty we are in the weightier matters of the law. 2. They dwelt on their exceptional goodness, and forgot their prevailing wickedness. "We are no spies." They were right here, but in how many respects were they wanting? How many base characteristics they had we have just seen. But is not this seizing on some creditable trait of character, and ignoring all the bad traits a constant source of self deception? Says the prodigal son, listening to some story of covetousness and meanness, "Well, anyhow, nobody can charge me with money-grubbing!" And the man who is a walking lie, a mass of selfishness, full of egotism and pride, will reply, when some one is convicted of tipping, "Well, thank heaven, I never was a beast!" People think sometimes that the Pharisee is only found in the Church among seemingly good people; but the Pharisee is in the world also, in the most outrageous sinners, and it is often curious to hear the sanctimonious accent in the hiccup of the drunkard, and to see the broad phylactery showing through the finery of the harlot. The apostle says, "If we offend in one point we are guilty of all," but we argue as if to keep one point was to be innocent of all. "True men." They are true all round, the soundness of their hearts discovering itself in the harmony and beauty of their whole life. But, alas! we judge ourselves by some phase of exceptional goodness, and because we are not spies conclude ourselves saints. 3. They dwelt on their present goodness and forgot their past wickedness. "We are no spies." They were right in that matter,

right at that time, but what of the past? The moral insensibility and forgetfulness exhibited by these men is simply surprising. So it is with ourselves. Nothing is more startling than our moral unconsciousness and forgetfulness. We easily believe time sponges out all disagreeable records, and presents us with a clean state. "True men." We are not true men until we are "purged from our old sins." II. THE PAINFUL EXPOSURE. How wonderfully God can cleave to our very heart, and show us what spirit we are of, no matter how profoundly we may have been disguised from ourselves. Many years ago in Brazil a slave found what was supposed to be a diamond of nearly a pound weight. It was presented to the emperor, constantly guarded by soldiers, and was supposed to represent millions of money. But an English mineralogist produced a cutting diamond, and scratched the supposed mammoth prize. One scratch was enough, if it had been a real gem it would not have taken a scratch, it was no diamond at all, the millions vanished in a moment into thin air. So God detects and exposes character. It was thus in the narrative before us. "And Joseph said unto them the third day, This do, and live; for I fear God: if ye be true men bring your youngest brother unto me." That single scratch spoiled all the string of diamonds. "And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us." The "true men" were found out, they knew themselves to be frauds. So God finds us all out one day or the other, one way or other. We notice sometimes with our friends how they suddenly stand revealed to us in a light most unexpected; they flash upon us in a character hitherto wholly unsuspected by us. And so our true self is long concealed from ourself, but at last God by His Spirit makes us know our true self, and we are filled with astonishment and distress. By Christ "the thoughts of many hearts are revealed." By the Spirit of Christ "the world is convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment." The Pharisee at last becomes a publican, and smiting on his breast, cries, "God be merciful to me a sinner." "A true man." Is not that the very grandest character you can give a man? How eloquent it is! "A true man." Is not that the very grandest epitaph you can write over the dead? Rich man, successful man, great man, gifted man, no, none of these are to be compared with "a true man." We all covet that inscription far more than sculptured urn or animated bust. And yet many of us are painfully conscious that we are not "true men." Oh! no, far from it. How full we are of weakness, hypocrisy, confusion, misery. "False and full of sin I am." But we may be all made "true men." Jesus was the true man, "the Son of Man," as Luther calls Him, "the Proper Man." Oh! how brave, noble, majestic, tender, pure, true, was the ideal Man. How grand is man when he reaches the full conception of his nature! And Christ can make us "true men," that is His mission. (W. L. Watkinson.) *Searchings of heart*:—I. PAINFUL SUSPENSE. II. PANGS OF REMORSE. III. A PERPLEXING INCIDENT (vers. 27, 28). IV. A PLAINTIVE LAMENT (vers. 36, 38). (W. S. Smith, B.D.) *The accusation*:—Far be it from us to say that Joseph had attained absolute perfection when he was on earth, although his virtues were far beyond those of most other men. It will not be easy, or rather it will be impossible, to exempt him from the charge of dissimulation, when he alleged that his brethren were spies. His words are not to be considered as an assertion, but they express a suspicion, which certainly did not enter into his mind. His design was good. He meant to humble them for their good, but good intentions will not excuse a departure from truth. He knew that they were not spies come to see the nakedness of the land, but he wished, without discovering himself to them, to be informed of the welfare of his father and of his father's house. It is to be remembered that Joseph lived before the law was given. The light which discovers sin and duty shone less brightly in his days than in ours, and therefore the limits between what is lawful and what is unlawful would not be so easily discerned. It is likewise to be feared that Joseph's station as Prime Minister in the court of Pharaoh led him into connections, and placed him in circumstances, unfavourable to progress in virtue. He held fast his integrity, and would not let it go amidst great temptations, but human infirmity discovered itself in some parts of his conduct. (G. Lawson, D.D.) *The answer*:—It could not be supposed that one man would suffer ten of his sons to engage at once in a business so full of perils as that of spies, or that so many brethren should risk the almost total extirpation of their father's house at one blow. It requires a very daring spirit for a man to venture his own life in an office so desperate; but who would venture at once his own life and the life of almost all

that are dear to him along with his own? Clear proof, at least, is requisite before belief can be given to an accusation so improbable as this which was laid against Joseph's brethren, when it was known that they all belonged to the same house, and that there was only one brother left at home with a father sinking under the burden of age. "We are true men, we are no spies. We are what we pretend to be, and have assumed no false character." The business of a spy is not in all cases unlawful. It is a business, however, so full of temptations to falsehood that an honest man will not rashly undertake it. (*Ibid.*) *Put to the test unconsciously*.—The whole treatment of his brothers by Joseph was meant to prove their characters, and see whether they had or had not repented of their sin against him, and whether they had or had not changed their disposition and mode of life. They did not know that he was thus experimenting on them, but the result satisfied him, and led to his revelation of himself to them. Now it is often similar with men and their fellows. When Gideon led his army to the brook, and saw his soldiers drink, they had no idea that he was picking out his three hundred for his midnight attack on the Midianitish camp. But so it was; for those who did not care luxuriously to go down on hands and knees to put their mouths to the stream, but who simply lapped the water up with their hands as a dog laps up with his tongue, showed thereby that they had the qualities of rapidity, dash, and hardihood which were specially needed for the service on which he was bent, and therefore they were selected for it. Even so men have been watched by others when they were not thinking of anything of the kind, and the diligence, energy, integrity, and amiability which they have shown has commended them to those interested for some situation of trust, honour, and emolument. Young man, your employer is testing you when you do not know it, therefore see that you are faithful and obliging even in that which is least, that you may approve yourself worthy of something greater. Many incidents might here be narrated to prove that men have risen from comparative obscurity to eminence simply because they had been tested, unwittingly to themselves, by others who were on the outlook for the agents that would most effectually serve their purpose. When they rose, envious people prated about "luck," but they who knew best spoke about character manifested by faithfulness in that which was least, and saw in their promotion the earthly miniature of the doing of the last Judge, who shall say to him whom He approves, "Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

Ver. 18. For I fear God.—*The fear of God*.—1. The first impression which the human mind receives from the conviction of an over-ruling Power, is that of fear. It is a moral impression. It is made upon the conscience. A feeling of awe at the thought of an invisible witness, who judges and will requite. 2. "For I fear God." The text begins with a word that connects it with something else; that supposes a reason for the assertion it makes. Why should we thus "fear" Him? Because He is present to every agreement that is made, to every promise that is spoken, to every purpose that is secretly devised, to every action, however silently done. Because He is holy, and "the righteous Lord hateth iniquity." Because He is mighty, and who can stand before His displeasure? Because He requires the duty by which we feel ourselves bound. Because He appoints every law, and chastises for its infraction. Because, if through that subduing veneration, that salutary dread, we hold fast our integrity and depart from evil, we are encouraged by His assurances, we are encompassed by His defence. 3. There are various ways in which these effects are produced upon the children of disobedience. (1) They fear the powers of the visible world, as if they were ready to betray or smite their delinquencies; as if their sounds might publish something concerning them, or their "arrows upon the string" had an aim towards them. The stormy wind or the voice of the waters may have a word to fulfil for their condemnation. The rustling leaf has a warning. The bare bough points. "A bird of the air shall carry the matter." There is a Greek story of a poet who, falling under the daggers of robbers, called upon some cranes who was flying overhead to avenge his death. While his name and fate were yet upon the public tongue, in a great assembly of the people—when in the vast theatre of Corinth, open to the sky, the solemn chorus and personation of the Furies were exhibiting the truth, that "there is no shadow of death where the workers of iniquity can hide themselves"—a flock of those noisy birds darkened and shook the air. A cry escaped from the assassins, who were present at the spectacle. Their detection followed, and their just death

was added as the terrible conclusion of the sacred song, and fulfilment of its prophecy. The story may be true, for doubtless such things have been. And they illustrate one part of the fact, that the creation, even in its innocent objects and pleasant forms, is the enemy of those who will not make the Author of it a friend.

(2) There are surprises of Providence, in disappointment, deprivation, pain. These are trials wherever they fall; but to persons sensible that they have given them the right to surprise, they are peculiarity full of dismay. Sudden accidents will occur. The usual order of our lives will be broken in upon by strange occurrences. Dangers springs up by the wayside. Sorrows invade the dearest neighbourhoods of our life. Many, like old Israel's son's, find a journey made to the south terminate into captivity, and have to bear "the burden of Egypt," while they were seeking for its corn. Wretched, indeed, if what they must suffer then admonishes them of their trespasses, and forces from them the confession, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother." But, without imagining any of these casualties and violent interruptions, and troubles that may come, there are others that must come. The God whom we "fear" deals with us in the slow course of His appointments, through the gradual changes of time and age. If He continues our days upon the earth, we must pay for the privilege by parting with many of their delights, feeling some unwelcome alterations, and witnessing more. The soul will have to retire further inward for its satisfactions or its repose, as remembrance out-measures expectation, and the veils of the flesh grow thin. When the world is declining, its weight greater and its pleasure less, will not everything appear departing from us, if the answer of a good conscience and a hope towards an immortal possession do not remain behind? To feel forsaken of God, or obnoxious to His judgments then!—is not that a dreary and terrible occasion of fear? 4. The several topics hitherto mentioned touch upon what is outside of us. They have been immediately connected with natural objects, or distressful incidents, or waning powers. But all these are only circumstances. The individual consciousness of every one dwells in the midst of them, and impresses them with a character of its own. Here is the true seat of the principle. Let each stand in awe of what is within him; of the judgments that are pronounced beyond mortal hearing, and executed through the habits, the fancies, the passions, the memories, of the mind itself. Are these habits depraved—these fancies disordered? Do these passions start away from holy motives? Do these memories condemn the past, that cannot be restored to be tried again and live better? The hostilities of nature the utmost rage of the air and sea, are nothing to this. Pain and misadventure are nothing. The wear and losses of encroaching years are nothing. (*N. L. Frothingham.*) *The story of Joseph*:—Joseph punishes Simeon by imprisonment. It may be that he had reasons for it which we are not told. But when his brothers have endured the trial, and he finds that Benjamin is safe, he has nothing left but forgiveness. They are his brethren still—his own flesh and blood. And he "fears God." He dare not do anything but forgive them. He forgives them utterly, and welcomes them with an agony of happy tears. He will even put out of their minds the very memory of their baseness. "Now, therefore, be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither," he says; "for God," &c. Is not that Divine? Is not that the Spirit of God and of Christ? I say it is. For what is it but the likeness of Christ, who says for ever, out of heaven to all mankind, "Be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye crucified me; for God, my Father, sent me to save your souls by a great salvation." My friends, learn from this story of Joseph, and the prominent place in the Bible which it occupies—learn, I say, how hateful to God are family quarrels; how pleasant to God are family unity and peace, and mutual trust, and duty, and helpfulness. And if you think that I speak too strongly on this point, recollect that I do no more than St. Paul does, when he sums up the most lofty and mystical of all his Epistles, the Epistle to the Ephesians, by simple commands to husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, as if he should say: You wish to be holy? you wish to be spiritual? Then fulfil these plain family duties, for they, too, are sacred and divine, and he who despises them, despises the ordinances of God. And if you despise the laws of God, they will surely avenge themselves on you. If you are bad husbands or bad wives, bad parents or bad children, bad brothers or sisters, bad masters or servants, you will smart for it, according to the eternal laws of God, which are at work around you all day long, making the sinner punish himself whether he likes or not. Examine yourselves—ask yourselves, each of you, Have I been a good brother? have I been a good son? have I been a good husband? have I been a good father? have I been

a good servant? If not, all professions of religion will avail me nothing. If not, let me confess my sins to God, and repent and amend at once, whatever it may cost me. (*C. Kingsley, M.A.*) *The fear of God*:—This fear should daily control every Christian. No influence on the feelings, or the character, can be more salutary. What greater preservative from wrong can there be in youth, than the constant presence of a parent, whose feelings we regard, whose opinions we respect, and whose judgment we reverence. And if the presence of a parent is so salutary in restraining us from transgression, how much more so must the impression be, that we act in the view of the Almighty? And how appropriate to the condition of an immortal being is the state of mind, which is described in the saying, "I fear God." "I fear God." I know He is here. He is everywhere. I cannot go from His presence, nor flee from Him. To live, and move, and be in the presence of so great and adorable a being, cannot but excite emotions of awe. It cannot fail, if rightly considered, to produce a salutary fear in the heart of every child of Adam. "I fear God." He knows all my actions. Not one of them has been concealed from His view. The sins of my childhood are known to Him. They are written in His book. The iniquities of my youth are kept in His remembrance. The transgressions of maturer years are not hidden from His eyes. No palliation nor excuse can cause Him to take a different view of them from that with which He beholds them. He understands my thoughts. "There is not a thought in my heart, but He knows it altogether." There is no operation of my intellect, which He does not readily perceive. The subtleties, which a perverted heart, or a soul full of prejudice, cast over its own doings, do not conceal it from the Most High. He knows all my opinions. If interest, or the fear of man, or the pride of consistency shall influence me to give, as my view of facts or of truths, a sentiment at variance with what seems to me to be according to truth, He sees it all. He fully comprehends the hypocrisy of the transaction, and abhors the iniquity. He knows my motives. He knows what it is in us that moves us to retain His Word in our families; what it is that influences us to come to His house; what it is that incites any of us to profess to be His disciples. He knows all our feelings. There is no affection in our hearts which is not entirely open to His view. I fear God; for He is holy. To some, it may seem strange that the holiness of a being should be a ground of fear. But there is no other consideration which invests the character of Jehovah with such fearfulness, as that of His holiness. And this is as true of those who are holy, as of those whose sinfulness exposes them to His indignation. No other trait is more prominent in the character of devout men, than the fear of God. And this reverential regard for Him does not abate, even when the soul becomes perfect in glory. When John had a view of the heavenly world, he heard them "sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, 'Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints. Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glory Thy name, for Thou only art holy!'" "I fear God"; for He has a settled aversion to sin. This is His nature, and He is immutable—immutable in His attachment to holiness, and in His opposition to sin. Now, who that knows the holiness of Jehovah, and His constant abhorrence of sin, will not fear Him? Can a human being, who is convinced that he has violated the law of God—who understands that during many years he was constantly engaged in rebellion against Him—who feels, that even if he has been born of God, he has not been perfect, but is chargeable every day, in the view of Infinite Holiness, with many transgressions—can he live without fear? Considering the strength of his unsubdued propensities to evil, will he not be apprehensive that he may incur the displeasure of a Holy God? "I fear God;" for He inflicts severe chastisements, even in this life, on such of His people as wander from Him. "I fear God"; by Him I must be judged. All my deeds, my words, and my feelings, must pass His scrutiny and receive His sentence. Do you say, if I am a Christian, I ought not to fear? The Saviour has not thus instructed me. "I will forewarn you," said He to His disciples, "whom ye shall fear—fear Him who has power to destroy both soul and body in hell; yea, I say unto you, fear Him." In view of such a Judge, who will not fear? Now, if such a fear of God occupy our souls, then it will be impossible not to speak reverentially respecting Him. Again: If this fear of God be in us, we shall have a happy influence on others. Our conversation will evince that there is something in our hearts, which is not known to the world, nor felt by such as are alienated from God. Our lives will tell to all around us that there is something in the fear of God which is calculated to diffuse a heavenly savour over all our feelings and actions. In ways

innumerable—in ways which, it is impossible for us to describe, or others to see—a grace will distil on those around us like drops of the morning dew; and blessings of immeasurable value, and eternal duration, will descend upon them. Brethren—let the fear of God dwell at all times in your hearts; for “to that man,” said Jehovah, “will I look, who is humble, and of a contrite heart, and who trembleth at My word.” (*J. Foot, D.D.*)

Vers. 19, 20. Let one of your brethren be bound.—*Lessons*.—1. To prove truth among national parties, it is not unequal to give hostages. 2. Hostages being taken it is but equal that parties have liberty to manifest truth. 3. Nature will not, much less grace, dispatch hungry men without food. 4. Bread-corn is the break-neck of hunger (ver. 19). 5. Reasonable testimonies of truth may be peremptorily demanded of suspected persons. 6. Justification and security are to be afforded to men of truth. 7. It is reasonable for men under trials to yield to just terms for deliverance (ver. 20). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*)

Vers. 21, 22. We are verily guilty concerning our brother.—*Conscience awakens in Joseph's brethren*.—I. Joseph's brethren had not been placed in any peculiar circumstances of trial since the loss of Joseph; consequently their sin had slept. There had been nothing to call it to light; they had well-nigh forgotten it; its heinousness had become dim in the distance. But now they were in trouble, and they could not help seeing the hand of God in that trouble. Their spiritual instinct told them that their trouble did not spring out of the ground; it had been planted there—it had a root. Their sin had found them out at last, and their own adversity brought about that contrition for their offence which its own hatefulness ought to have been sufficient to produce. II. We see from this story that men may commit sins, and may forget them; and yet the sins may be recorded, and may one day rise up again with a frightful vitality. Men will soon bury their own sins, if they be left to themselves; but it is like burying seed, which appears to die and be forgotten, and yet it rises up again, and perhaps becomes a great tree. III. The voice of conscience is a good voice, a wholesome voice—yea, the very voice of God to our souls, and one to be welcomed by us if we only listen to it at the right time. The consciousness of guilt is a blessed thing, if only it come at the right time, and when there is opportunity for bringing forth fruits meet for repentance. Well for us if our estimate of our condition is the same, at least in its main features, as that estimate which God has made, and which the last day will produce! (*Bp. Harvey Goodwin.*) *The memory of conscience*.—I. IT IS SURE TO AWAKEN, THOUGH IT MAY SLEEP LONG. II. IT IS SOMETIMES AWAKENED BY OUTWARD TROUBLE. III. IT IS FAITHFUL AND JUST. 1. In that it brings the past accurately to mind. 2. In that it connects the penalty with the sin. IV. IT CONVERTS MORAL DIRECTION AND REMONSTRANCE INTO REPROACH AND UPBRAIDING. Reuben became to his brethren what conscience becomes to the sinner. V. IT REMINDS US OF MORAL PROCESSES NOW AT WORK IN THE WORLD. God's searching providence is ever bringing past sins to light. Christ's Cross reveals the darkness of the world's guilt. (*T. H. Leale.*) *The Nemesis of wrong*.—I. THE POSSESSION OF A GUILTY SECRET. 1. This secret bound them henceforward to a life of hypocrisy. 2. This secret filled them with constant anxiety. 3. This secret neutralized all healthful moral influence. II. THE BLACK CLOUD OF SUSPICION DARKENED THEIR DAILY LIFE. 1. They were the objects of suspicion. Jacob refused to allow Benjamin in their company. 2. They were the subjects of suspicion. Living in dread of God and man. III. THE EVER-DREADED, BUT INEVITABLE, EXPOSURE OF THEIR GUILT. (*J. C. Burnett.*) *Joseph's brethren in trouble*.—I. THAT MEN UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF FEAR CAN CONTEMPLATE ONLY THE WORST TRAITS IN THEIR CHARACTER. II. THAT TIME DOES NOT OBLITERATE THE SINFULNESS OF AN EVIL DEED. III. THAT THE VOICE OF CONSCIENCE IS UNCHANGEABLE. IV. THE RECOGNITION OF THE LAW OF RETRIBUTION. (*Homilist.*) *The guilt of neglecting the souls of our brethren*.—I. THE SOURCES FROM WHENCE THESE CONVICTIONS ARE TO BE DERIVED. 1. The relation of the sufferers. Our brethren. 2. The wretchedness of their state. 3. Our orders to succour them. 4. The possibility of affording them succour. 5. The facilities we have in this cause of compassion. (1) Providence; (2) The grace of God. 6. That even the effort we have made in this work furnish evidence of our guilt. II. WHAT INFLUENCE SHOULD THESE CONVICTIONS PRODUCE? 1. The depravity of human nature will be acknowledged. 2. Deep and godly sorrow will be felt. 3. It will lead us to apply to the mercy of God. 4. It will awaken zeal. (*J. Summerfield, M.A.*) *Transgression*

unperceived.—I. The most dangerous propensity of sin is its deceivableness; the concealment of its true nature and danger when committed, the extent and evil of it are seldom perceived; a veil is thrown over its hideous and destructive qualities; and it is imagined to be, if not altogether defensible in the sight of God, at least desirable at the moment, and tolerable. However the conscience may give warning that all is not perfectly right, the consequences are commonly neither foreseen nor apprehended. Whether this be in the very nature of sin, as brought by the spirit of evil into the world; or whether that wicked spirit, with his numberless agents, is continually exercised in producing this deceit; or whether it proceed from both these sources, which is probable, the evil and misery are the same: men are tempted to sin, because they do not perceive its utter sinfulness; and it seems as if they could do it with impunity, do it and have nothing to fear. II. And here, as we see the dreadful nature of sin, how it blinds the sinner, and makes him content with his guilt, so do we see the goodness of our heavenly Father, how graciously, by the ordination of His providence, He leads the transgressor to a deep sense of his perilous condition; how compassionately He interposes to deliver him from the fatal snare. III. The instruction to be drawn from this subject is highly beneficial and important: it warns us to consider our own case, to look into our own condition. And let us be mindful that we do draw, from such considerations and examples, the right conclusion. IV. There are two great considerations in connection with this subject, which I desire to press upon your attention. 1. The importance of our hearts being always open to God's merciful dealings in awakening us, and reclaiming us from evil. 2. That we profit from them without delay. (*J. Slade, M.A.*) *The Christian responsible for his influence over others*.—The language of self-reproach, which sharp compunction wrung from Jacob's sons, may well be adopted by many among ourselves. Take the most favourable case you can. Grant that you have done no positive harm to others. Have you not, too often, forgotten to do them good? Some, with no more natural abilities, and no better opportunities than their neighbours, render all with whom they come in contact, wiser, holier, and happier. Others, possessing the same powers of mind, and surrounded by the same circumstances, stand like a moral Upas, rendering the very atmosphere about them unwholesome and deadly. But, alas! how many who ought to improve a privilege so great, are, by inactivity and gross neglect, preparing for themselves seasons of sorrow in the future, when they will cry out, in agony of soul, knowing it is then too late to offer advice or aid to one who has become hopelessly hardened in sin, but whom, at an earlier period in his career, they possessed influence enough to save: "We are verily guilty concerning our brother." The wicked might kindly have been warned; the ignorant might easily have been taught; the headstrong might have been moved by expostulation and love; the poor might have been effectually relieved. Selfishness is the true secret of such unwarrantable neglect. We are disposed to think too much of our ease. Christians should not be contented with being in the right road themselves, but they should feel a lively interest in the welfare of others. Christians are responsible for their example. They are "the salt of the earth." They are "the leaven," which must leaven the whole lump. Their example in their families, in private intercourse with friends, and in their regular occupation, should be safe and consistent. Christian principle should be discovered in everything. Is it any wonder that the ungodly mock? Can we be surprised that unbelievers multiply? Is it astonishing that such a reckless disregard of ordinary duties, and such a strange forgetfulness of the importance of setting a good example, should draw a long train of calamities in the wake of inconsistent Christians, and cause them, in the hour of sickness and death, to cry out, at the remembrance of a brother, or husband, or child, or friend, shipwrecked and ruined by their neglect: "We are verily guilty concerning our brother"? (*J. N. Norton, D.D.*) *Of the cause of inward trouble*.—In this chapter we have the description of our fathers, the patriarchs; their first journey into Egypt for corn, to relieve their famine in Canaan. Herein is considerable—1. Their entertainment there: it was harsh, with much trouble, more danger. 2. The consequence of this their hard and distressful usage and entreatment; and that is trouble of mind, horror and perplexity of spirit: "And they said one to another," &c. The words, then, are the Holy Ghost's report of the case of the sons of Jacob, their being spiritually troubled, by way of conviction, or judgment in their own (which also is the Lord's) court of conscience. Wherein we observe—1. The actors themselves: being the registers, accusers, witnesses, judge, and tormentors. 2. Process in judging themselves: wherein—(1) Self-accusation of the cause of their trouble, their sin, with

the utmost aggravations; namely—(a) In general: “We are guilty.” (b) In particular: Of envy, wrong against a brother; whom in bitterness we saw without pity, and were deaf to his entreaties; obstinate to the admonition of Reuben, and abiding therein. (2) In self-condemnation: “Therefore is this distress come”; and his blood required. 8. Execution; wherein—(1) The smart, by inward terror and consternation; their heart, misgiving them, is deeply affected, and that makes them very abrupt: “Yea, verily,” that is, Alas! what shall we do? (2) The circumstance of the time when; couched in, “and.” (a) In general: Many years after the offence was done. (b) In special: Now that they were outwardly in an afflicted condition. Doctrines: I. Every man hath a conscience within himself. II. The guilt of sin turns a man's conscience, that is, himself, against himself. III. Conscience is apt to be very sensible, when it is awakened, not only of sin, but particular sins, and the particular circumstances and degrees thereof to the utmost; and charge all upon a man's self, not upon God's decrees or providence, nor upon the devil or evil company, &c. IV. Envy, unnatural affection, cruelty, deafness to the entreaties of the distressed, obstinacy against warning and admonition, continuance in sin without repentance, &c., are very heinous and dangerous. V. The accusations and condemnations of conscience are terrible, or cause terror beyond all expression. VI. There is a time when God will call over sins that are past, and charge them upon the conscience. VII. Inward trouble of mind sometimes (yea, usually) comes upon the people of God, when they are outwardly in some distress. (*E. Pledger, M.A.*) *The moral impotence of time*:—Twenty years after the event! Their recollections of that event was as clear as if it transpired but yesterday. Learn the moral impotence of time. We say this evil deed was done fifty years ago. Fifty years may have some relation to the memory of the intellect, but it has no relation to the tormenting memory of the conscience. There is a moral memory. Conscience has a wondrously realizing power—taking things we have written in secret ink and holding them before the fire until every line becomes vivid, almost burning. Perhaps some of you know not yet the practical meaning of this. We did something twenty years ago. We say to ourselves, “Well, seeing that it was twenty years ago it is not worth making anything to do about it, it is past, and it is a great pity to go twenty years back raking up things.” So it is in some respects, a great pity to bother ourselves about things other men did twenty years ago. But what about our own recollection, our own conscience, our own power of accusation? A man says, “I forged that name twenty-five years ago, and oh! every piece of paper I get hold of seems to have the name upon it. I never dip the pen, but there is something in the pen that reminds me of what I did by candle light, in almost darkness, when I had locked the door and assured myself nobody was there. Yet it comes upon me so graphically—my punishment is greater than I can bear!” Time cannot heal our iniquities. Forgetfulness is not the cure for sin. Obliviousness is not the redeemer of the world. How then can I get rid of the torment and the evils of an accusing memory? The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin. “Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, let him return unto the Lord and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” That is the kind of answer men want, when they feel all their yesterdays conspiring to urge an indictment against them, as sinners before the living God. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The human soul contains within itself all the necessary elements of retributive penalty*:—Here is nothing but memory, conscience, and reason; yet what an exhibition and illustration of the self-retributive power of sin! 1. Memory. “We saw the anguish,” &c. 2. Conscience. “We are verily guilty,” &c. 3. Reason. “Therefore is this distress come upon us.” Let a soul go into the future state with a memory to recall, a conscience to accuse, and a reason to justify penalty as deserved; and what more is necessary to hell? Hence Milton—

“The mind in its own place, and in itself,
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven!”

Sin brought home to the conscience:—It would be good for us if we could entertain the same views of sin in the time of temptation, that we are likely to have after it is committed, or at the time when trouble brings it home to our consciences. When Joseph cried piteously to his brethren out of the pit, they thought only of the pleasure of gratifying their envy. They then wilfully overlooked the guilt they were

contracting, and the sorrows they were preparing for their father, and for themselves; but when they were in trouble, they remembered their guilt in all its aggravating circumstances, and they would have given all they had in the world to recover that degree of innocence to which they might have pretended before Joseph came into their hands. They were chargeable with many other sins. Simeon and Levi, in particular, were chargeable with a crime not less heinous than the murder of Joseph. Yet the affliction which they endured in prison brought to remembrance in a special manner this sin against their brother. This was an atrocious iniquity, of which the most of them were equally guilty. We are naturally averse to suffering of every kind, and yet nothing is more necessary than suffering when we have sinned. It is necessary for us to know and feel the bitterness of sin, that we may confess and forsake it. And the sufferings which our flesh endures, are often necessary and useful to bring our sins to our remembrance. No doubt Joseph's brethren had often formerly thought with regret of the hatefulness of their conduct. If they were not hardened to a very uncommon degree, their hearts must have smitten them soon after the fact was committed. The sight of their father's anguish must have melted their stubborn spirits. But they needed their afflictions in Egypt likewise to awaken a new and more affecting sense of their wickedness. Joseph, and God by Joseph, did them a kindness in giving them an experimental knowledge of the bitter sufferings of an oppressed man, when he pours out tears, but finds no comforter. (*G. Lawson, D.D.*)

Therefore is this distress come upon us:—Jacob's sons did not think that the man who had treated them with such severity knew anything concerning their conduct to their poor brother, but they knew that there is a God in the heavens, who knoweth and judgeth all the actions of the children of men. In this knowledge they were trained up by their father. But although they had been the children of a man who knew not God, this reflection might have occurred to them in the day of trouble. Adoni-bezek, king of Jerusalem, had his education amongst the most hardened sinners that ever lived in the world, and was himself one of the most hard-hearted tyrants that ever disgraced a throne; yet, when sore trouble came upon him, he acknowledged that it was the infliction of just punishment from God (*Judg. i.*). It is said of the virtuous Dion, the Syracusan, that when he was compelled to flee from his country, and knocked at some doors that did not open unto him as they would have done in former times, he meekly observed to his servant, that perhaps himself, in the time of his prosperity, had not always opened his door to the stranger. When we meet from men with treatment which we did not deserve, it may be of use, for calming our spirits, to consider whether we have not been guilty of as bad, or even worse conduct, to some of our neighbours. What if God has commissioned these men who behave ill to us, as His messengers, to execute His anger for offences against some of their fellow-men? Look forward, ye who have hitherto lived in ease and prosperity. The day of trouble will come. Plant not your dying pillow before hand with thorns and briars. If no reverse of circumstances should come upon you before you till you die, yet you are sure that you must die; and a death-bed will be the very worst place for such reflections as awakened conscience may produce. Bitter was the anguish of Joseph's brethren, but it would have been ten times more bitter if they had seen inevitable death before their eyes. They had little prospect of repairing the injury done to Joseph; but they might yet live to repair in some degree the wrong they had done to their father, and to seek with tears and supplications the forgiveness of their sins from God. Look back on your former conduct. Consider whether you have not done some injuries that may yet be repaired, or neglected some important duties that may yet be done, before you go to that place where there is no counsel, nor device, nor work. O death! how terrible are thy approaches to the man who is conscious that he hath shut his ears against the cry of the poor, or against the loud calls of the Son of God, urging him to improve the space given him for repentance! (*Ibid.*) *The time when conscience makes itself heard:*—Have you ever heard of the great clock of St. Paul's in London? At midday, in the roar of business, when carriages, and carts, and waggons, and omnibuses, go rolling through the streets, how many never hear that great clock strike, unless they live very near it. But when the work of the day is over, and the roar of business has passed away—when men are gone to sleep, and silence reigns in London—then at twelve, at one, at two, at three, at four, the sound of that clock may be heard for miles around. Twelve!—One!—Two!—Three!—Four! How that clock is heard by many a sleepless man! That clock is just like the conscience of the impenitent man. While he has health and strength, and goes on in the whirl of business, he will not hear con-

science. He drowns and silences its voice by plunging into the world. . . . The time will come when he must retire from the world, and lie down on the sick bed, and look death in the face. And then the clock of conscience, that solemn clock, will sound in his heart, and, if he has not repented, will bring wretchedness and misery to his soul. (*Bp. Ryle.*) *Indestructibility of conscience*.—Man's conscience was once the vicegerent of Deity: what conscience said within was just the echo of what God said without; and even now, conscience in its ruin has enough of its pristine eloquence and surviving affinity to God never to be altogether and always silent. The passions try to make conscience a sort of citizen-king, putting it up and down as they please: but it will not quietly submit; it resists the authority of the passions; it insists upon supremacy; it cannot forget its noble lineage and its erst holy function derived from God. As long as man can gratify his passions, and give an opiate to conscience, so long will it be partially quiet. But a day comes when the passions must be laid, and when every beat of the heart, like the curfew bell, will tell you that the time for extinguishing their fires is come, and then and there conscience will re-assert its lost supremacy, grasp its broken sceptre, and, refusing to be put down, it will emit its true and eternal utterances; and reason of righteousness, and temperance, and judgment; and prove that man may peradventure live without religion, but die without it he rarely can. A death-bed is that hour when conscience re-asserts its supremacy, however stupefied it may have been with the opium of half a century, and reminds its possessor of all behind and before. In such a case there are two resources: either the Romish priest, with a stronger opiate, under which man will die deluded and deceived: or the blood of Jesus, with pardon for the sin, and therefore peace for the conscience, which is the joyful sound of forgiveness. (*J. Cumming, D.D.*) *Voice of an evil conscience*.—The voice of an evil conscience is not one evil in particular, but a multitude of evils. It is a barking hell-hound, a monster vomiting fire, a raging fury, a tormenting devil. It is a nature and quality of a guilty conscience to flee and be terrified, even when all is well, and when prosperity abounds, and to change such prosperity into danger and death. (*Luther.*) *A burdened memory*.—A dying man, floating about on the wreck of the *Central American*, thought he heard his mother's voice saying, "Johnny, did you take your sister's grapes?" Thirty years before his sister was dying of consumption, and he had secretly eaten some choice grapes sent her by a friend. For twenty years the words had passed from his recollection. What have we really forgotten?

Ver. 22. Do not sin against the child.—*Do not sin against the child*.—Thus Reuben reminded his brethren of his admonition concerning Joseph—thus would I address you with regard to your own children. Note the words of the text: "Spake I not unto you saying, Do not sin against the child?" The essence of sin lies in its being committed against God. The sword of sin cuts both ways, it not only contends against God but against His creatures too. It is a double evil. Like a bursting shell, it scatters evil on every side. Every relationship which we sustain involves duty, and consequently, may be perverted into an occasion for sin. The text calls us to consider one particular form of sin, namely, sinning against a child, and it is of that I intend to speak this morning, looking up to the Father of spirits that He would teach me to speak aright. **WHAT IS THIS WHICH HAS BEEN SAID TO US?** "Do not sin against the child." This warning may be suitable for every one of us without exception, for those who are not parents, and who are not teachers of the young are nevertheless bound to remember that they are in a commonwealth of which young people make up a very considerable part. Little eyes are so quick to observe the actions of those who are grown up, that adults should be careful what they do. I would say to every man who is giving full swing to his passions, if nothing else will check you, at any rate pause awhile when yonder fair-haired girls and lisping children are gazing upon you. If you care not for angels, stop for the sake of yon blue-eyed boy. Let not the leprosy of your sin pollute your offspring more than must be. To the parent the text speaks with a still small voice, to which I trust none of us will be deaf. "Do not sin against the child"—against your own dear child! Yet how many parents do so! If, as I now speak, unconverted parents will be compelled to acknowledge the truthfulness of the accusations I shall lay against them, I hope they will be led to deep and true repentance. There are many parents who neglect altogether the religious education of their children. I remember a woman who was converted at an advanced age, who had been left years before a widow with many children; she was a most exemplary, moral, and industrious

woman, and earning her living by most laborious work, she yet managed to bring up all her family, and settle them in a suitable manner; but after her conversion I think I never saw more bitter tears than those which she shed when she said, "I took care to feed them and clothe their bodies, but I never thought of their souls. Alas! for me, I knew no better; but alas! for them, I left the chief thing undone. The other day I spoke to my eldest son about the things of God, and he told me religion was all a farce, he did not regard a word I said; and well," said she, "might he be an infidel when his mother never said a word by which he could have been led to be a believer." Words were spoken by way of comfort to her, but like Rachel she refused to be comforted, because she said, and said truly, her great opportunity had been thrown away. The best time of effort for a mother had been allowed to pass away unused. Her harvest was passed, and her summer was ended, and her children were not saved. Parents who teach their children to sing the silly, frivolous, and perhaps licentious songs, are sacrificing them to Moloch. Shame is it when from a father's lips the boy hears the first oath, and learns the alphabet of blasphemy. There are crowds of parents upon whose head the blood of their children will certainly descend, because they have launched them on the sea of life with the rudder set towards the rocks, with a false chart, a deceitful compass, and every other appliance for securing eternal shipwreck. The text further bears with equal severity upon the preacher. I feel it chides and chastens me. Preaching is full often too obscure for children; the words are too long, the sentences too involved, the matter too mysterious. Sacred simplicity should be so cultivated by the ambassador of Christ, that lads and lasses should hear intelligently under a good shepherd, and the least lamb should be able to find food. But we must push on. I want the Church of God, and especially this church, to attend carefully to the next few remarks. When teachers and others are earnest about the conversion of children, and some of them are converted, they then come into relationship with the Church, and too often the Lord's people need the advice, "Do not sin against the child." How can a Church so offend? It can do so by not believing in the conversion of children at all. II. WHO SAYS THIS TO US? 1. Nature says it first. The instincts of humanity cry, "Do not sin against the child. It is but a child; it is little; sin not against it." 2. Experience adds its voice to nature, "Do not sin against the child." Hundreds of parents have been brought with sorrow to the grave through the natural result of their own failures and trespasses in reference to their children. They taught the lesson of sin, and the children, having learned it, practised it upon their parents. If you would not stuff your pillow with thorns, do not sin against the child. 3. Conscience repeats the same advice; that inward monitor ceases not to remind us of what is due to God and to His peculiar charge, the weak and feeble. Conscience tells us plainly that we must not sport with responsibilities so vast. 4. The Church adds her voice to that of conscience. "Do not sin against the child," for the children are the Church's hope. Bring them to Christ, that He may put His hands upon them and bless them, that they may become the future teachers and preachers, the pillars and defence of Christ's Church below. 5. God Himself, speaking from the excellent glory, this morning, saith to each one of His servants here, "Do not sin against the child," and I ask that if no other voice be heard, we may all bow before His glorious Majesty, and ask for grace to be willing and obedient. III. Thirdly, having heard the message, WHAT THEN? Only two things. 1. Does not that exhortation startle some of the unconverted and unawakened here? I think if I were as you are, sir, if I had lived to be sixty years of age, and my son had died through drunkenness, or my daughter were at this time living a godless life, and I were unconverted, it would shoot a pang through my heart to think that I should have brought such misery upon them through my neglect of Divine things. 2. Does not this command of this morning press upon every Christian here, not alone upbraiding us, but as arousing our laggard energies, exciting us to something more of diligence and effort? Will you not roll away that reproach which I mentioned just now, which rests upon some of you, because there are schools without teachers? Parents, will you not pray for your children, and even to-day seek to hold up Jesus before them? Will we not all, God helping us, say within ourselves, that we will not longer sin against the child, but in Jesus' name seek to gather His lambs and feed them for Him? (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Do not hurt the child*.—I. How MAY WE SIN AGAINST A CHILD? 1. We may sin against a child first of all by spoiling him. If the peach trees and plum trees that are nailed to the garden walls by a hundred little pieces of cloth could but think and speak, they might very likely say to the gardener so busily at work with the hammer—"Why fasten us up like this,

and forbid our beautiful branches from running on the ground or playing in the breeze. How unkind it is to put so many restraints upon us and leave us so little liberty; let us just for this season run over the wall, along by the wall, or away from the wall, or any way we please." But the gardener, with a smile, would reply, "It is out of kindness I do it, not from mere caprice. Wait until the spring has glided into summer, and all thy branches are decked with snowy bloom. Wait until the summer has mellowed into autumn, and then when thy boughs are laden with fruit, which they never could have borne but for these restrictions, then you will see that all has been done for thy good and to make thy fruit the richer." So, parents, out of very kindness to the child you must sometimes say, "No," and place restrictions on him. 2. There is a second way in which you may sin against a child, the very reverse of that just mentioned, and it is by harshness. 3. A third way of sinning against a child is by bad example. It is Gillsallan who remarks that "any fault in a parent, any inconsistency, any disproportion between profession and practice, or precept and practice, falls upon the child's eye with the force and precision of sunbeams on a daguerreotype plate." On what other ground can you account for the awful proficiency in sin which you find in many a little one? 4. There is a fourth way of sinning against a child which I do not for a moment suppose is followed by any present. It is by selling a child for gain. Would that my Master might enable me to express in language strong enough the indignant thoughts that burn within my breast concerning this miserable traffic in children's souls. Joseph is not the only child that has been sold for a few pieces of silver. Do you ask me what I mean and to what I refer? I answer to the thoughtless wicked practice of setting the child to any kind of work, and placing him amidst any kind of companionship so as to have the benefit of the few pence he may earn. Better starve without it than live by it, for it is nothing less than blood money. 5. Our next point is one that will, I doubt not, include many present. You may sin against the child by neglecting the means for its salvation. II. THERE ARE MANY REASONS WHY WE SHOULD NOT SIN AGAINST THE CHILD. 1. Sin not against him, because he is a child. If you must sin against some one, sin against one of your own size and strength, but it is a dastardly thing and cowardly to sin against a child. The little thing's innocence ought to be its safeguard, and its very weakness should prove its protection. 2. Sin not against the child, because by so doing you may blast his whole life. You may with your foot so alter the course of that tiny little mountain rivulet that, instead of flowing gently down and widening as it goes until it glides through the smiling valley, refreshing thirsty man and beast, it leaps from rock to rock, from crag to crag, falling at last with hideous roar down some black precipice. Oh, the fatal result of turning its course so near the spring. 3. Do not sin, moreover, against the child, because children are Christ's favourites. He ever showed a peculiar sympathy with and care over children. (*A. G. Brown.*) **His blood is required.**—*The heinousness of sin* :—From this, as well as from many other passages of Scripture, may be learnt the unpardonable nature of sin, and that even penitence itself cannot always protect us from the evils which vice naturally brings in its train. And this we see to be continually the case in the world around us. We often perceive that the consequences of one false step, one single error, can never be altogether averted, by any repentance or amendment on the part of the sinner. Suspicion and distrust still cling to him through life, haunting him at every step, and blasting all his prospects. This is the natural course of things; and what is the natural course of things but the will of God, making use of human instruments to manifest to the world His utter abhorrence of even the very appearance of evil. Let us not, then, deceive ourselves in supposing that because God has opened to us a hope of forgiveness, through the death of His Son, sin has thereby lost any of its blackness in His sight. Still less let us imitate the conduct of those who do evil that good may come, and who profanely imagine that God can be glorified by their iniquities. It is true that "there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance"—but the joy arises from the unexpectedness and difficulty of his repentance, and not from his greater acceptableness in the sight of a holy God. Let it then be our earnest labour, from our earliest youth to our latest old age, to keep ourselves as much as possible undefiled in the way, and we shall still feel enough of our original frailty within us, to convince us that we are, after all, but unprofitable servants. Let the magnitude of the price which has been paid for our offences be a proof to us of the heinous nature of sin, and not an occasion of negligence. And let us learn, from the example before us, that guilt, though it may be retrieved, by repentance, from eternal punishment in the next

world, will hardly ever escape from its evil consequences in this—that though the wound may be healed, yet the scar will still remain—and that though we may sin, like Reuben, from weakness rather than from vice, yet from us, like Reuben, will some bitter atonement for our transgression be hereafter required. (*D. Charles.*) *Blood-guiltiness*:—Although it was not certain that Joseph was dead, yet Reuben had too good reason to charge his brethren with blood-guiltiness. They were guilty of a bloody crime even in the eyes of men. No thanks were due to them for the care that Divine Providence took of him, any more than we owe thanks to the murderers of our Lord, because God brought Him again from the dead. We are accountable for those mischiefs that are the probable consequences of our wilful sins, as much as for the real consequences of them, if we had the same reason to dread them. When we repent of such sins, our grief on the whole will not be so painful as it would have been if God had not prevented the fatal effects which we had reason to dread; but the sin is the same, and the grief with which we ought to lament the sin is the same, only it is to be mingled with thankfulness and joy in that mercy which hath counteracted the natural effects of our misconduct. Two pair of combatants go forth to fight a duel. One kills his antagonist. Another fires his pistol with a view to kill his neighbour; but Divine Providence mercifully prevents the shedding of blood. He is no less a murderer in the eye of God than the other, and has the same reason to deplore his bloody purposes. But the other has an additional reason—or bitter grief, because God hath suffered him to execute his bloody purpose, and to send into the other world a fellow-creature, who died in an act of wickedness like his own. You will all say, that whatever crimes are chargeable upon you, the guilt of blood is not in your skirts. Joseph's brethren might probably have said the same thing. They do not say, We are guilty of our brother's blood, but, We are guilty of turning a deaf ear to his mournful cries. Reuben, however, does not hesitate to charge them in direct terms with the guilt of blood; and we do not find that they had the courage to contradict him. They could not but see that their cruelty to Joseph had brought on, or might have brought on, his death. Isaiah tells the people of his own time, that their hands were full of blood (Isa. i. 15). It is not to be supposed that the generality of the people were chargeable with that kind of murder which would have exposed them to an ignominious death by the laws of their country. But in the eyes of the great Judge, they were stained with blood in such a manner, that when they made many prayers with hands stretched out to His throne of mercy, He turned away His eyes from beholding them, and His ears from hearing their supplication (Isa. i. 15). (*G. Lawson, D.D.*)

Ver. 24. He turned himself about from them and wept.—*Joseph's feelings on seeing his brethren*:—After the lapse of twenty years, Joseph on seeing his brethren wept. Why, he might have been vengeful! It is easy for us glibly to read the words, "Joseph turned himself about and wept." But consider what the words might have been! We oftentimes see results, not processes. We do not see how men have had to bind themselves down, crucify themselves—hands, feet, head, and side—and undergo death in the presence of God, before they could look society in the face with anything like benignity and gentleness and forgiveness. What the words might have been! Joseph, when he saw his brethren, might have said, "Now I have you! Once you put me in a pit—I shall shake you over hell; once you sold me—I will imprison you and torture you day and night; you smote me with whips—I shall scourge you with scorpions! It shall be easier to go through a circle of fire than to escape my just and indignant vengeance to-day!" He might have said, "I shall operate upon the law, 'A tooth for a tooth and an eye for an eye.'" That is the law of nature; that is elementary morality. It is not vengeance, it is not resentment; it is alphabetic justice—justice at its lowest point—incipient righteousness. It is not two eyes for an eye, two teeth for a tooth; but an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a blow for a blow, a pit for a pit, selling for selling, and so on. A great many men are perfectly content with elementary morality and alphabetic justice. People don't educate themselves from this kind of righteousness into Christian nobility of disposition. It is not a question of education; it is a question of sanctification. Few men can rise beyond mere justice. Many men find in mere justice all the moral satisfaction which their shallow natures require; they cannot see that mercy is the very highest point in justice, and that when a man stoops to forgive he becomes a prince and a king and a crowned ruler in the house and kingdom of God. It requires all that God can do to teach men this: That there is something higher than the law of retaliation.

that forgiveness is better than resentment, and that to release men is oftentimes—if done from moral consideration and not from moral neglect—the highest form of Christian justice. But revenge is sweet! I am afraid that some of us like just a little revenge; not that we would ourselves personally and directly inflict it, but if our enemies could, somehow or another, be tripped up, and tumble half way at least into a pit, we should not feel that compunction and sorrow and distress of soul which, sentimentally, appears to be so very fine and beautiful. Nothing but God the Holy Ghost can train a man to this greatness of answering the memory of injury with tears, and accepting processes in which men only appear to have a part, as if God, after all, had been over-ruling and directing the whole scheme. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The secret sorrows of men*:—"And Joseph turned himself about from them and wept." Afterwards he left their presence and went into his chamber and wept. Think of the secret sorrows of men! The tears did not flow in the presence of the ten men. The tears were shed in secret. We do not know one another altogether, because there is a private life. There are secret experiences. Some of us are two men. Joseph was two men. He spake roughly unto his brethren. He put it on, he assumed roughness for the occasion. But if you had seen him when he had got away into his secret chamber, no woman ever shed hotter, bitterer tears than streamed from that man's eyes. We do not know one another altogether. We come to false conclusions about each other's character and disposition. Many a time we say about men, "They are very harsh, rough, abrupt"; not knowing that they have other days when their very souls are dissolved within them; that they can suffer more in one hour than shallower natures could endure in an eternity. Let us be hopeful about the very worst of men. Some men cannot cry in public. Some men are unfortunately afflicted with coarse, harsh voices, which get for them a reputation for austerity, unkindliness, ungeniality. Other men are gifted with fairness and openness of countenance, gentleness and tunefulness of voice. When they curse and swear it seems as though they were half praying, or just about to enter into some religious exercise. When they speak, when they smile, they get a reputation for being very amiable men, yet they do not know what amiability is. They have no secret life. They weep for reputation; they make their tears an investment for a paltry renown. We do not want all our history to be known. We are content for men to read a little of what they see on the outside, and they profoundly mistake that oftentimes. But the secret history, the inner room of life, what we are and what we do when we are alone, no man can ever tell—the dearest, truest, tenderest friend can never understand. Do not let us treat Joseph's tears lightly. Under this feeling there are great moral principles and moral impulses. The man might have been stern, vengeful, resentful. Instead of that he is tender as a forgiving sister. When he looks he yearns, when he listens to their voices all the gladness and none of the bitterness of his old home comes back again on his soul. (*Ibid.*) *Joseph's emotion*:—"The hearing of the bitter reflections made by his brethren, upon their barbarous treatment of himself, brought rivers of waters from Joseph's eyes. Many passions, many unpleasant and many pleasant remembrances, struggled together in his mind. He tenderly sympathized with the distress of his brethren. He was grieved when he found it necessary to inflict such grief upon men so dear to him, after all they had done to ruin his comfort. He wept at the remembrance of that anguish which he had felt in the day of his calamity, and of the unavailing applications to his hard-hearted brethren, extorted by strong necessity and bitter anguish. He called to mind his afflictions and his misery, the wormwood and the gall; but he remembered also how the Lord had sent from above, and taken and drawn him out of many waters, and set him in a large place, and established his goings. Although Joseph was now exalted to glory and power, he was not in the place where all tears are wiped from every eye. We must in this world weep often, even for ourselves; we must often weep for our friends; but "they that sow in tears shall reap in joy." He that "goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Joseph wished not that his brethren should see his tears. When he found he could not refrain, he turned himself from them and wept. Tears shed in secret are the truest indication of the heart. Jeremiah wept in secret places for the calamities coming upon his people, when the Lord's flock was to be carried away captive. (*G. Lawson, D.D.*) Took from them Simeon, and bound him.—*Harsh steps sometimes necessary*:—"The circumstances of the case required such a behaviour from Joseph as ought not to be made a precedent, unless similar circumstances, or different cir-

circumstances of a very uncommon kind, render it advisable. It was not sufficient to satisfy Joseph that he heard his brethren sorely regret their conduct towards himself. In the judgment of charity, he hoped their repentance was sincere; but farther proofs of their sincerity were requisite, before he could place that confidence which he wished to do, in any professions they might have made. Parents are not to be blamed when they forgive their offending but penitent children, although they watch over them with anxious jealousy, lest they should not "bring forth fruits meet for repentance." The surgeon is not to be blamed although he give great pain to his patient, by incisions deeper than appear to ordinary beholders to be necessary. Joseph had too good reason to know the stubborn spirit of some of his brethren, and in particular of Simeon; and who knows but he had particular directions from God about the proper means for taming it? During the two or three days of his brethren's imprisonment, he had time to acknowledge the Lord in this important affair, and the Lord directed his steps. You must not be rash in passing judgment on men's conduct. "A tree," says our Lord, "is known by its fruit." And yet there are cases in which the fruit is to be judged of from the tree. If a good man does actions that are certainly bad, that charity which rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, will not hinder you from assigning them that character which they deserve. But if actions are dubious, charity, which believeth all things, hopeth all things, forbids you to pronounce them bad till better evidence appear. "He bound Simeon before their eyes." This circumstance of Simeon's imprisonment puts us in mind of Nebuchadnezzar's cruelty to Zedekiah, king of Judah, whose sons he slew before their father's eyes, and then caused his eyes to be put out, that he might never behold another object. His intention was to double the calamities of the loss of sight, and of the murder of his children. But those actions may be not only different, but opposite in their nature, which present the same appearance when viewed with a careless eye. An enemy wounds that he may destroy, "but faithful are the wounds of a friend." All Joseph's brethren now with him, except Reuben, needed severe rebukes; and no reproofs of the tongue were so likely to subdue their haughty spirit, as the sight of the distress of their brother and companion in iniquity. But it is probable that Joseph's chief design in presenting this melancholy spectacle to their eyes was, that they might be excited to return more speedily with their younger brother, whom Joseph was impatient to see. The eye affects the heart. Envy hindered them from regarding the distress of Joseph in the pit; but it was to be hoped that they would compassionate the sufferings of that brother who had never offended them by his dreams, nor received from his father a coat of divers colours. We cannot pretend either to the power or to the wisdom of Joseph. We do not enjoy such intercourse with Heaven by immediate revelation as he frequently enjoyed; and therefore, it would be presumptuous in us to pretend to take such methods as he employed, to humble the spirits of those who have offended us. We have never met with usage that can be compared to the treatment which he had received from his brethren. We must not, however, hope to pass through life without trials to our patience and meekness. "Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among us? let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom." (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 25-28. **My money is restored; and lo, it is even in my sack: and their hearts failed them.**—*The miseries of an awakened conscience.*—I. THEY PURSUE THE SINNER EVERYWHERE. II. THEY DRIVE THE SINNER TO PUT THE WORST CONSTRUCTION UPON EVERY EVENT. III. THEY ARE INTENDED TO LEAD THE SINNER TO REPENTANCE. (*T. H. Leale.*) **The money returned:**—I. THE RETURN. Affairs in Egypt strangely settled, they set out on their return. They have been treated with a perplexing mixture of kindness and harshness. They have provision for their journey; but they remember the prison, and the hostage they have left behind. What shall they say to their father? Once they returned without Joseph. He scarcely recovered from that blow. Now they are without Simeon, and must demand Benjamin. How great their perplexity! They thought of Joseph when in the presence of the lord of Egypt; do they think of him now? By the very road they were travelling they saw him borne away years before. They were enveloped in mystery. The old man at home among his hungry household, and their own children awaiting their return. Simeon's children, too, to meet; and no father brought back to them. II. THE DISCOVERY. Thus perplexed, and anxiously anticipating the result, they arrive at one of the inns, or khans, at which the caravans stopped to rest. An ass needs provender. A sack is opened. The money is dis-

covered. Consternation. What can it all mean? Did they reflect on the money for which they had once sold a brother? Probably Joseph's purchasers once lodged with their newly bought slave in that very inn, and talked of the sum they had given, as these men were now talking of the money they had found. This money boded no good. An unheard-of thing, that a seller should return the money. Joseph very likely returned the money to ensure their return; lest they might need food and not have money to buy it. A new thing to tell their father. III. THE FAMILY CONSTERNATION. They arrive at home. The first greetings over, inquiries are made. Where is Simeon? They relate the history of their adventures and Simeon's detention. While they relate this strange history they open their sacks. A new discovery. All the money returned! Fear seizes the whole family. It is a new thing in the story of trade. May have been regarded by them as a pretext for the Egyptians coming and carrying them all away into captivity. Jacob especially filled with dread. He has now lost two sons, and sees in the returned money a new occasion of alarm. "All these things are against me." But they were all for him, because a son was in it all. "All things shall work together for the good of them who love God," because another Son—Jesus Christ—is concerned in our welfare. Learn: I. Past sins cast their shadow on the present, and overcast the future. II. The wicked fleeth when no man pursueth. III. Conscience converts things strange into things ominous. IV. Our ignorance of Divine plans causes us to charge God foolishly. V. No money needed to procure the bread of life. "In my hand no price I bring." Jesus Christ is an "unspeakable gift." (J. C. Gray.) *A sorrowful company* :—"They said one to another, What is this that God hath done unto us?" They all spoke the same language of despondency. None of them, as far as we find, administered any comfort to his companions. It is an unhappy thing, when, in a company of men, not one is found who can speak a word in season, for advice or consolation to his companions in trouble. It is reported, that in a time of persecution, some faithful ministers met together to deliberate about their duty. All of them for a time were silent, or if anything was said, it tended only to increase the general dejection. At last they all recovered their spirits, at hearing one of their number say, "We are all immortal till our work is done." These few words gave effect to a truth, which they already knew, that their days were numbered by a Divine decree, and that it was not in the power of all the men on earth to cut them off from the land of the living a moment before the time appointed by the wisdom and love of that God whom they served. (G. Lawson, D.D.) *The money found in the sack* :—1. See how sin pursues the sinner. Like an enemy that he cannot shake off, ready at any moment to accuse and torment. And it will do more against him hereafter, unless taken away. 2. Observe the fear of these men. They were bold, hard men; yet see how their heart fails them. Whom do they fear? The stern Egyptian ruler? No. Their own thoughts, their own secret, their own sin. Nothing makes men so fearful as an evil conscience. 3. But their thoughts turned not to their sin alone, but to God. They saw His hand in what befell them. This, as far as it went, was a wholesome thought. What they said was quite true; it was God that was dealing with them. It was well that they should feel it. (F. Bourdillon.)

Vers. 29-35. *They came unto Jacob.*—*Lessons* :—1. Providence carrieth guilty souls in, through, and out of temporal dangers at His will. 2. Gracious fathers are gratified sometimes from God by safe return of sinful children. 3. Reason will instruct men to declare all events of Providence furthering, or hindering in the way (ver. 29). 4. In relation of providential events truth must be declared; yet no need of telling all. 5. In relating providences, evil men are willing to hide sins which caused them. 6. It concerns suspected and accused persons to declare what is required for their purgation. Upon this these sons of Jacob make this narration of themselves and others (vers. 30-34). (G. Hughes, B.D.) *Lessons* :—1. Providence ordereth to creatures strange things at home, as well as abroad. 2. God ordereth good in events to men, which they are apt to think bad. 3. Mistakes of Providence may make men fear where no cause is (ver. 35). (Ibid.) *Money causing fear* :—Gold and silver are bright metals. They dazzle the eye of the greater part of mankind. Achan saw a gold wedge, and, in defiance of an awful curse, took it to his tent. Yet when Jacob and his sons saw heaps of money in the mouths of their sacks, they were terrified as if they had seen a serpent. For what reason were they afraid at a sight so generally desired? They thought that this money was a snare laid for their lives. And have not many rich men still

greater reason to tremble when they look at their gold and silver? All money unjustly got, or unrighteously or unmercifully kept, is a snare to the possessor, and will rise up to witness against him in the day of accounts. Such riches are corrupted and cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against the owners, and eat their flesh as it were fire. But Jacob and his sons had no good reason to be afraid when they saw the money. It came not from an artful knave, but from a kind son and brother, who was tenderly solicitous about his father and brethren, that they should not come to poverty. Our fears often proceed from our ignorance and mistake. We are afraid of those evils that will never come, and stand in no fear of those that will come. Happy are they who can commit all their affairs to Him who knows everything that shall befall us. Jacob's sons were afraid at the inn, when they were told of money in one of their sacks. But the fears which they had endeavoured to forget were awakened anew at the opening of all their sacks. Every little circumstance heightens the distress of minds already dejected; and therefore, in dangerous circumstances, it is necessary to our peace and happiness to have our minds fortified with the consolations of God. "The wicked fleeth when no man pursueth, but the righteous is bold as a lion." (*G. Lawson, D.D.*)

Ver. 36. *All these things are against me.*—*The conflict of life*:—So spoke the patriarch Jacob when Joseph had been made away with, Simeon was detained in Egypt, Benjamin threatened, and his remaining sons were suspected by him and distrusted; when at his door was a grievous famine, enemies or strangers round about, evil in prospect, and in the past a number of sad remembrances. Thus did Almighty God remind His people that the world was not their rest. I. In Jacob is prefigured the Christian. What he said in dejection of mind, the Christian must say, not in dejection, not in complaint or impatience, but calmly, as if confessing a doctrine—"All these things are against me," but it is my portion; they are against me, that I may fight with and overcome them." If there were no enemy, there could be no conflict; were there no trouble, there could be no faith; were there no trial, there could be no love; were there no fear, there could be no hope. II. To passages like these it is natural to object, that they do not belong to the present time, that so far from Christians being in trouble because they are Christians, it is those who are not Christians who are under persecution. The answer is that affliction, hardship and distress are the Christian's portion, both promised and bestowed, though at first sight they seem not to be. If Christians are in prosperity, not in adversity, it is because, by disobedience, they have forfeited the promise and privilege of affliction. III. Take up thy portion then, Christian soul, and weigh it well, and learn to love it. (*J. H. Newman, D.D.*) *The increasing troubles of Jacob's old age*.—I. THE CAUSES WHICH LED TO THEM. 1. The strange perplexity into which his sons had been brought. 2. The opening again of an old wound (ver. 32). 3. The loss of all earthly hope. II. THE WEAKNESSES IN JACOB'S CHARACTER WHICH THEY REVEAL. 1. Querulousness and despondency. 2. Want of strong faith in God. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Mistaking God's providences*:—There is nothing more characteristic or more striking in the nature of man than the alternations—often very rapid—to which he is subject of seasons of self-confidence and gloom. I. A NATURAL EXCLAMATION. 1. Human nature in similar circumstances is continually making it. I might go further, and say that human nature, even after it has been strengthened and elevated by Christianity, is still continually prone to pass this judgment upon the providence of God. When lately the edifice of fortune, which perhaps long years of energy and honesty had piled, was in an instant stricken as by a bolt from heaven, and fell crumbling around you, leaving you all unsheltered in a cold, unpitiful world, could you see a proof of infinite tenderness, a sign of happiness, in the smoking ruins at your feet? 2. Human nature cannot by itself do otherwise than give this answer. There is, and can be found, no comfort, no strengthening, for man in mere nature, and man himself has an instinctive consciousness of this. The highest effort of philosophy, strictly so called, was simply to harden man—to cure his wounded sensibilities by first destroying them. Christianity alone can lay open to man's tearful gaze the vision of two worlds, and, pouring its sustaining, enlightening influences into his soul, enable him to apprehend the truth that "the sufferings," &c. (Rom. viii. 18). II. AIDS TO FAITH FURNISHED BY REASON AND EXPERIENCE. Are there not considerations furnished to us from these sources which should lead us to regard all God's dealings with us, even those which seem to us the heaviest and darkest, as not really against us, but for us? 1. We should be led to this conclusion by the consideration

of God's character. "God is love," and "I, the Lord, change not." 2. We should be led to this conclusion by the consideration of our own present ignorance in all things. What can we see of the outgoings of the All-wise and the All-good other than the veriest hem of His garment? We see a few isolated facts, but the hidden connections, the far reaching purposes, the eternal consequences of the mighty plan are entirely covered up from our eyes. You have sometimes seen from a hill-side, a valley over the undulating floor of which there has been laid out a heavy mantle of mist. The spires of the churches rise above it. Here and there you seem to catch the glistening of a roof or of a vane. Here and there a higher house, or some little eminence, or some tree-tops islanded in vapour, are beheld. But the lower and connecting objects—the linking line of the roads, the plan and foundation of the whole—are completely hidden from our gaze. And this is just the view which is permitted to us of the providence of God. We see a few isolated facts, and that is all. How absurd then, in reason, to attempt to determine the character of the Divine dealings with us upon such a view! How unjust are we when we do so to our God! 3. We should be led to a patient submission to God's will, and a belief that even His severest visitations are the effects and evidences of His love, from a consideration of the present moral effects of trial and suffering manifested to us by experience. (1) This discipline is generally necessary to break off our connections with this world and to fix them on heaven. We should want no better rest if all were peace here. We should want no deeper joy if no blackness of affliction ever rested on our earthly path. (2) Only thus can the highest style of character be formed. Affliction gives balance to the character, softens the asperities of nature, gives tone and depth to all our emotions, and places us nearer to the Son of Man, who was also the Son of God. Concluding lessons: 1. Contentment. This a day of great hopes, desires, endeavours, and disappointments. 2. Trust in God (Job xiii. 15). (*W. Rudder, D.D.*) *A faithless lament:—* I. *ATHĒISTIC.* He makes no mention of God. For the moment he has forgotten how the Lord had led him at first to Laban's house, and had given him prosperity during his twenty-one years' sojourn in Padan-aram; how He had cared for him when he left his father-in-law; how He had mollified for him the anger of Esau; how He had blessed him at Penuel after the night-long wrestling; and how He had protected him at the time when the violence of some of his sons might have drawn upon him the vengeance of the Shechemites. Now God was in this new trial as much and as really as He was in these old ones, and if Jacob had remembered that, he would not have spoken as he did. We shall see, indeed, that after a while, when his sons were bidding him farewell on their departure for Egypt for more food, he came back to his old trustfulness, and offered for them this prayer: "God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." But at the first, when the full shadow of his trouble passed over him, God was to him, for the moment, eclipsed, and that only made his trial heavier. II. *UNTRUE.* All these things were not against him. They were really working together for his good. They were onward steps in that process by which he was to recover his long-lost son, and was to have conferred upon him those years of happiness that, as we read the history, seem to us to be like the Sabbath of his early life, which, after the labour and sorrow of the week, he was enabled to spend in rest, in thankfulness, and in joy. How he would blame himself for these hasty words in those latter days, when he went to see Joseph in his palace, and took his grandsons between his knees; and I can imagine him saying to the God of his fathers, after all the riddle of his life had been unfolded to him, "Now I know the thoughts of Thy heart towards me, and I bless Thee that they were thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give me this delightful end." 1. Now, from this analysis of Jacob's experience, we may learn, in the first place, that God is in all the events of our lives. Many of us are ready enough to admit that He is in the prosperous things, but when trouble comes upon us we attribute that solely to others, and in that way we lose the comfort which otherwise we might have enjoyed under its endurance. The mercies of a lifetime are often ignored by us under the bitterness of a single trial; and God, who has been our friend for years, is forgotten altogether, while we passionately condemn some others as the authors of our affliction. But we shall never find consolation that way. The first thing we ought to say regarding every trial is, "It is the Lord." If, instead of turning on his sons, Jacob had only turned to his God, he would have been sustained; and we may be sure of this, that trouble never yet overwhelmed a man so long as he could see God in it. 2. Then, again, from our

analysis of Jacob's case, we ought to learn to pass no sentence of condemnation on God's work until it is completed. "Judge nothing before the time." We must not argue, from the pain of a part of the process, that there is evil intended to us in the result of the whole. The surgeon has a stern aspect, and apparently an unfeeling hand, when he cuts into the diseased organ or amputates the broken limb, but he is working towards healing all the time. And so it is with God and the discipline of His children. Wait until He finish His work before you condemn it.

3. Finally, if these two things be true, that God is in our trials, and that the outcome of them all under His supervision will be good, we may surely stay ourselves in trouble by earnest prayer. "Is any among you afflicted, let him pray." We have to deal with no blind, remorseless law. The Lord Jesus has taught us to say, "Our Father," and when we enter fully into the meaning of these words, and recognize clearly that His providence is universal, we shall have no difficulty in saying "Thy will be done"; for the Father's will is always love to His own children. That will sustain us while we are on earth. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *The smiling face behind the frowning providence*:—I. WE HAVE UNQUALIFIED ASSURANCE THAT GOD IS THE FRIEND OF HIS PEOPLE; AND THAT HE IS DIRECTING AND CONTROLLING ALL THINGS FOR THEIR HIGHEST GOOD. Why, then, should we ever fall into despair? II. WE HAVE THE EVIDENCE OF GOD'S LOVE TO US IN THE DEATH OF HIS SON ON OUR BEHALF. We may, therefore, rest satisfied that He will not harm us by any of the events of His providence. There are not two Gods, one of providence, and one of grace. III. WE HAVE THE TESTIMONY OF MANY OF GOD'S PEOPLE TO THE FACT THAT THOSE THINGS WHICH WERE APPARENTLY HARDEST IN THEIR LOTS, WERE AFTER ALL MOST BLESSED TO THEM. It is easy to see how that was the case in the history of Jacob which has been before us. But it is equally conspicuous in the history of Abraham. But it has been the same with all God's saints. The head-waters which have fed the main tributaries to their character, have been away up in some lonely tarn of trial among the mountains, where their souls were sore pressed by the affliction that came upon them. IV. YOU MAY FIND FROM YOUR OWN PAST EXPERIENCE THAT YOUR TRIALS WILL END IN YOUR SPIRITUAL PROFIT. You are different from any disciples of Jesus whom I have ever known, if you be not ready to say that the greatest starts your spiritual growth has taken have been occasioned by trial. In the early spring-time, after the seed has been put into the ground, and has begun to sprout out of the earth, there come those cloudy, close, damp, steamy days, which we all know so well and dislike so much. The sun is rarely visible; the heat is more oppressive and relaxing than in the dog-days; and everybody is uncomfortable. We would rather have a pelting rain for a few hours and be done with it, or we would infinitely prefer the cloudless sky and blazing sun of midsummer. Yes, but then these are the "fine growing days" which the farmer loves, when things seem to be shooting up from the earth with such rapidity that you almost think you can see them moving. So, the "fine growing days" of the soul are not its most agreeable ones. They are the close, damp, depressing ones, in which, as with Paul and his fellow-passengers in the storm, no sun appears by day, and no star visible by night. Or, to illustrate it yet in another way: There is a shuddering dread comes over one as he sees the lightning leap from the cloud, and light up the midnight gloom with its glare; but if the flash reveal to us that we are standing on the edge of a precipice over which we are in danger of falling, we will welcome it in spite of our alarm, and thank God for the providence that sent it just then. Now, it is so sometimes that trial has come to us, and we have forgotten the forked fury of the flaming thunderbolt in our gratitude for the warning which it gave so timely. Who has not known of such times in his history? and with such experiences behind us, how can we permit ourselves to say of any circumstances, however untoward they may seem, "All these things are against us"? Take to yourselves the support which these considerations are fitted to supply. If I have spoken truly, then—1. No matter what your trials may be, you may be at peace. You are in God's hands. Where could you be better? Where would you be rather? 2. You may see new reason for patience. "Judge nothing before the time." Let God finish His work, and when you can look back upon the beginning from the end, you will not need anyone to vindicate His ways to you. 3. You may surely stay yourselves by earnest prayer. (*Ibid.*) *Lessons*:—I. A PRINCIPLE OR AFFECTION, WHICH IS IN ITSELF GOOD, WHEN ALLOWED TO OPERATE EITHER EXCESSIVELY OR PARTIALLY, MAY GIVE RISE TO SENTIMENTS AND FEELINGS, AS WELL AS TO WORDS AND ACTIONS, SUCH AS CANNOT BE JUSTIFIED. THE PRINCIPLE TO WHICH I NOW REFER, AS YOU WILL AT ONCE CONJECTURE, IS THAT OF PARENTAL AFFECTION. But in the instance before

us, amiable as was the principle in itself, it led the aged patriarch to the feeling and the utterance of what could not be vindicated. For example—1. His affection for Joseph and Benjamin made him unreasonable to his other sons. 2. Under the predominant influence of his parental solicitudes, Jacob forgot for the time the hand of his God. “Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away. All these things are against me.” Things may often be set in a more striking light by means of contrast. And Jacob not only overlooked the hand of God; he manifested criminal distrust of the faithfulness and goodness of the God of the covenant; distrust of that word which he had never yet known to fail, and of that ever-watchful care to which heretofore he had been so deeply indebted: “All these things are against me.” Many a time had the Lord appeared to Jacob. Many an assurance had He given him of His love and care. II. THAT THERE IS GREAT DANGER, ON THE PART OF CREATURES, IN FORMING HASTY CONCLUSIONS RESPECTING ANY PARTS OF THE DIVINE ADMINISTRATION. How ignorant and short-sighted was the good old saint! He saw not—and who does?—“what a day was to bring forth.” The mission of Benjamin was to be the release of Simeon. Benjamin was to be made happy in the meeting of his own maternal brother. And Jacob himself was to get tidings of his long-lost boy, that would be the renewing of the youth of his aged spirit. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*) *All these things—a sermon with three texts*:—The patriarch must needs use the expression, “ALL THESE THINGS.” He had gone through the catalogue: there were but three items at the most, and yet nothing narrower than “All these things are against me” will suit him. “All these things,” indeed! And what a little “all” compared with the benefits of God! What an insignificant “all” compared with the sufferings of our covenant Head! What a trifling “all” compared with the amazing weight of glory which shall soon be revealed in us! I. Our first text is the EXCLAMATION OF UNBELIEF: “All these things are against me.” 1. In Jacob’s case it was a very plausible verdict. Yet plausible as was the old man’s mournful conclusion, it was not correct; and hence let us learn to forbear rash judgment, and never in any case conclude against the faithfulness of the Lord. 2. Jacob’s exclamation was most evidently exaggerated—exaggerated in the term he used, “All these things,” for there were but three evils at the most; exaggerated, too, in most of the statements. You would suppose, from the patriarch’s language, that beyond all doubt, Simeon had fallen a victim in Egypt, and that Benjamin was demanded with a view to his instant execution; but where was evidence to support this assertion? We frequently talk of our sorrows in language larger than the truth would warrant. We write ourselves down as peers in the realms of misery, whereas we do but bear the common burdens of ordinary men. 3. The exclamation of Jacob was also as bitter as it was exaggerated. It led him to make a speech which (however accidentally true), with his information as to his sons, was ungenerous, and even worse. He said, “Me ye have bereaved of my children.” Now, if he really believed that Joseph was torn of beasts, as he appears to have done, he had no right to assail the brethren with a charge of murder; for it was little else. In the case of Simeon, the brethren were perfectly innocent; they had nothing whatever to do with Simeon’s being bound, it was wrong to accuse them so harshly. In the taking away of Benjamin, though there may have been a jealousy against him as aforesaid against Joseph, yet most certainly the brethren were not to blame. 4. Observe that this speech was rather carnal than spiritual. You see more of human affections than of grace-wrought faith; more of the calculator than the believer; more of Jacob than of Israel. Jacob is more the man and less the man of God than we might have expected him to have been. See how he dwells upon his bereavements! Notice, in the case before us, the patriarch’s unbelieving observation was quite unwarranted by his past history. Could Jacob think of Bethel, and yet say, “All these things are against me”? Could he forget Peniel, and the place where he wrestled and prevailed at the brook Jabbok? 5. Still keeping to Jacob’s exclamation, let me observe that it was altogether erroneous. Not a syllable that he spoke was absolutely true. “Joseph is not.” And yet, poor Jacob, Joseph is. Thou thinkest the beasts have devoured him, but he is ruler over all the land of Egypt, and thou shalt kiss his cheeks ere long. “Simeon is not”; wrong again, good father, for Simeon is alive, though for his good, to cool his hot and headlong spirit, Joseph has laid him by the heels a little. And as to Benjamin, whom thou sayest they wish to take away, he is to go and see his brother Joseph, who longs to embrace him, and will return him to thee in peace. Not one of all these things is against thee. Our best days have been those which we thought our worst. Probably we are never so

much in prosperity as when plunged in adversity. No summer days contribute so much to the healthy growth of our souls as those sharp wintry nights which are so trying to us. We fear that we are being destroyed, and our inner life is at that moment being most effectually preserved. 6. Being wrong in judgment, the good old man was led to unwise acting and speaking, for he said, "My son shall not go down with you." The unbelieving generally do stupid things. We conclude that God is against us, and then we act in such a way as to bring troubles upon ourselves which otherwise would not have come. 7. And notice, once more, that good old Jacob lived to find in actual experience that he had been wrong from beginning to end. We do not all live to see what fools we have been, but Jacob did. II. Turn now to the thirty-eighth chapter of Isaiah, and the sixteenth verse, where you have THE PHILOSOPHY OF EXPERIENCE: "O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit." Unbelief saith, "All these things are against me"; enlightened experience saith, "In all these things is the life of my spirit." The passage is taken from the prayer of Hezekiah after he was raised from his sick bed. 1. Our spirits, under God, live by passing through the sorrows of the present; for first, let me remind you, that by these trials and afflictions we live, because they are medicinal. There are spiritual diseases which would corrupt our spirit if not checked, kept down, and destroyed as to their reigning power by the daily cross which the Lord lays upon our shoulders. Just as the fever must be held in check by the bitter draught of quinine, so must the bitter cup of affliction rebuke our rising pride and worldliness. 2. Afflictions, again, are stimulative. We are all apt to grow slothful. There is an old story in the Greek annals, of a soldier under Antigonius who had a disease about him, an extremely painful one, likely to bring him soon to the grave. Always first in the ranks was this soldier, and in the hottest part of the fray; he was always to be seen leading the van, the bravest of the brave, because his pain prompted him to fight that he might forget it; and he feared not death because he knew that in any case he had not long to live. Antigonius, who greatly admired the valour of his soldier, finding out that he suffered from a disease, had him cured by one of the most eminent physicians of the day, but alas! from that moment the warrior was absent from the front of the battle. He now sought his ease, for, as he remarked to his companions, he had something worth living for—health, home, family, and other comforts, and he would not risk his life now as aforetime. So when our troubles are many, we are made courageous in serving our God, we feel that we have nothing to live for in this world, and we are driven by hope of the world to come, to exhibit zeal, self-denial, and industry; but how often is it otherwise in better times? for then the joys and pleasures of this world make it hard for us to remember the world to come, and we sink into inglorious ease. 3. Our troubles are a great educational process. We are at school now, and are not yet fully instructed. 4. So, too, trials and tribulations are the life of our spirit, because they are preparative for that higher life in which the spirit shall truly live. This is the place for washing our robes—yonder is the place for wearing them; this is the place for tuning our hearts, and discord is inevitable to that work; but yonder is the abode of unbroken harmony. III. I close with my third text, and I think you may almost guess it, it tells of THE TRIUMPH OF FAITH. Turn now to the eighth chapter of Romans, and the thirty-seventh verse: "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." "All these things are against us." Very well, we could not conquer them if they were not against us; but they are the life of our spirit—and as Samson found honey in the lion, so we, though these things roar upon us, shall find food within them. Trials threaten our death, but they promote our life. I want you to be sure to notice the uniform expression, "All these things are against me." "In all these things is the life of my spirit," and now, "In all these things we are more than conquerors." The list is just as comprehensive in the best text as in the worst. Nay, poor Jacob's "All these things" only referred to three; but look at Paul's list: tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword—the list is longer, darker, blacker, fiercer, sterner, but still we triumph—"In all these things we are more than conquerors." Observe then, that the believing Christian enjoys present triumph over all his troubles. What does Paul mean by saying that believers are "more than conquerors"? Is it not this, that with the conqueror there is a time when his triumph is in jeopardy? But it is never so with the believer; he grasps the victory at once by an act of faith. No "ifs," "buts," "per-adventures," for him. He is conqueror at once, for God is on his side. But see how this last text

of mine opens up the great source of comfort. "We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." Did you notice, Jacob said nothing about Him that loved us? No, he could not have been unbelieving if he had thought of Him; and the life of our spirit in trouble very much lies in remembering Him that loved us. It is through Him we conquer because He has conquered. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

A mistaken conclusion:—I. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH HIS PEOPLE, EVEN WHEN HE IS WORKING THEIR DELIVERANCE, AND DESIGNING THEIR GOOD, ARE OFTEN DARK AND INTRICATE, SEEMING TO MAKE MORE AGAINST THEM THAN FOR THEM. Thus it was with Jacob now. God designed the preservation of him and his family in Egypt, by Joseph's advancement there; but how unlikely was the method He took in order to it? II. WHENCE IT IS THAT A CHILD OF GOD MAY BE READY TO CONCLUDE THAT TO BE AGAINST HIM WHICH IS REALLY FOR HIM. 1. This proceeds from their weakness of faith, as to God's wisdom and power, faithfulness and love. 2. A saint is apt to say of what befalls him, all these things are against me, as looking to Providence, and judging by it abstracted from His promise. 3. A child of God may say of what befalls him, all these things are against me, judging by sense. 4. What a saint thus speaks, 'tis as looking down to the present world, and his interest in it. 5. Saints may say of God's dealings, they are against them, as speaking through rashness, and viewing only a part of his work, and not staying to the end. 6. Saints, under the trials they meet with, may be tempted to say, all these things are against us, as not duly attending to the method of God's dealing with His people, and their own and others' experience of the happy purposes He has served by it.

III. HOW MAY IT BE CONCLUDED, THAT WHAT THE PEOPLE OF GOD APPREHEND TO BE AGAINST THEM, SHALL IN THE ISSUE MAKE REALLY FOR THEM? 1. From God's relation to them. He is their God in covenant, their tender Father, and so in a peculiar manner concerned about them. 2. From His love to them. 3. From His express promises (Isa. xliii. 1, 2). IV. WHY GOD CHOOSES TO CARRY ON HIS PEOPLE'S GOOD BY WAYS, TO APPEARANCE, THE MOST DARK AND THREATENING. 1. For His own glory (John xi. 4). In God's delivering us when we are at the end of our thoughts and hopes, and when ready to give up all for lost, then He appears in His glory, a God powerful, wise, merciful, and faithful indeed. 2. This God does, for the trial and discovery of His people. (1) In their corruption: that they may be more sensible of it, and humbled under it. (2) For the discovery of their graces: either as to their weakness, that they may be labouring after improvement; or as to their strength, that this may appear to His honour and their own comfort. (3) To quicken and make them the more earnest in prayer to Him. (4) To sweeten and endear the mercy He vouchsafes them, after all their doubtings and fears of the contrary. (5) God heightens the difficulties that seem to stand in the way of mercy before us, that we may be enlarged in our thanksgivings for it afterwards. Application: 1. Take heed of judging God's purposes of grace by the external dispensations which make way to bring them into effect. 2. Beg that faith may not fail when all things of sense seem dark and dismal. 3. Beware of entertaining narrow thoughts of God in the deepest distress. Believe Him always the same, whatever changes you meet with. 4. Listen not to what flesh, and sense, or Satan would suggest, derogatory to the power and faithfulness of God. 5. Be assured that all God's providences are accomplishing His promises, though you see not how this will be brought about. 6. Whilst you are so apt to say on earth, that all these things are against me, with the greater earnestness press on towards heaven. And in the light of that world, you will be fully satisfied how all things in the issue were for you, and that all your tears did but prepare you, with the greater relish to enter into that presence of God, where there is fulness of joy, and where there are pleasures for evermore. (D. Wilcox.)

Jacob's complaint:—1. That men may be brought by very different ways to think that all things are against them. Jacob was brought to despond by the simple pressure of adverse circumstances. It was the loss of his children that made him utter the words of my text. Joseph and Simeon were gone. Benjamin was apparently to go next. It was indeed too much for a father's heart. But I wish you to observe, that it had in it nothing of the bitterness of sin. I do not say that Jacob's adversity might not be connected with the faults of his early life. Most probably the judgment of God it was. But I mean that his sorrows were not of a kind to bring his sins to remembrance. I think if the sons of Jacob had said, "all these things are against us," they would have had much more reason for uttering these words than had their father. Depend upon it, it is when our faults have brought us into trouble—when our punishment is the legitimate child of our sins—it is then that we have most reason for believing and for saying, that

"the hand of the Lord is against us." And yet I would have you observe, that even in the case of Joseph's brethren, who were now in his power, and locked by his command in prison, it was not true that all things were against them. Little as they might deserve it, God's hand was over them for good. Thus they were on the eve of prosperity; for, however strange it may seem, still it was certainly true, that the sin of these men against their brother was not only the means of their own prosperity, but was likewise a link in the grand chain of God's providential dealings with the whole race of mankind. 2. Every one knows how frequently he is wrong in his forebodings of evil—how circumstances of evil which he feared would prove fatal to his happiness have turned out entirely different from that which he feared—how often has it been the jaundice of his own eyes, and no defect of the light of heaven, which has made all around him wear a melancholy tint. And, therefore, upon mere general grounds, we strongly condemn those who are always faint hearted, and those who magnify disasters and difficulties in fancying that all things are against them. 3. But I have showed you that there is a divinely appointed way of viewing the circumstances in which we find ourselves placed, so that, by the help of this, we may foresee that they are really for us, when they seem to be against us. Yes, there is such a divinely appointed mode, and if I can only help some of you to look on your condition here upon earth, in that way which God has revealed and has made palpable through His most blessed Son, I shall feel sure that I have not spoken to you in vain. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God? Then, if you do, you will find it impossible to prove that in any condition of life all things can be against you. You will feel an assurance which nothing on earth or hell can shake, that God Himself is for you. Let me take two or three cases by way of example. In the first place, let us take a case of poverty. I suppose that there is nothing so likely to make a man say to himself that all things are against him, as being poor. Jesus Christ was a poor man too. You cannot be so poor as He. What honest man is there without a home? But again, there is a much worse enemy to be found in this world than poverty, and in sight of this enemy, I do not wonder that a person who remembers our Lord's words concerning the narrow road of life, and the broad road of destruction, should sometimes be dismayed. I allude to the fact, that every condition of life, and every period of life, is full of temptation to go astray from the ways of God and of heaven. Christ, by whose name we are called, and whose soldiers we are, condescended to be tempted himself. But again, a man may be brought to the conclusion that all things are against him by the same kind of painful experience as that which made Jacob utter the words of the text. It was the hand of God taking away what was dearest to the heart that made Jacob groan with a sense of the deepest misery. I do not think we need inquire whether Jacob was or was not excusable for uttering this lamentation. God was the judge of this. But we may well remark, that myriads of persons since then have been afflicted in the same manner, and many have given way to the same lament. He who believes on Jesus Christ must never say, under the weight of any affliction, "all these things are against me," because, under the weight of those sorrows which were put upon Christ, He never uttered such words. Once more, let me allude to that moment in every human life which brings a man into immediate contact with the unseen world. Let me speak of death, that one only event which is certain to every one present. It is well for us, while we are in health, and have the use of our faculties, to consider what impression will be made on us when we feel our strength decaying, and are assured either by age or sickness, that our work will soon be done. It is a terrible thing for a man, then, to feel that all is against him; and, no doubt, this feeling does often give rise to very happy results; but, I believe, that this is not the usual result. Certainly, according to my own experience, it is far from being so. I think that, in general, they who have not found out how much there is against them during their life, and how much has to be done in order to cut through the obstacles which stand between their souls and God—I think that they do not find this out in death. They who have lived carelessly, generally die carelessly too. (*Bp. Harvey Goodwin.*) *The methods of Divine Providence*:—He thought everything was against him. But we know that he was wrong. All was for him, both temporally and spiritually. Jacob's exclamation was caused by ignorance. I. I notice THAT GOD WORKS THROUGH SECONDARY INSTRUMENTS. The fore-determined purpose was to provide for Jacob and for his race; and we know that this purpose was accomplished. Jacob spent his declining years in peace and plenty beneath the shadow of his son's greatness. So also was the race secure from the incessant wars and dangers of Canaan. In

the land of Goshen they grew into a nation, till, through the agency of the Egyptian king, God sent them forth upon their destiny a great and conquering people. But think, how many links in the chain of events there were to bring about this result, how many secondary causes were at work! The silent order of nature, the bad passions of man, the apparent accidents of travel, the vain visions of the night, all concurred—but why? Was it some happy accident alone that blended them all together? Do great results spring out of blind causes? or do the accidents of a world of chance accomplish the promises of a God of truth? Surely not? They all concurred because God was in them all, through them all, over them all. II. I notice THE COMPLEXITY AND REACH OF THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT, EXTENDING SO FAR AND INVOLVING SO MUCH AS TO BE WHOLLY BEYOND OUR POWER TO UNDERSTAND IT. Surely none but God can measure God. If He be not beyond our reach and understanding, He cannot be God. We know only that which is before our eyes, and can not measure Him or His doings. III. But, lastly, LET US LEARN TO HAVE CONFIDENCE IN THE LOVE OF GOD AND THE FULFILMENT OF ALL HIS GRACIOUS PURPOSES TOWARDS US. To the blinded eye of the flesh indeed there may seem darkness and trouble on every side of us, our wishes thwarted, our hopes destroyed, our loved ones taken away—every comfort wrecked, till the heart cries out, I have nothing left to live for—yet when that time of bitterness comes to us, let us not forget the promise, “All things work together for good to them that love God”—the exact meaning is—“all things are working together for good,” at this very moment, when the anguish is in thine heart, and the complaint is yet quivering upon thy lips. (*E. Garbett, M.A.*)

Man's ignorance of God's providence:—The plan of our lives is hidden from us, it is only worked out step by step, and we who see a part only and not the whole of which it is the part, grow frightened and perplexed; we are like those who are led along blind-folded by others, and fear to plant our steps firmly on the ground before us; we are as travellers in a strange land who have received directions to take a road which seems unlikely to lead to our destination. God leads His own by a way that they know not, and we, ignorant as we are of the ways of His providence, too often take alarm, and refuse to place implicit trust in our Heavenly Guide; faith refuses to pierce the veil of sense, and we are ready to sit down by the wayside in despair at the very moment when the towers of the heavenly city are ready to burst upon our view. Now, why does God thus deal with us? 1. It is for the trial of our faith. 2. And do not the secret ways of God's providence illustrate brightly His Divine power? He works indeed by means, but His independence of them is shown by the unexpected way in which He orders and employs them. 3. And, lastly, do we not gather the oft-required lesson of increased confidence in Him, who is our God and our all? (*S. W. Skeffington, M.A.*)

Take a comprehensive view of God's dealings with us:—A child might say to a geographer, “You talk about the earth being round! Look on this great crag; look on that deep dell; look on yonder great mountain, and the valley at its feet, and yet you talk about the earth being round.” The geographer would have an instant answer for the child; his view is comprehensive; he does not look at the surface of the world in mere detail; he does not deal with inches, and feet, and yards; he sees a larger world than the child has had time to grasp. He explains what he means by the expression, “The earth is a globe,” and justifies his strange statement. And so it is with God's wonderful dealings towards us: there are great rocks and barren deserts, deep, dank, dark pits, and defiles, and glens, and dells, rugged places that we cannot smooth over at all, and yet when He comes to say to us at the end of the journey, “Now look back; there is the way I have brought you,” we shall be enabled to say, “Thou hast gone before us, and made our way straight.” (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Magnifying our troubles:—Being once surrounded by a dense mist on the Styhead Pass in the Lake District, we felt ourselves to be transported into a world of mystery, where everything was swollen to a size and appearance more vast, more terrible than is usual on this sober planet. A little mountain tarn, scarcely larger than a farmer's horse-pond, expanded into a great lake, whose distant shores were leagues beyond the reach of our poor optics; and as we descended into the valley of Wastwater, the rocks rose on one side like the battlements of heaven, and the descent on the other hand looked like the dreadful lips of a yawning abyss; and yet when one looked back again in the morning's clear light there was nothing very dangerous in the pathway, or terrible in the rocks. The road was a safe though sharp descent, devoid of terrors to ordinary mountain-climbers. In the distance through the fog the shepherd “stalks gigantic,” and his sheep are full-grown lions. Into such blunders do we fall in our life-pilgrimage: a little trouble in the distance

is, through our mistiness, magnified into a crushing adversity. We see a lion in the way, although it is written that no ravenous beast shall go up thereon. A puny foe is swollen into a Goliath, and the river of death widens into a shoreless sea. Come, heavenly wind, and blow the mist away, and then the foe will be despised, and the bright shores on the other side of the river will stand out clear in the light of faith. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Jacob's wrong view of life:*—An old man, who does not know what he is talking about! What does the oldest and best man amongst us know about life? Jacob is writing a list of his grievances and misfortunes and distresses, and God's angels are looking down upon him and saying, That the whole statement, though one of what men call facts, is all a mistake from beginning to end. Think of man writing his life, and of God's writing the same life in a parallel column! Now old Israel is perfectly correct, so far as the story is known to himself. Jacob their father said, "Me have ye bereaved of my children." That is right. "Joseph is not." That is perfectly true, so far as Jacob is concerned, so far as his information extends. "And Simeon is not." That also is literally correct, so far as the absence of Simeon may be regarded. "And ye will take Benjamin away." Precisely so, that is the very thing they have in view. "All these things are against me." It is exactly the same with us to-day. Men don't know what they say when they use words. They don't know the full meaning of their own expressions. They will always snatch at first appearances and pronounce judgment upon incomplete processes. Every day I afflict myself with just the same rod. I know what a fool I am for doing so, and yet I shall do it again to-morrow. There comes into a man's heart a kind of grim comfort when he has scourged himself well; when he knows all the while that ten thousand errors are accusing him of a repetition of his folly. There are men who don't know their own family circumstances, yet they have undertaken to pronounce judgment upon the infinite! Some men are very familiar with the infinite, and have a wonderful notion of their power of managing God's concerns. We seem at home when we go from home. Here is an old man saying, "Joseph is not, Simeon is not, Benjamin is to be taken away. All these things are against me." Yet we who have been in a similar position, though the circumstances have been varied, have undertaken to pronounce judgment upon God's way in the world, God's government, God's purposes. Why don't we learn from our ignorance? Why don't we read the book of our own folly, and learn that we know nothing, being children of yesterday? We cannot rise to that great refinement of learning, it would appear. Every day we repeat our follies. It is but a man here and there who has a claim to a reputation for religious wisdom. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Me have ye bereaved of my children:*—The words before us are the expressions of that peevishness and dejection which are ready to find place in the heart even of a good man in a day of darkness. "Me have ye bereaved of my children: all these things are against me." We ought, however, to remember, that words expressive of the passionate working of the mind, ought always to be understood with a limitation of their import. When Jacob says that he was bereaved of his children, the meaning is, that he was bereaved of two or three of them. When he speaks of his sons then present, as if they had bereaved him of his children, he does not mean that they had murdered them, or sold them into a strange land. He means, that by their unwise conduct they had some agency in bringing the calamity upon them. If they had not rambled about with their flocks from one place to another, Joseph might not have met those wild beasts that tore him in pieces. If they had not, by some imprudent conduct, excited suspicion in the mind of the hard-hearted governor of Egypt, Simeon would not have been kept in prison. If they had not spoken to the governor about their younger brother, he might still have been left with himself when they returned to buy more corn. Jacob, however, spoke more truth than he knew in these words, "Me have ye bereaved of my children." They had sold Joseph into Egypt, and Simeon's imprisonment was the consequence of that criminal conduct. But as we have no reason to think that Jacob suspected them to be guilty, his words are to be considered as an angry reflection, which the distress of his mind drew from his lips rather than his heart. When your minds are disturbed be watchful over your tongue. Beware of ill-natured reflections on your children, your servants, or any that are under your power. But, on the other side, let not children or servants be surprised or angry when unjust reflections are uttered or glanced at them by their parents or masters, when grief rather than reason has the direction of their tongues. We must all bear something from our fellow-mortals, and we all make some of our neighbours bear something from us

that might be spared. (*G. Lawson, D.D.*) *Joseph is not, and Simeon is not*:—More is said than meant, and more was meant than what was true, in these words. The patriarch knew that Simeon was not dead, so far as this information reached, but he was almost given over as a dead man by his father. Yet he had not any strong reason to do it. Perhaps the money came by some oversight into the mouth of the sacks. Probably that hard man, who was Lord of Egypt, did not intend to put Simeon to death; or if he did, his heart might yet be softened by the God of Jacob. We make our burdens heavier than they ought to be, by adding to them the weight of our own gloomy apprehensions; or we represent them heavier than we feel them to be, by words that convey more meaning than they ought. Surely the troubles laid upon us are heavy enough to be borne. Why should we court unhappiness, and yet complain of it? (*Ibid.*) *Joseph is not, and Simeon is not*:—A certain good woman, in a time of persecution, heard that one of her sons was killed in the field by the enemy. "Which of my sons?" said she. "The eldest," said the informer. "God be thanked," replied she, "he was the fittest to die. My other children will have some more time for preparation, and needed it more than their brother." Yet Jacob was more grieved for the loss of Joseph, than for the loss of Simeon, although Joseph was sanctified in his early years; and Simeon, for anything we can learn, and yet given little evidence of piety. But it must be remembered that Jacob was only afraid that Simeon might die. Joseph was, in his apprehension, already dead. I believe that a good man, were it referred to his choice which of his children he must lose, would refer it to his Maker; but it would be his deliberate wish, that, if God pleased, He would remove to the other world that member of his family who was fittest for it, though much the dearest to himself. (*Ibid.*) *And ye will take Benjamin away*:—True; they would take him away to Egypt, but not out of the world. To go a long journey was a very different thing from dying. He might be exposed to danger from the artifices of the unfeeling lord of Egypt. But will such a good man as Jacob make himself and his house miserable because a favourite son may be lost, when he was not exposed to greater danger than his brethren? Even those who are eminent fearers of God, are too often deprived of a great part of that happiness which they might enjoy, by the infirmity of their faith. (*Ibid.*) *The days of bereavement*:—1. The great object of religious discipline in this world is to prepare for the perfect happiness of a future existence. This is a fact too much lost sight of. Many, and especially young and inexperienced Christians, expect that the commencement of a religious life is to be a deliverance from those cares and sorrows, by the pressure of which they were perhaps first drawn to seek the Lord. But the great object of religion is to fit a guilty, polluted, lost creature, for the presence of God in a world of eternal happiness. But as the gift of inspired religion is rather a means of preparing the soul for the future life, than a provision of comfort for this, we remark—2. Religion does not prevent the occurrence of those afflictions which are the common lot of mankind. 3. That if religion, or a real and religious connection with God, increases our afflictions, it sanctifies them. Though deeper afflictions do come upon the child of God, they are not the capricious severities of a hard master. (1) They are sanctified by our Divine Master to the increase of faith. (2) Again, the afflictions of the saints are appointed as a means of setting their affections on the things above. (3) God sanctifies affliction to the increase of obedience. Entire submission to God is a difficult lesson. (4) But observe that the years of later life are often more especially marked by correction and afflictive discipline. It is partly owing to natural causes. The natural progress of events and relationships serves for a time to increase our hold upon this present scene, and to open to us new sources of earthly enjoyment. But though we conceive that these things are adding to our happiness, and are consequently anxious to increase them, they are so many additional points at which we are accessible to affliction; and then, at last, the time comes, when we feel that schemes and plans will fail, and unexpected misfortunes will arise. The happiness on which we calculated ends in disappointment. Life is, in this respect, like a tree, which in its progress to maturity sustains, and soon recovers an injury, by the energy of the vegetative principle; but after it has spread to its widest extent, both in the root and the branch, and the day of maturity is gone by, it is more widely exposed to injuries than ever—and every day less fitted to repair them. But it is of Divine appointment also that afflictions crowd upon the decline of life. We see it in the history of the saints—in Jacob and Eli and David. We see it every day around us. There is much to be done in the heart, which remains long undone; and life glides away, and grey hairs are upon

us, before we are prepared to submit to the needful discipline. And yet the work must be done. God therefore hastens His work of sanctification, and often, very often, sustains and sanctifies the soul of His faithful pilgrim under an accumulation of suffering, which once would have appeared absolutely insupportable: "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and Rachel is not, and ye will take Benjamin away." (5) But observe, the believer sometimes, in the crisis of affliction, loses sight of the great object of afflictive discipline, and receives it in a wrong spirit. The spirit of resistance shown strongly in the case of Jacob. In the bitterness of his sorrow, he exclaimed, "All these things are against me." It was the language of passion, of momentary rebellion. In these few words Jacob was guilty of a forgetfulness of the former faithfulness and love of his Almighty Friend—"All these things are against me." Jacob was guilty of an aggravation of the causes of his sorrow. It is difficult in the time of recent affliction to take a deliberate view of the afflictive circumstances; but it is unwarrantable in a complaining spirit to exaggerate them. "Simeon is not." Why should Jacob suppose so? Jacob was guilty here also of a premature decision of the whole case, without reference to the Divine power. He had seen his former trials terminating to the welfare of his own soul, and to the glory of God. Jacob was guilty of a decline from the practical conviction of his unworthiness, which formerly he strongly felt. (6) But observe, such afflictive dispensations issue in the vindication of God's dealings with His people, and in their advancement in grace and holiness. But see how the development of the dispensation vindicates the gracious providence of God. Of the three sons who were the subject of the Patriarch's grief, Joseph was already exalted to an honourable station, Simeon was safe under his brother's roof, and Benjamin was in this very matter the object of his brother's peculiar solicitude; and the whole family had been so specially the object of Divine protection. Such visitations issue in the superior sanctification of God's people. We must not look at the fretful repining of Jacob, without noticing the settled composure with which he meets the severity of the trial when it must be endured. Nothing can be more interesting than the spirit of submission with which he addresses himself at last to this distressing sacrifice, "If it must be so now, do this. Take of the best fruits of the land, and carry down the man a present." Certainly, Christians in general must not expect a conclusion to their trials so marvellous as this; but, at the same time, God is infinitely wise in the choice of the facts by which our faith is to be strengthened and encouraged; and He would not have put upon the record a history so remarkable, if He did not mean us to gather from it how much we may expect from His gracious providence, as the issue of those trials in which we bend with meekness to His will. (*E. Craig.*) *Depression*:—In a fit of dejection Dean Hook once wrote: "My life has been a failure. I have done many things tolerably; but nothing well. As a parish priest, as a preacher, and now as a writer, I am quite aware that I have failed, and the more so because my friends contradict the assertion." (*One Thousand New Illustrations.*) *Providence in heathen politics*:—In the early history of Burmese missions, a young Burman of superior rank became a convert. His sister was a maid of honour to the queen, and being greatly distressed at his change of religion, and thinking if she could separate him from the missionary he would soon forget the foreign ideas, she obtained for him an appointment, which he was obliged to accept, as governor of a distant province. He had not been long at his new post, when some Karens were brought before him accused of worshipping a strange God. "What God?" he asked. "They call Him the eternal God," was the reply. A few questions satisfied the young governor that he had fellow-Christians before him. To the great surprise of the accusers he ordered the prisoners to be dismissed. (*Fifteen Hundred Illustrations.*) *A token of God's favour in adverse providences*:—Mr. Newton had a very happy talent of administering reproof. Hearing that a person, in whose welfare he was greatly interested, had met with peculiar success in business, and was deeply immersed in worldly engagements, the first time he called on him, which was usually once a month, he took him by the hand, and drawing him on one side into the counting-house, told him his apprehensions of his spiritual welfare. His friend, without making any reply, called down his partner in life, who came with her eyes suffused with tears, and unable to speak. Inquiring the cause he was told she had just been sent for to one of her children that was out at nurse, and supposed to be in dying circumstances. Claspings her hands immediately in his, Mr. Newton cried, "God be thanked, He has not forsaken you! I do not wish your babe to suffer, but I am happy to find He gives you this token of His favour." (*Moral and Religious Anecdotes.*)

Ver. 37. Slay my two sons.—*An unlawful mode of speaking*.—I will give you leave to take away my life, unless I do this or that. Such modes of speaking as this do not become the mouths of the disciples of our Redeemer. How do we know what we shall be able to do a day or an hour hence? We ought to say, If we live, and the Lord will, we shall do this or that; "for a man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps." When men use this language their words are not to be understood in their literal sense. They are only strong assertions, tinged with a profane levity of mind. Death ought not to be made a by-word. It will be found a serious thing to die when death comes, if it is not habitually esteemed a serious matter by us, whilst we are living in prosperity and health. "By the life of Pharaoh, ye are spies," said Joseph to his brethren. Reuben engages, by the life of his two sons, that he will bring Benjamin in safety to his father, if his father would trust the young man to his care. Surely Reuben might have learned to avoid such strong asseverations about things of this sort. It was his wish to bring Joseph home to his father, and yet he could not persuade his brethren to comply with his intentions. It was his desire to bring Simeon safe to his father, and yet he was compelled to leave him in Egypt. He had reason to hope that his brethren would not treat Benjamin as they had treated Joseph. He had reason to hope that the lord of Egypt would keep his promise. But was he so sure of both these things, and of meeting with no bad accident in the course of his journeyings, that he could warrantably pledge the life of his two sons for Benjamin's happy return? He knew that Jacob would not take him at his word. But what if God should, by some untoward event, make him sensible that he had spoken amiss? (*G. Lawson, D.D.*)

Ver. 38. Bring down my gray hairs with sorrow.—*Graceless children*.—Some graceless children despise their fathers and their mothers when they are old, and when their grey hairs claim reverence or compassion. If we must bow before the man of hoary hairs, although he is a stranger, what reverence do we owe to our own parents, when the respect due to age is added to the claims of parental relation! Those children that load the grey heads of their parents with crushing sorrows, are worse than common murderers. Yet, let not parents, by their own frowardness, kill themselves with grief, and load their children with the blame due to themselves. The aged ought to remember that their infirmities may dispose them to make their burdens heavier than God or men have made them. And when we torment ourselves we are too ready to transfer our own folly to the account of others. (*G. Lawson, D.D.*) *A faithless exclamation*.—Why should Jacob die with grief, if Benjamin should be lost? Is Benjamin his God, his life, his exceeding joy? "The Lord liveth, and blessed be the Rock of Israel." He is the Rock of ages. God had made desolate all Job's company, and his hope had He removed like a tree; but Job knew that his Redeemer lived. "All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field; but the Word of the Lord shall stand for ever." And whilst the Word stands, those whose trust is placed on it are safe. They may, through the prevalence of unbelief, and of earthly affections, speak unadvisedly with their lips; but the Lord will make them sensible of their folly, and enable them to commit their affairs into His hand, and to cast all their cares upon Him who cares for all His people. We shall soon hear Jacob saying, "If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved"; and on his death-bed he says, "I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord!" (*Ibid.*)

CHAPTER XLIII.

VERB. 1-14. Go again, buy us a little food.—*Jacob under the pressure of want*.—**I. HIS CHANGE OF RESOLUTION** (vers. 11-14). **II. HIS PIETY THROUGHOUT.** 1. His faith in God. 2. His honest principle. 3. It is no reflection on his piety that he changed his purpose. Consistent with the unchanging truth of God, with the eternal law of righteousness, we must and ought to be; but not invariably consistent with ourselves; for our goodness is imperfect, and we are liable to mistake and error. Instead of adjusting our present conduct to our former habits and thoughts, we should act upon our present convictions, leaving the present and the past to

reconcile themselves as they may. It is only by looking continually to God, and not to ourselves, that we can walk sure-footedly in the present life. (*T. H. Leale.*)

The second journey of Joseph's brethren into Egypt:—I. THE JOURNEY. 1. The resolve of Jacob to send at last his son Benjamin to Egypt. In this consent of Jacob we read a double instance of faith, faith in God and in man. (1) Faith in God; for he says, "God Almighty give you mercy before the man" (ver. 14). Faith has been well defined thus, "the heart to make ventures for God." He alone knows what real faith is, who has been compelled to lose sight of or to relinquish hold of those most dear to him, relying only on the mercy and eternal love of God. Faith is that which makes us hold and cling to God when nothing else is left for us to cling to; the grasp of the dying sailor to the mast, that is faith. (2) There was, besides, faith in humanity, in his son Judah, in one scarcely worthy of his confidence, for once at least he had proved treacherous. But it was better so, and it is better for us if we possess this faith in man. 2. Jacob's honesty (ver. 12). We are bound not only to return that which is ours unjustly, but also that which is ours by the oversight or mistake of others. But there is another way of looking at this act of Jacob's. It seems somewhat to savour of his disposition to mollify and appease his enemies by presents; as, when he dreaded the enmity of Esau, he sent presents to him, flattering him with the name of god. And if it be so, we find here that which tells, not of honesty, but of pliancy. 3. The change of Jacob's resolution in permitting Benjamin to go. At first we might be inclined to charge him with inconsistency, but the circumstances were changed, and the only choice now left him was between famine for them all and the loss of one son. II. THE ARRIVAL IN EGYPT. 1. The fear of Joseph's brethren when invited to Joseph's house. They came dreading some misfortune. They were suspicious of Joseph's intentions. They could not but think that he wished to entrap them and make bondsmen of them. And this fear of theirs arose partly out of their own capability for a similar act of treachery. "Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all." It is the worst penalty of a deceitful and crooked disposition that it always dreads being overreached. 2. In the next place we observe the bowing down of the brethren before Joseph (ver. 26). This was an exact fulfilment of one of his early dreams, when the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed down before him. But Joseph was now changed; he had been too much saddened by misfortune, and was far too much accustomed to Egyptian homage, to find any real pleasure in this, from which he had formerly expected so much. For us this is a pregnant example of the illusiveness of human life. Now that his dream was fulfilled to the very letter, he could not enjoy it. 3. We next observe Joseph's relief in the indirect utterance of his feelings. He asked, "Is your father yet alive, and your youngest brother?" &c. (ver. 27). 4. The feast of brotherhood. (*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*) *Lessons from Jacob's behaviour at this crisis:—*1. Did he at length admit the necessity of making the sacrifice which he declared he would never make? Let us never be ashamed to retract any hasty and improper resolution which we have ever formed. And when we perceive how necessary it is to give up any idol, or any forbidden indulgence, let us not hesitate a moment to act upon our convictions. No delays are so dangerous as those which take place between the formation and the performance of a good resolution. 2. Again, we must not attempt to procure the favour of Him who sits upon the throne of grace by any present that we have to bring, or any payment that we have to make. While we are willing to part with everything for the sake of Christ, we are not to bring anything as the price of our salvation, or to offer anything that we have, or anything that we can do, to recommend us to His favour. 3. Again, let us never forget that the desire for His salvation, and the broken and contrite heart which He has promised to accept, must come from God. The preparation of the heart of man is from the Lord. We must bring our heart when we come into His presence, and it must be upright and contrite if we would see His face in peace. But He only, who requires such a heart as this, can produce it for us. 4. For here, observe, the importance of a praying spirit is especially to be seen in Jacob's behaviour at this time. When he sent his sons away, it was with the humble and earnest petition—God Almighty give you favour before the man. Prayer ever was, and ever must be, the distinguishing mark of all the true sons of Jacob. 5. Lastly, Jacob at length determined to acquiesce in the appointments of Divine Providence, whatever they might be. So let every true penitent resolve to do, and he is certain eventually to be delivered out of all his fears. (*C. Overton.*) *Jacob's prayer:—*1. The character under which the Lord is addressed—"God Almighty," or God all-sufficient. This was the name under which Abraham was

blessed, and which was used by Isaac in blessing Jacob. Doubtless Jacob, in putting up this prayer, thought of these covenant promises and blessings, and that it was the prayer of faith. 2. The mistake on which the prayer is founded, which yet was acceptable to God. He prayed for the turning of the man's heart in a way of mercy; but the man's heart did not need turning. Yet Jacob thought it did, and had no means of knowing otherwise. The truth of things may in some cases be concealed from us, to render us more importunate; and this importunity, though it may appear at last to have been unnecessary, yet being right according as circumstances appeared at the time, God will approve of it, and we shall find our account in it. 3. The resignation with which he concludes: "If I am bereaved, I am bereaved!" It is God's usual way, in trying those whom He loves, to touch them in the tenderest part. Herein the trial consists. If there be one object round which the heart has entwined more than all others, that is it which is likely to be God's rival, and of that we must be deprived. Yet if when it goes, we humbly resign it up into God's hands, it is not unusual for Him to restore it to us, and that with more than double interest. (*A. Fuller.*) *The second visit to Egypt.*—I. JACOB'S ENTREATY. 1. The occasion of it. Continuance of the famine. How dreary the prospect. Barren earth. Languishing cattle. Dry river-beds. The heavens as brass. 2. The character of it. "Buy us a little food." (1) "Buy." They had money. The money that was returned, and a little more. They probably took all they could well spare the first time, not thinking the famine would last so long, and intending to obtain enough to suffice till plenty was restored. (2) "A little food." It was all they could purchase with what money was left after they had restored the first purchase-money. (3) "Go again." He does not say a word about Benjamin. Did he think they had forgotten him; or that they would not press the matter? He speaks of food, not of Simeon or Benjamin. II. JUDAH'S EXPOSTULATION. He at once assures his father that it is of no use except Benjamin goes too; and refuses to go without him, as a useless and perilous experiment. III. THE BROTHERS' MEETING. They once more set out for Egypt. In due time they stand in the presence of the great lord. Joseph sees and recognizes Benjamin. Commands that a banquet shall be prepared in his own house. This new kindness filled them with new fear. They thought they were being ensnared, and would be sold as bondmen. Yet they had done to Joseph the very thing they feared to receive at his hands. Having had no opportunity of speaking to Joseph, they explain to the steward. He encourages them. Tells them not to fear. Reminds them of God's mercy. Joseph's present is therefore prepared, and they await the issue. In all this see how a guilty conscience destroys enjoyment of happy circumstances. If a man is right within, all will be right without; if he be wrong, all will be wrong. Learn: I. To be thankful for plenty. II. To pity the distressed. III. Sin brings its own punishment. IV. The brothers' meeting may remind us of our future meeting with our Elder Brother. (*J. C. Gray.*) *If thou wilt send our brother.*—*A reasonable condition*:—"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." But let parents take heed that they provoke not their children to resist their commands, by enjoining that which is unjust, unreasonable, or impracticable. Judah was justifiable in making conditions with his own venerable father. But to object to the commands of a parent, without an urgent reason, is consistent neither with the law of Christ, nor with the law of nature. The command of Jacob was not simply to go to Egypt, but to go and fetch corn from Egypt. This was impracticable, unless Benjamin went along with his brethren. Every wise man will consider, when he undertakes a journey, or any great work, for what purpose it is designed, and how it may be executed, so as to answer the end. What man would have travelled all the way from the place where Jacob sojourned in Canaan to Egypt, to buy corn in the time of famine, without the prospect of being able to obtain it? What man will plough or sow his land, without the prospect of a crop? What wise man will undertake any religious employment, without the prospect of obtaining the wished advantage to be found in the service of God? If those who call themselves the children of light, were half as wise in their generation as the children of this world, when they wish to have the oil of grace, they would go to those who sell before the door is shut, and would not go without their Elder Brother, without whom no man can come to the Father with acceptance. It is said of the famous Themistocles, that when he fled for refuge to Admetus, king of Thessaly, he took the king's infant son in his arms, and obtained what he requested. He had been told that this was the law of the court of Admetus. And this is the law of God's house, that we cannot come with success to the throne of God's grace, but in the name of Christ, the only

mediator between God and sinful men. (*G. Lawson, D.D.*) If it must be so now, do this.—*Jacob yields to persuasion*:—"A fool rageth, and is confident"; but a wise man will yield to reason, be it from a servant, from a son, from a wife, or from any other person, though inferior to himself, in station, in good sense, or in holiness. "Ye younger, be subject to the elder, yea, all of you be subject one to another; and be clothed with humility, for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Pet. v. 3). Here you have an illustration of the apostle's precept, and the reason by which it is enforced. Jacob's sons submitted to their father in going down to Egypt, and their father complied with them in sending Benjamin along with them; and God crowned their designs with success, and gave them wonderful displays of His favour in the event of their journey. How was Jacob persuaded to comply with a motion so adverse to his feelings? Not by Reuben's, but by Judah's solicitations. Judah addressed his father in words of wisdom and meekness. He set before him the absolute necessity of parting with Benjamin for a time, and the great comfort to be expected in the issue. Far was he from reproaching his father for his manifest partiality to this favourite son, but he gave him full assurance that his partiality should be gratified, if possible and necessary; for when Judah became surety for him, he, in effect, engaged to stand between him and every danger; and this promise he did not fail to perform. Complain not, young persons, of tyranny in your parents, when the truth probably is, that you have not learned to treat with due reverence the fathers of your flesh. Do they refuse to comply with your wishes? Can you say with uprightness, that your desires were such as ought to have been granted? And if this has been the case, have you showed due respect to them in expressing your desires? and have you borne, with a meek temper, those eruptions of passion which disagreeable circumstances may sometimes produce, even in the best men? You see in the instances before us, "that by much forbearing, a prince" and a father "may be persuaded, and that a soft answer breaketh the bone." (*Ibid.*) *Conduct in emergency*:—1. He acts prudently. He uses means of conciliation, and of bespeaking the good graces of the unknown ruler of Egypt. 2. He acts honestly. "The money that was brought again in your sacks, carry it again in your hands: peradventure it was an oversight." There are not a few who, in similar circumstances, would have been disposed to regard such money as, according to their cant phraseology, a God-send; and who would have thought no more about the matter. Not so Jacob. Before he would regard the money as his, or have his sons regard it as theirs, he must be at the bottom of the matter—he must have it accounted for, how came it there—he must know whether they can keep it honestly. Thus let all Christian transactions be regulated by the principles of high honour and sterling unbending integrity. 3. He acts piously. "And God Almighty give you mercy before the man!" When a human heart requires to be softened, and inclined to favour where there is seeming hostility, it is ours to do what we can, and to leave the result, by prayer and supplication, in the hands of God—of "God Almighty." How much more like himself does Jacob now appear; and how much more becoming an example does he set before his family! 4. He acts submissively. "If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved!" 5. He acts affectionately. It may be truly said of Jacob, as a father, that "even his failings leaned to virtue's side." We can account for them from causes that are in themselves good. But the point to which my observation tends, as many of you may anticipate, is this. How come we to be so much in earnest in seeking to propitiate a fellow-creature—to turn away his displeasure, and to conciliate his favour, in order to avoid what harm, and to ensure what good, he may have it in his power to do us; while we are so careless about averting the wrath and obtaining the grace of a higher than the highest of created powers?—of Him, whose wrath is so infinitely more to be deprecated, and whose grace is so infinitely more to be desired and sought, than those of all the agents of evil or of good combined, in the world or in the universe. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*) *Carry down the man a present*.—*Offerings by the little to the great (a harvest sermon for children)*:—An old man is sending off a company of his sons; they are going to visit a very great man, who is the governor of a great country. They have a proper awe of this man, because he is so great, but he has been very good to them, and their need compels them to go. So their father sends them off, and bids them by no means go empty-handed, but take with them a present for the man. Now your parents have sent you or brought you to church to-day to our Harvest Festival, not to visit some great earthly governor, but to God's House, to meet God, and to present your prayers through Jesus Christ, the

Son of God, of whom in His human life Joseph was in many ways a type; and I feel sure that your parents will have said to you, as Jacob said to his sons, "Take a present." "a little of the best fruits of the land," or their value in money. For even if it should be very little indeed that you can bring, I am sure they will have told you that that certainly should not be forgotten. Joseph in Egypt was a picture in some small degree of our Lord, who is Governor of all the earth, who says by the mouth of David, "the whole world is Mine, and all that is therein" (Psa. l. 12). He has no need of our corn, or of our fruits, or of our money: and yet He has commanded us to offer to Him. There follow close after, in this same Psalm, the words, "Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the Most Highest." God ordered His people (Deut. xxvi.) when they came into the land of Canaan to take at harvest-time a basket of the first-fruits, and give it into the hands of the priest before God's altar, and say, "A Syrian ready to perish, was my father, and he went down into Egypt with a few—and became great and mighty." So the people of Israel were to be reminded of this visit to Egypt and its consequences, for by "the Syrian, my father," is meant Jacob. Let us look again at our picture, and see what it will teach us. Joseph, we may be quite sure, was pleased with the present, not for its value in itself, but because it showed that those who brought it wished well. But what pleased him most was the coming of his brethren themselves. He wanted them very much, especially the little one. And there was great joy when he had them all together, and made himself known and embraced them. Joseph is here again a type of our Blessed Lord. That which, above all, He desires, over and above the gifts which He welcomes, is the heart of the giver. St. Paul tells us exactly what it is He seeks—"not yours, but you" (2 Cor. xii. 14). "He is not ashamed to call us brethren" (Heb. ii. 11), though we have treated Him worse than Joseph's brethren treated him; and though we may be as shabby and poor as probably Joseph's brethren looked in his royal palace in Egypt, our Lord Jesus Christ will be ready with His kiss and embrace for us. And when I tell you that He seeks "not yours, but you," I do not mean that He does not want your little offerings; He does for your sakes. What you can give, of course, is nothing to Him: but do not allow yourself to be tempted into saying, as grown-up people sometimes say when the harvest is not so plentiful, and they are poor, and "the times are hard," that we must leave giving to those who are well off. Jacob and his sons were poor enough—there was a famine in the land—and yet they sent the rich governor of Egypt a present, and see what a blessing came out of it. I find, as I read my Bible, that it is "the poor of this world, rich in faith," who become "heirs of the kingdom" (James ii. 5), through their faith and liberality. And our Lord has told us why it is He likes us to offer to Him of our little: He says, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. vi. 21). He wants our hearts, and therefore He asks for our treasures. Let me give you an example. Only a few weeks ago I read a sad story in a newspaper. There were several young men, brothers, who went, I think, to Canada, and there worked very hard upon a farm out in the wilds, and earned a good deal of money. A man came to visit them, and persuaded them to trust him with their savings, saying that he would use it in the working of a mine which would yield them double their money in a short time. But one day they found out that this man was a rogue, and that he had spent all their money for nothing, and the news was so terrible a shock to them that they all went out of their minds. Their minds were all upon their money, and when that was lost they were lost. Learn, then, as soon as you may, to lay up your treasure in heaven. Bring your little offerings to Jesus Christ,

"And what He most desireth,
Your humble, thankful hearts."

(Archibald Day, M.A.)

Vers. 15-18. The men were afraid, because they were brought into Joseph's house.—*Joseph's brethren under the influence of a guilty fear:*—I. THEY DREAD SOME GREAT MISFORTUNE. They are driven to Egypt by a dire necessity. A presentiment of disaster weigh upon their hearts. They expect no favourable solution of their mysterious treatment. II. THEY ARE POSSESSED BY AN INVETERATE SPIRIT OF MISTRUST. They interpret adversely even the most favourable appearances. The generous reception which was given them only serves to raise their worst suspicions and to alarm their fears. They cannot get rid of the belief that Joseph meant to entrap them by a cunning device. III. THEY ARE HAUNTED BY THE

MEMORY OF AN OLD CRIME. They are innocent respecting this money in their sacks, and yet they feel themselves to be guilty men. Conscience makes cowards of them everywhere. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Lessons*.—1. Fear misinterprets kindness. 2. We are often being tested while we are unconscious of the fact that we are so. 3. An illustration of the difference between the outer appearance and the inner life of a man. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Bring these men home*.—It was a whisper aside, addressed to one who proved himself very capable of executing Joseph's wishes. This device of "bringing them home" and feasting them gave Joseph opportunity for testing their feelings towards Benjamin; it allowed them a chance of recognizing their brother; and it used them to his love as mingled and contrasted with his severity. Joseph wished to produce these three effects; but I scarcely think he intended another effect, which, however, was the first—the re-awakening of their fears. It was God who intended that. (*A. M. Symington, D.D.*) *Use of animal food in Egypt*.—It has been objected here that the narrator must be in error in representing Joseph as giving orders for the slaughter of animals for food, since that must have been contrary to the customs of the Egyptians; but Wilkinson, in describing preparations for dinner, says, "an ox, kid, wild-goat, gazelle, or oryx, and a quantity of geese, widgeons, quails, or other birds were obtained for the occasion"; and Kalisch alleges that "though there was scarcely an animal which was not held sacred in some province, there was, perhaps, with the only exception of the cow, none which was not eaten in other parts of the land"; so that the description here is in perfect harmony with what we now know to have been the habit of the people. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

Vers. 19-25. And they came near to the steward of Joseph's house, and they communed with him.—*Joseph's steward*.—I. HE LISTENS PATIENTLY TO THE EXPLANATION OF THEIR CONDUCT, OFFERED BY JOSEPH'S BRETHREN. II. HE TREATS THEM WITH A WISE KINDNESS AND WITH PIETY. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Lessons*.—1. Just orders are readily entertained by honest servants from their masters (ver. 17). 2. The house of kindness may sometimes terrify souls as the house of dangers. 3. Innocency itself may be suspicious of wrong charges, to raise up fear. 4. Groundless jealousies pretend dangers where none are (ver. 18). 5. Wisdom suggests unto innocency a fair defence to prevent danger (ver. 19). 6. Innocency's plain acknowledgment of its designs is its best apology (ver. 20). 7. Declaration of events of providence as they are tends to justify the innocent. 8. Where providence orders good, souls may make question of receiving or keeping it (ver. 21). 9. Just souls will deal justly in dealing with others about buying, &c. 10. Innocency may plead ignorance of the fact of sin plainly, being not guilty (ver. 22). 11. Upright hearts in power will speak peace and encouragement to fearful spirits. 12. Good hearts teach to ascribe all good providences unto God in covenant. 13. Just men will own their acts to discharge the innocent. So the steward. 14. Conditions being performed, hostages must be in justice returned (ver. 23). 15. Good hospitality will labour to afford room and all convenient refreshings to its guests. 16. Hospitality in truth, provides for beasts as well as men (ver. 24). 17. Prudence will put men upon care to prepare a present for rulers in time of danger. 18. Courtesy from hosts gives opportunity for guests to express their returns. 19. Noon refreshments are suitable to morning's labours. 20. Good rulers are careful first to work and then to eat (ver. 25). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*)

Vers. 26-34. And he took and sent messes unto them from before him.—*Joseph and his brethren at the banquet*.—Consider this incident.—I. AS IT ILLUSTRATES SOME USEFUL PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL LIFE. 1. That we should not set up the pretence of loving all alike. Benjamin was specially honoured (ver. 34), and greeted with loving words (ver. 29). 2. That it is wise to observe the established customs of society when they are not morally wrong. II. AS IT ILLUSTRATES THE SECRET AND THE OUTWARD LIFE. 1. In the case of the brethren. 2. In the case of Joseph. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Joseph's banquet*.—1. The banquet of Joseph's joy, of his hope, of his trying watch. 2. The feast of reviving hope in Joseph's brethren. 3. Their participation without envy in the honouring of Benjamin. 4. An introduction to the last trial, and a preparation for it. 5. The successful issue in the fearful proving of Israel's sons. (*J. P. Lange.*) *The dinner designed to make Joseph known*.—And now, I apprehend, it was Joseph's wish to discover himself to his brethren, or rather to enable them to discover him. There are three things in particular while they were at dinner, each tending to this end, and as I conceive,

designed for it. 1. The order of the tables. One for himself, one for the strangers, and one for the Egyptians. The design of this was to set them a thinking of him, and who he was, or could be? That the Egyptians and Hebrews should eat apart they could easily account for: but who, or what is this man? Is he not an Egyptian? Yet if he be, why eat by himself? Surely he must be a foreigner. . . . 2. The order in which they themselves were seated; it was "before him," so that they had full opportunity of looking at him; and what was astonishing to them, every man was placed "according to his age." But who can this be that is acquainted with their ages, so as to be able to adjust things in this order? Surely it must be some one who knows us, though we know not him. Or is he a diviner? Who or what can he be? They are said to have "marvelled one at another," and well they might. It is marvellous that they did not from hence suspect who he was. 3. The peculiar favour which he expressed to Benjamin, in sending him a mess five times more than the rest. There is no reason to suppose that Benjamin ate more than the rest; but this was the manner of showing special favour in those times. It was therefore saying in effect, "I not only know all your ages, but towards that young man I have more than a common regard. . . . Look at all this, and look at me. . . . Look at me, my brother Benjamin. Dost thou not know me?" But all was hid from them. Their eyes, like those of the disciples towards their Lord, seem to have been holden, that they should not know him. Their minds however are eased from all apprehensions, and they drank, and were cheerful in his company. (*A. Fuller.*) *Lessons*:—1. Gracious hearts, however sometime they may deal severely, yet they desire their peace. 2. Providence sometimes orders peaceable entertainment, where worse is feared. 3. Nature itself, much more grace, inquires of and desires the peace of parents. He asked of their father, and meaneth his own (ver. 27). 4. It is equal that peaceable inquiries should have due answers. 5. In answering for others, Providence orders the accomplishment of his will. The sunbows, &c. 6. All humility becomes their answers who are in fear of foreign powers (ver. 28.) 7. Sight of near relations moveth to inquire of their condition. 8. Natural affection desires to know its near relations for good. 9. Grace puts souls upon blessing relations as well as knowing them. 10. The best blessing is the grace of God procured upon souls. 11. Brethren may be fathers in blessing the fruit of the same womb (ver. 29). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Lessons*:—1. Natural affection may speed to vent itself, after gracious benediction. 2. Natural bowels may burn in gracious souls to their relations. 3. Gracious wisdom teacheth to seek time, place, and measure of expressing affection to relations. 4. Secret venting of affections is best at some opportunities (ver. 30). (*Ibid.*) *Benjamin's mess*:—I. PRESENTS FROM HOME. Those made to Joseph by men who little thought what feelings they might excite. 1. They were from his father. He would think of them as being selected by him. An act of homage. 2. They were peculiar to his native country and immediate neighbourhood. How often when a boy had he collected similar gums and nuts. They would take him back to the old time. 3. The presents we may receive from home have more of love in them than homage. We like them the better for that. 4. These presents were the gifts of poor men, who were the poorer by reason of the famine. Presents not to be valued by their intrinsic worth, but by the circumstances under which they were selected, and the feelings with which they are offered. 5. Every good gift is from above. God the author and giver of every good and perfect gift. 6. There is one unspeakable gift, made to us, suited to us; have we accepted this gift? II. INQUIRIES ABOUT HOME. 1. They are asked concerning their welfare (see Exod. xviii. 7). Such inquiries from us often mean only the welfare of the body, or relate to temporal things. Family greetings pleasant. Should include an interest in highest and best things. 2. They soon regarded the absent. His father in particular, the "old man." It was about twenty-two years since he had seen his father. "Is he yet alive?" A few years work great changes in families. Return to your native town after an absence of twenty-two years, and note the different names, and the vast changes. The father was poorer than when he saw him last by reason of the famine; the son was richer than when he left home to look after the shepherds in Shechem. The coat of many colours exchanged for a robe of state. The shepherd boy become a prince. Absent friends to be remembered. 3. Benjamin specially addressed. III. THE BANQUET. 1. The president of the feast. Joseph at a raised table by himself. His state and grandeur. Perhaps the presents from home were placed before him. His knowledge of the guests, and their ignorance of him. Jesus at the last supper knew all, and was little known; after the resurrection He was known

in the breaking of bread. 2. The officers of his household. They would show the respect and honour in which he was held. 3. The Israelites. The arrangement of their places at the table. "Whence hath this man this knowledge?" Benjamin's mess. What could this mean? Whether they liked it or not, their father's regard for the younger son, whether Joseph or Benjamin, was to be respected. They needed to be taught this lesson. And we must honour our parents. As they thus sat and feasted with the prince, did they think of the time when they sat down to eat bread by the side of the pit where Joseph was once imprisoned? Joseph returned good for evil. Learn: Let us remember home, especially the heavenly home. (*J. C. Gray.*)

CHAPTER XLIV.

VERS. 1-15. The cup was found in Benjamin's sack.—*The trials of the innocent*:—

I. That there is sorrow, and sorrow on a vast scale, is a great fact—a fact both too patent and too painful to be gainsaid. Joseph put the cup in the sack to try his brothers' faith, love, and loyalty to their father. 1. Sorrow was sent into the world as a preventive of greater sorrow. 2. Sorrow gives occasion for the exercise of many an else impossible virtue. 3. This would be a lame excuse indeed if it stood alone. But grief is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. 4. When we remember our sins, we wonder, not that life has had so many sorrows, but that it has had so few. II. Why should sorrow so often smite us in the most sensitive place? or, to take up the parable of the text—1. Why should the cup be in Benjamin's sack? Just because it is Benjamin's, we reply. The very thing that leads God to smite at all, leads Him to smite you here. God takes away earthly pleasure, and thus helps you to remember your sin and repent of it. 2. The cup was put there to bring them to a better mind ever after. 3. It was put there to give Joseph the opportunity of making himself known to his brethren. 4. It was put there to lead them out of the land of famine into the land of plenty. From this we may learn three lessons: (1) Learn to think more kindly of God and His dispensations, as you see how much reason you have to expect sorrow, how little right to look for joy; (2) Learn the lesson the lesser sorrows are meant to teach, lest you need the greater; (3) Take care lest you not only lose the joy, but lose the good the loss of joy was meant to give. (*J. B. Figgis.*)

The final trial of Joseph's brethren:—I. **THE SEVERITY OF THE TRIAL.** 1. It was unexpected. 2. It exposed them to the agony of suspense between hope and fear. 3. They were conscious of innocence. 4. The trial touched them in the sorest place. 5. The bringing them into their present difficulty seemed to have the sanction of religion. 6. They regard their case as hopeless. II. **THE PURPOSE OF THE TRIAL.** 1. To stir up their consciences to the depths. 2. To show whether they were capable of receiving forgiveness. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Joseph puts his brethren to the test*:—I. **THE TEST TO WHICH JOSEPH EXPOSED HIS BRETHREN.** There is at first sight an apparent wantonness in the manner in which this was applied; but looking deeper we see some motives for such a mode of action. 1. Probably it was designed as a kind of penalty for their former deeds. Joseph had been basely treated. Though he forgave his injurers, yet it was good for them to see their crime and feel it. His was not mere maudlin compassion; he desired first to bring them to repentance, and then he was ready and willing to forgive. And in this he is a type of God; God is the infinitely Forgiving One, but the Just One besides. 2. And a second motive which may be assigned for Joseph's conduct is that perhaps it was to compel them to feel that their lives were in his power. They are humbled to the dust before him by the test. Now, in assigning to him such a natural motive, we are not showing his conduct as anything superhuman. It was magnanimous, but yet mixed with the human. Everything that man does has in it something of evil; even his best actions have in them something that will not bear the light of day. 3. Again, Joseph may have wished to test his brethren's capability of forgiveness. II. **THE CONDUCT OF JOSEPH'S BRETHREN UNDER THE TEST.** 1. Judah cannot prove that his brother is not guilty, neither can he believe that he is guilty; he therefore leaves that question entirely aside. Instead of denying it, in modern language he showed cause why the law should not be put in force against him. 2. We next notice the pathos of that speech (ver. 20). 3. Let us learn, in conclusion, that even in the worst of mankind there is something good left. Judah was by no means an immaculate man; but

from what a man was, you cannot be certain what he is now. Here were men virtually guilty of the sin of murder, really guilty of cupidity in selling their brother; but years after we find in them something tender still, love for their father and compassion for their brother. It is this spark of undestroyed good in man that the Spirit of Christ takes hold of; and he alone who is able to discover this in the hearts of the worst, he alone will be in this world successful in turning sinners to God. (F. W. Robertson, M.A.)

Analogies.—1. We see a striking analogy between the conduct of Joseph towards his brother Benjamin, and that of Jesus towards His people. "Whom I love, I rebuke and chasten." The Lord often brings us into difficulties that He may detain us, as I may say, from leaving Him. Were it not for these, He would have fewer importunate applications at a throne of grace than He has. He does not afflict willingly or from His heart; but from necessity, and that He may bring us nearer to Him. 2. We also see a striking analogy between Joseph's conduct towards his brethren, and that of the Lord towards us. In all he did, I suppose, it was his design to try them. His putting the cup into Benjamin's sack, and convicting him of the supposed guilt, would try their love to him, and to their aged father. Had they been of the same disposition as when they sold Joseph, they would not have cared for him. But, happily, they are now of another mind. God appears to have made use of this mysterious providence, and of Joseph's behaviour, amongst other things, to bring them to repentance. And the cup being found in Benjamin's sack, would give them occasion to manifest it. It must have afforded the most heartfelt satisfaction to Joseph, amidst all the pain which it cost him, to witness their concern for Benjamin, and for the life of their aged father. This of itself was sufficient to excite, on his part, the fullest forgiveness. Thus God is represented as looking upon a contrite spirit, and even overlooking heaven and earth for it (Isa. lxvi. 1, 2). Next to the gift of His Son, He accounts it the greatest blessing He can bestow upon a sinful creature. Now, that on which He set so high a value, He may be expected to produce, even though it may be at the expense of our present peace. Nor have we any cause of complaint, but the contrary. What were the suspense, the anxiety, and the distress of Joseph's brethren, in comparison of that which followed? And what is the suspense, the anxiety, or the distress of an awakened sinner, or a tried believer, in comparison of the joy of faith, or the grace that shall be revealed at the appearing of Jesus Christ? It will then be found that our light affliction, which was but for a moment, has been working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. (A. Fuller.)

The cup in the sack.—I. THE PRIVATE COMMAND. 1. Its nature. All the money to be returned, and the silver cup to be placed in the sack belonging to Benjamin. It may seem strange that the steward was to charge them with stealing a cup wherein Joseph divined (if indeed the cup was not used for that purpose, as we believe), knowing that Joseph was a servant of God. We may not, with the higher standard of morality of these Christian times, approve this pretence; but it is in keeping with the whole transaction, which is a feint throughout. 2. Motive. Doubtless to test the feeling of the rest towards Benjamin. Did they envy this favourite as they did the other? If so, it was very likely that on being overtaken they would abandon the man with whom the cup was found—Benjamin—to his fate. Make no effort to procure his release. Return home without him, as they had once gone without Joseph. Before he proceeded further in helping his family in the famine, he would see if they had improved morally all these years. II. THE OBNOXIOUS CHARGE. The confidential servant having received the command, but most likely being ignorant of all his master's plans and of the relation of these guests, proceeds to put it in execution. 1. The brethren set off. Their journey. How unlike the last, when they were full of perplexity, and had left Simeon behind. Now they talk of their good treatment, and are accompanied by Simeon, and that Benjamin whom they had feared to lose. 2. They are pursued. Their astonishment at seeing the steward, who (chap. xliii. 23) had not long before spoken assuring words, hastening after them. 3. The charge. The steward faithfully, but to their great amazement, repeats the command of his master. 4. Their indignant denial. Such conduct would be opposed to the will of God (ver. 7). The idea was inconsistent with their proved honesty (ver. 8). They are quite willing to abide by the results of search. And that the punishment should be greater than hinted. III. THE APPALLING DISCOVERY. 1. The search commences. They are willing. The steward begins as far as possible from where he knows it is concealed. Thus they do not suspect him of any complicity, and their confidence increases as he proceeds. 2. They see Ben.

jamin's sack opened, and there, shining in all its beauty, is the cup! What could they think, or say, or do? They did not suffer Benjamin to return alone. The test was successful. There was another discovery—an altered feeling towards the old man and his favourite son. This discovery Joseph made. 3. They could only regard it as a plot of some one—perhaps the Lord of Egypt—to find a pretext for keeping them in bondage. What would become now of their father, and their wives and little ones. Learn: I. That our religion admits not of pretences. II. The time of confidence may be the hour of peril. (*J. C. Gray.*) *Money in the sack*:—Frederick, King of Prussia, one day rung his bell, and nobody answering, he opened his door, and found his page fast asleep in an elbow chair. He advanced towards him and was going to awaken him, when he perceived part of a letter hanging out of his pocket. His curiosity prompting him to know what it was, he took it out and read it. It was a letter from this young man's mother, in which she thanked him for having sent her a part of his wages to relieve her misery; and finished with telling him that God would reward him for his dutiful affection. The king, after reading it, went back softly into his chamber, took a bag full of ducats, and slipped it with the letter into the page's pocket. Returning to the chamber, he rang the bell so loudly, that it awakened the page, who instantly made his appearance. "You have had a sound sleep," said the king. The page was at a loss how to excuse himself; and putting his hand into his pocket by chance, to his utter astonishment, he there found a purse of ducats. He took it out, turned pale, and looking at the king, shed a torrent of tears without being able to utter a single word. "What is that," said the king, "what is the matter?" "Ah, sire," said the young man, throwing himself on his knees, "somebody seeks my ruin! I know nothing of this money which I have just found in my pocket." "My young friend," replied Frederick, "God often does great things for us, even in our sleep. Send that to your mother; salute her on my part, and assure her that I will take care of both her and you." (*Moral and Religious Anecdotes.*) *Grace unknown in the heart*:—A child of God may have the kingdom of grace in his heart, yet not know it. The cup was in Benjamin's sack, though he did not know it was there; thou mayest have faith in thy heart, the cup may be in thy sack though thou knowest it not. Old Jacob wept for his son Joseph, when Joseph was alive; thou mayest weep for grace, when grace may be alive in thy heart. The seed may be in the ground, when we do not see it spring up; the seed of God may be sown in thy heart, though thou dost not perceive the springing up of it. Think not grace is lost because it is hid. (*T. Watson.*) *Divining cups*:—The Ancient Egyptians, and still more, the Persians, practised a mode of divination from goblets. Small pieces of gold or silver, together with precious stones, marked with strange figures and signs, were thrown into the vessel; after which, certain incantations were pronounced, and the evil demon was invoked; the latter was then supposed to give the answer, either by intelligible words, or by pointing to some of the characters on the precious stones, or in some other more mysterious manner. Sometimes the goblet was filled with pure water, upon which the sun was allowed to play; and the figures which were thus formed, or which a lively imagination fancied it saw, were interpreted as the desired omen—a method of taking auguries still employed in Egypt and Nubia. The goblets were usually of a spherical form; and for this reason, as well as because they were believed to teach men all natural and many supernatural things, they were called "celestial globes." Most celebrated was the magnificent vase of turquoise of the wife Jemsheed, the Solomon among the ancient Persian kings, the founder of Persepolis; and Alexander the Great, so eager to imitate Eastern manners, is said to have adopted the sacred goblets also. (*M. M. Kalisch, Ph.D.*)

Vers. 16-34. And Judah said, What shall we say unto my lord?—*Judah's intercession*:—I. IT WAS ABLE. II. IT WAS NOBLE. III. IT GAVE PROMISE OF FUTURE GREATNESS. IV. IT SUGGESTS SOME FEATURES OF OUR LORD'S INTERCESSION FOR US. V. IT SUGGESTS THE QUALITIES OF TRUE PRAYER. In true prayer the soul is stirred to its depths. "I would give very much," says Luther, "if I could pray to our Lord God as well as Judah prays to Joseph here; for it is a perfect specimen of prayer—the true feeling there ought to be in prayer." (*T. H. Leale.*) *Judah's intercession*:—The whole of this intercession, taken together, is not one twentieth part of the length which our best advocates would have made of it in a court of justice; yet the speaker finds room to expatiate upon those parts which are the most tender, and on which a minute description will heighten the general effect.

We are surprised, delighted, and melted with his charming parenthesis: "Seeing his life is bound up with the lad's life." It is also remarkable how he repeats things which are the most tender; as, "when I come, and the lad be not with us . . . it shall come to pass, when he seeth that the lad is not with us. . . ." So also in describing the effect which this would produce: "When he seeth that the lad is not with us, he will die; and we shall bring down the grey hairs of thy servant, my father, with sorrow to the grave. And now, having stated his situation, he presumes to express his petition. His withholding that to the last was holding the mind of his judge in a state of affecting suspense, and preventing the objections which an abrupt introduction of it at the beginning might have created. Thus Esther, when presenting her petition to Ahasuerus, kept it back till she had, by holding him in suspense, raised his desire to the utmost height to know what it was, and induced in him a predisposition to grant it. And when we consider his petition, and the filial regard from which it proceeds, we may say, that if we except the grace of another and greater Substitute, never surely was there a more generous proposal! (*A. Fuller.*) *Joseph's love, and Judah's charge*:—I. BENJAMIN'S SURETY. II. THE FRIENDLY BANQUET. III. THE STRANGE STRATAGEM. IV. THE ELOQUENT APPEAL. Judah makes a speech which is very natural, simple, and pathetic. It is conciliatory towards Joseph. Joseph's greatness, power, and high rank are fully recognized ("Thou art as Pharaoh"). It is considerate in reference to the statements about Jacob's peculiar reasons for sorrow. It is courageous in its announcement of Judah's own responsibility, and of his readiness to be a substitute for his brother. And all through the speech tenderness and sympathy are exhibited in a very simple but touching manner. (*W. S. Smith, B.D.*) *Judah's argument*:—To point out the force of this overwhelming argument requires a view of the human mind, when, like a complicate machine in motion, the various powers and passions of it are at work. The whole calamity of the family arising from obedience to the judge's own command; an obedience yielded to on their part with great reluctance, because of the situation of their aged father; and on his part with still greater, because his brother was, as he supposed, torn in pieces, and he the only surviving child of a beloved wife; and the declaration of a venerable grey-headed man, that if he lose him it will be his death—was enough to melt the heart of any one possessed of human feelings. If Joseph had really been what he appeared, an Egyptian nobleman, he must have yielded the point. To have withstood it would have proved him not a man, much less a man who "feared God," as he professed to be. But if such would have been his feelings even on that supposition, what must they have been to know what he knew? It is also observable with what singular adroitness Judah avoids making mention of this elder brother of the lad, in any other than his father's words. He did not say he was torn in pieces. No, he knew it was not so! But his father had once used that language, and though he had lately spoken in a manner which bore hard on him and his brethren, yet this is passed over, and nothing hinted but what will turn to account. (*A. Fuller.*) *Judah's intercession*:—I. HE REHEARSES THE PAST (vers. 18–29). 1. The speaker. Judah. Well that it was he. Had it been Reuben the proof of penitence had not been so clear. It had been too much like the old Reuben (comp. xxxvii. 22 with xlii. 22). It was Judah, and not like the old Judah (xxxvii. 26, 27). The last time Joseph heard Judah speak of his father's favourite was when he (Joseph) was in the pit, and Judah, on the edge, was proposing to sell him into bondage. Now he intercedes to save Benjamin from bondage. 2. The subject. He (1) recalls the former visit, and the conversation of that time (vers. 18–20). He then (2) proceeds to remind Joseph of his command (ver. 21), but for which they had not brought their brother. Of their expostulations (ver. 22) and of his firmness of purpose (ver. 23). He then drew the portrait of the old man, described the long time they bore the pangs of hunger before Jacob at last would suffer Benjamin to go; and, having hinted at the loss of one other son, repeated the final words of the old man (ver. 29). II. HE PICTURES THE FUTURE. This he was the better able to do, from his memory of a former occasion. That picture of sorrow and wail of agony had ever since haunted him. It might be repeated with still more painful consequences. It might hasten the death of his father. He records, without a censure, the endearing union of the old father and his younger brother. There was one life between them. The death or loss of Benjamin might be the death of the father. He relates that he had become a surety for the safe return of the lad. As he thus earnestly and most pathetically pleads for the release of Benjamin, what feelings must have risen in the mind of Joseph. Chiefly of joy that

Judah was so changed; but also of attachment to a father who had mourned his own supposed death so long and truly. III. HE PROPOSES A COMPROMISE. 1. Its nature. If one must be held in bondage for this supposed crime, let it be himself, who is confessedly innocent, in place of Benjamin, whose guilt is assumed. Judah has wife and children at home, yet will leave all rather than abandon his brother. He will be henceforth a slave, if only Benjamin may be free. Was ever love like this? "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John xv. 13; see especially Rom. v. 6-8). 2. The motive. To spare his father all needless pain, he would accept the position of being less loved than Benjamin. His father might grieve at his loss, as he had at Simeon's, but the loss of Benjamin would affect him more. 3. The result. The test had proved to Joseph that Judah repented the past. It was a happy discovery. What can give greater joy to a brother than to see a right moral change in a brother? Learn: 1. Fearlessly to take the side of the innocent and the aged. 2. To bring forth fruit meet for repentance. 3. Not to be ashamed of an honourable change of heart and mind. 4. To love and honour Him who became a surety for us. (*J. C. Gray.*)

Ver. 30. **His life is bound up in the lad's life.**—*The life of the lad*:—These words were spoken by Judah as descriptive of the tenderness and affection which Jacob felt towards Benjamin, the youngest son of that patriarchal family; but they are words just as appropriate to hundreds of parents in this house—"since his life is bound up in the lad's life." The fowl in the barnyard, clumsy-footed and heavy-winged, flies fiercely at you if you come too near the little group, and God intended every father and mother to be the protection and the help of the child. Jesus comes into every dwelling, and says to the father or mother: "You have been looking after this child's body and mind; the time has come when you ought to be looking after its immortal soul." I read of a vessel that foundered. The boats were launched; many of the passengers were struggling in the water. A mother with one hand beat the wave, and with the other hand lifted up her little child towards the lifeboat, crying: "Save my child! save my child!" The impassioned outcry of that mother is the prayer of hundreds of Christian people who sit listening this morning while I speak. I. I propose to show some of the CAUSES OF PARENTAL ANXIETY. 1. I find the first cause of parental anxiety in the inefficiency and imperfection of parents themselves. We have a slight hope, all of us, that our children may escape our faults. We hide our imperfections and think they will steer clear of them. Alas, there is a poor prospect of that. There is more probability that they will choose our vices than choose our virtues. 2. Again, parental anxiety often arises from an early exhibition of sinfulness in the child. It is especially sad if the parent sees his own faults copied by the child. It is very hard work to pull up a nettle that we ourselves planted. We remember that the greatest frauds that ever shook the banking-houses of the country started from a boy's deception a good many years ago; and the gleaming blade of the murderer is only another blade of the knife with which the boy struck at his comrade. The cedar of Lebanon that wrestles with the blast, started from seed lodged in the side of the mountain, and the most tremendous dishonesties of the world once toddled out from a cradle. All these things make parents anxious. 3. Anxiety on the part of parents, also, arises from a consciousness that there are so many temptations thrown all around our young people. It may be almost impossible to take a castle by siege—straightforward siege—but suppose in the night there is a traitor within, and he goes down and draws the bolt, and swings open the great door, and then the castle falls immediately. That is the trouble with the hearts of the young; they have foes without and foes within. II. I shall devote the rest of my remarks to ALLEVIATION OF PARENTAL ANXIETY. Let me say to you as parents, that a great deal of that anxiety will be lifted if you will begin early with your children. Tom Paine said: "The first five years of my life I became an infidel." A vessel goes out to sea; it has been five days out; a storm comes on it; it springs a leak; the helm will not work; everything is out of order. What is the matter? The ship is not seaworthy, and never was. It is a poor time to find it out now. Under the fury of the storm, the vessel goes down, with two hundred and fifty passengers, to a watery grave. The time to make the ship seaworthy was in the dry-dock, before it started. Alas for us, if we wait until our children get out into the world before we try to bring upon them the influence of Christ's religion. I tell you, the dry-dock of the Christian home is the place where we are to fit them for usefulness and for heaven. In this world, under the storm of vice and temptation, it will be too

late. In the domestic circle you decide whether your child shall be truthful or false—whether it shall be generous or penurious. You cannot begin too early. You stand on the bank of a river floating by. You cannot stop that river, but you travel days and days towards the source of it, and you find, after awhile, where it comes down, dropping from the rock, and with your knife you make a course in this or that direction for the dropping to take, and you decide the course of the river. You stand and see your children's character rolling on with great impetuosity and passion, and you cannot affect them. Go up towards the source where the character first starts, and decide that it shall take the right direction, and it will follow the path you give it. But I want you to remember, O father, O mother, that it is what you do that is going to affect your children, and not what you say. You tell your children to become Christians while you are not, and they will not. Above all, pray. I do not mean mere formal prayer, that amounts to nothing. Often go before God and say: "Here are my dear children. Oh save them. Put their feet on the road to heaven. Thou knowest how imperfectly I am training them; make up what I lack. Lord Jesus Christ, better than anything Thou canst give, give them Jesus." God will hear such a prayer. He said He would: "I will be a God to thee and thy seed after thee." (*Dr. Talmage.*)

CHAPTER XLV.

VERS. 1-3. Joseph made himself known unto his brethren.—*Joseph and his brethren*:—I. JUDAH'S PATHETIC APPEAL FOR THE RELEASE OF BENJAMIN (chap. xlv. 30-34). In this appeal the following points are made: 1. Jacob's strong attachment to Benjamin. 2. That Benjamin was the mainstay of Jacob in his advanced age. 3. A strong sense of personal honour. II. JOSEPH'S DEEP EMOTION. 1. Manifested in the tears he shed. 2. Manifested in his eager inquiry concerning his dear father. 3. Manifested also in the desire to take in his brothers to his heart. III. JOSEPH'S DEVOUT ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GOD'S GRACIOUS HAND IN ALL HE HAD SUFFERED AND ENJOYED. Lessons: 1. A very touching lesson is here taught the sons and daughters of aged parents concerning their greatest need in their declining years—not expensive clothing or luxurious living, but the manifestation of real, tender, loving sympathy. 2. Joseph's readiness to forgive his brothers, and his deep emotion when he saw their sincere love for his father, contain timely lessons, not only for brothers and sisters according to the flesh, but also for brethren and sisters in Christ. 3. The deep insight into the purposes of the providence of God, and perfect acquiescence in them, and joy that they have wrought out good for others, even though at a cost of personal sacrifice, are fraught with instructive lessons. (1) That special light is given to the obedient. (2) That in this, as in so many other features, Joseph is an eminent type of Christ. (*D. C. Hughes, M.A.*) *The soul in silence*:—No one doubts that Joseph is a type of Christ; in nothing is he more so than in that significant record, "there stood no man with him while Joseph made himself known to his brethren." Egypt and its idols were shut out; Pharaoh and his pomp; officers of state; obsequious servants; men of business—"he caused every man to go out from him"; and then in the silence he spoke in his own Hebrew tongue, with no interpreter then, and made himself known to his brethren. What is this most plainly and evidently but a parable of God and the soul? What is prayer but a speaking to God in silence? Silence is the height of worship. Conversing is silencing the world, silencing the tumult of sin, silencing the clamour of the passions. Growth in grace and holiness is but silencing human interests, human love, human pleasures. What is God's purpose in sickness but to create a silence in the soul in which He may make Himself known? So with sorrows, losses, deaths, calumny, persecution: they make a solitude round the soul; "there stands no man with us," but God stands with us, and it is far better. And what are all these things but preparations for, rehearsals before that great last reality—death? At that hour the soul is alone, and a great silence reigns; one by one all persons and things have been severed from the soul; one by one the senses fail, and all communion with the world and with creatures is cut off; most familiar things, most necessary things, faces, sounds, acts, all are not; the soul lives, but lives in silence; the silence deepens and deepens till it becomes absolutely perfect,

and then death has come, and the soul finds itself sensibly face to face with God. This is the end of all human life. (*F. C. Woodhouse, M.A.*) *Joseph discovers himself*:—I. A BROTHER'S PARDON. Joseph's. 1. Of a great injury. (1) To Joseph. (2) To Jacob. The beloved and trusted son taken from him. His heart well nigh broken by the story that was told him. 2. Of brothers. The crime therefore greater. More easy to forgive the offence of a stranger than of a friend (*Psa. xli. 9; lv. 12, 13, 20*). 3. The pardon magnanimously bestowed. Proved by deeds as well as words. Their sin extenuated. He dwells on the good that came out of it, not on the evil that was in it. Tried to soften down their harsh self-censure. The method of professing pardon may detract from its value, and suggest a doubt of its sincerity. 4. Marked by deep affection. He could not repress his emotions, nor conceal his joy. Judah, the darkest character, not excepted. 5. Practically demonstrated. He will henceforth care for them during the famine. II. A KING'S GRATITUDE. Pharaoh's. 1. It had been already proved. He had exalted Joseph. 2. He now cares for Joseph's friends. Royally lays himself out for their present good. Strange contrast to the conduct of many kings towards their deliverers and helpers (*Charles I. and Earl Stafford; Charles II., and his treatment of the faithful adherents of his house in its misfortunes; also David and Barzillai*). 3. It was beautifully expressed. Will have all Joseph's family invited to Egypt. Promises that they shall have "the fat of the land." Sends with the invitation the means of conveyance. Enjoins the free use of means and subsistence. "Regard not your stuff," &c. (*ver. 20*). III. A FATHER'S JOY. Jacob's. 1. Imagine Jacob's home. The old man of 130 years, feeble, doubtful, fearful, apprehensive. Waiting for the return of his sons. Anxious concerning Benjamin. 2. Picture the arrival at home. They are all there. Benjamin amongst them. Simon also. Joyful greeting. 3. They tell their story. Good news. Joseph yet alive! governor of Egypt. 4. Jacob's doubts. He is suspicious of his sons. 5. The arrival of the waggons convinces him. His spirit revives. His great joy. New hopes. He will see Joseph again, and in such a robe of office as his affection could not have provided. What greater joy can a father know than that excited by good news of absent children. Those who leave home with good principles the most likely to create such joy. Religion supplies the only true basis of character. The Lord was with Joseph. He will be with us in our wanderings if we begin them with Him. Learn: Let love be without dissimulation. Forgive injuries and prove the reality of forgiveness. (*J. C. Gray.*) *Joseph's dealings with his brethren*:—Joseph recognized his brethren at once, though they failed, as they bowed before the mighty vicegerent of Egypt, to recognize in him the child by them so pitilessly sold into bondage; and Joseph, we are told, "remembered the dreams which he had dreamed of them"; how their sheaves should stand round about and make obeisance to his sheaf; how sun and moon and eleven stars should all do homage to him. All at length was coming true. I. Now, of course, it would have been very easy for him at once to have made himself known to his brethren, to have fallen on their necks and assured them of his forgiveness. But he has counsels of love at once wiser and deeper than would have lain in such a ready and off-hand declaration of forgiveness. His purpose is to prove whether they are different men, or, if not, to make them different men from what they were when they practised that deed of cruelty against himself. He feels that he is carrying out, not his own purpose, but God's, and this gives him confidence in hazarding all, as he does not hazard it, in bringing this matter to a close. II. Two things were necessary here: the first that he should have the opportunity of observing their conduct to their younger brother, who had now stepped into his place, and was the same favourite with his father as Joseph once had been; the second, that by some severe treatment, which should bear a more or less remote resemblance to their treatment of himself, he should prove whether he could call from them a lively remembrance and a penitent confession of their past guilt. III. The dealings of Joseph with his brethren are, to a great extent, the very pattern of God's dealings with men. God sees us careless, in easily forgiving ourselves our old sins; and then, by trial and adversity and pain, He brings these sins to our remembrance, causes them to find us out, and at length extracts from us a confession, "we are verily guilty." And then, when tribulation has done its work, He is as ready to confirm His love to us as ever was Joseph to confirm his love to his brethren. (*Archbishop Trench.*) *Joseph makes himself known*:—I. THE ENDURING STRENGTH AND WORTH OF FAMILY AFFECTION. Nothing more beautiful in man than this. Age does not congeal it, nor death destroy it. A holy, perennial fire. It begets gentleness, patience, long suffering, forgiveness of

injury, oblivion of wrong. II. THE CONSTANT FEAR WROUGHT BY CONSCIOUS GUILT. The tender emotion of Joseph was not shared by his brethren. His declaration, "I am Joseph," drew from them no glad expressions of joy. They were silent from dismay. "His brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence." Conscious guilt filled them with alarm and anxious questioning. Could he ever forgive them? Since he had them now in his power, and he had become so great, would he not take vengeance upon them? Their sense of guilt had not perished or weakened with time. It was as enduring as Joseph's love. III. GOD CHOOSES THE WICKED TO ACCOMPLISH HIS DIVINE PURPOSES. Joseph had been sold, from malice, by his brethren into Egypt. And yet God had sent him there. It seems like an irreconcilable contradiction of facts, and yet the thing alleged was true. And our view of the world's events is inadequate unless we believe that God in a similar way always takes a controlling part in the affairs of men. Did this fact lessen the guilt of the sons of Jacob? Did Joseph mean that they were excused on account of it? Certainly not. Their guilt was according to their intention. IV. THE INVITED FIND GRACE RECAUSE OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE GOOD. For his father's sake and for Benjamin's sake, Joseph forgave them all they had done to him. What magnanimity of spirit! It was as if he had blotted out their sin and remembered it no more. And his efforts to allay and banish their fears assured them that from him they had nothing to dread. It was a beautiful fore-gleam of the grace of the Gospel. So Christ has sought to assuage our guilty fears by speaking to us of His Father and our Father, and by owning us as His brethren. Well is it for us that we are connected in this way by ties of relationship with the good of earth and sky. If we stood alone, unconnected with others whose prayers and merit move heaven's favour in our behalf to give us further opportunity to repent, or which win for us undeserved consideration from our fellow-men—who show us kindness for the sake of a father, or a mother, or a sister, or some other—it would be far worse with us. But their merit, like charity, covers a multitude of sins in us. We are clad in a borrowed grace, derived from them, and our faults are excused and borne with, and our meagre virtues rated far above their real value. V. THE GROUND OF PEACE FOR WRONG-DOERS. When Joseph had fallen upon Benjamin's neck and wept, and had kissed all his brethren and wept upon them, "after that his brethren talked with him." The speechless terror exhibited by them at first then vanished away. What cured their trouble of heart? It was the assurance they had that Joseph looked upon them graciously for their father's and brother's sake, and that he entirely forgave their sin. This assurance had been wrought in them by the words and acts of Joseph. The kiss he had given them, and his tears of joy, formed an indubitable token of pardon and reconciliation. In his treatment of them we have, therefore, a hint of God's treatment of men for their sin, and of the way a guilty soul may find peace. Two things are required: 1. A worthy Mediator to whom we are so related that His merit will procure us Divine favour. 2. Indubitable evidence of acceptance and pardon through Him. The Christ was such a Mediator. He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, . . . higher than the heavens," and "not ashamed to call us brethren." Through our relationship with Him as brethren, we are invested with His righteousness. (*A. H. Currier.*) *Joseph and his brethren*:—I. THE EXCELLENCE OF FORGIVENESS. II. THE SACREDNESS OF FAMILY TIES. The relation of children to their parents, and of brothers and sisters to each other is peculiarly sacred. Other connections we may determine for ourselves; this is appointed by God. It brings great opportunities and great risks. There are no others we can hurt so sorely, or make so glad, as those in our own household. III. THIS STORY ILLUSTRATES CHRIST'S FORGIVENESS. The great Elder Brother suffers at our hands; yet loves us when we will not love Him, and waits for years till our need shall bring us to His feet. Even then He cannot take us at once to His bosom. The sense of guilt must be awakened, the tears of penitence flow. (*P. B. Davis.*) *Joseph made known to his brethren*:—I. THE RIPENESS OF THE TIME. II. HIS DELICACY OF FEELING. III. HIS ENTIRE FORGIVENESS. 1. He strives to prevent remorse. 2. He bids them see in their past history the plan of God. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Joseph reveals himself*:—I. JOSEPH'S INTERVIEW WITH HIS BRETHREN. 1. Observe the delicacy of Joseph's feelings in removing all the witnesses of his emotion. Feeling, to be true and deep, must be condensed by discipline. 2. Notice the entireness of Joseph's forgiveness. (1) This may be inferred from his desire to prevent remorse (ver. 5). (2) A further proof of the entireness of Joseph's forgiveness is, that he referred the past to God's will (ver. 8). Upon this we have three remarks to make. First, that it is utterly impossible for us to judge of any event,

whether it is a blessing or misfortune, from simply looking at the event itself; because we do not know the whole. Fancy the buying of a slave in a cave in Canaan; and straightway there springs up in your breast a feeling of indignation. Pass on a few years, and we find Joseph happy, honoured, and beloved; two nations at least are saved by him from famine. Secondly, we remark how God educes good from evil, and that man is only an instrument in His hands. A secular historian, treating of mighty events, always infers that there has been some plan steadily pursued; he would have traced step by step how it all came about, and referred it all to Joseph. But from the inspired history we find that Joseph knew not one step before him. Thirdly, we remark that there is a danger in the too easy acquiescence in the fact that good comes from evil; for we begin to say, Evil then is God's agent, to do evil must be right; and so we are landed in confusion. Before this had taken place, had Joseph's brethren said, "Out of this, good will come, let us sell our brother," (they would have been acting against their conscience; but after the event it was but faith to refer it to God's intention. Had they done this before, it would have been presumption. But to feel that good has come through you, but not by your will, is humiliating. You feel that the evil is all yours, and the good is God's.

II. THE SUMMONS OF JACOB BY PHARAOH. 1. Remark, Pharaoh rejoiced with Joseph (ver. 16). Love begets love. Joseph had been faithful, and Pharaoh honours and esteems him. 2. The advice given by Joseph to his brethren (ver. 24). We should do well to ponder on Joseph's advice, for when that wondrous message was given to the world that God had pardoned man, men at once began to quarrel with each other. They began to throw the blame on the Jew alone for having caused His death; they began to quarrel respecting the terms of salvation. 3. Lastly, we remark the incredulity of Jacob, "his heart fainted." There are two kinds of unbelief, that which disbelieves because it hates the truth, and that which disbelieves because the truth is apparently too glorious to be received. The latter was the unbelief of Jacob; it may be an evidence of weakness, but not necessarily an evidence of badness. (*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*) *Recognition and reconciliation*.—I. DISCLOSURE. "I am Joseph." Were ever the pathos of simplicity, and the simplicity of pathos, more nobly expressed than in these two words? (They are but two in the Hebrew.) Has the highest dramatic genius ever winged an arrow which goes more surely to the heart than that? The question, which hurries after the disclosure, seems strange and needless; but it is beautifully self-revealing, as expressive of agitation, and as disclosing a son's longing, and perhaps, too, as meant to relieve the brothers' embarrassment, and, as it were, to wrap the keen edge of the disclosure in soft wool. II. CONSCIENCE-STRICKEN SILENCE. An illustration of the profitlessness of all crime. Sin is, as one of its Hebrew names tells us, missing the mark, whether we think of it as fatally failing to reach the ideal of conduct, or as always, by a Divine nemesis, failing to hit even the shabby end it aims at. "Every rogue is a roundabout fool." They put Joseph in the pit, and here he is on a throne. They have stained their souls, and embittered their father's life for twenty-two long years, and the dreams have come true, and all their wickedness has not turned the stream of the Divine purpose any more than the mud dam built by a child diverts the Mississippi. One flash has burned up their whole sinful past, and they stand scorched and silent among the ruins. So it always is. Sooner or later the same certainty of the futility of his sin will overwhelm every sinful man, and dumb self-condemnation will stand in silent acknowledgment of evil desert before the throne of the Brother, who is now the prince and the judge, on whose fiat hangs life or death. To see Christ enthroned should be joy; but it may be turned into terror and silent anticipation of His just condemnation. III. ENCOURAGEMENT AND COMPLETE FORGIVENESS (vers. 4-8). More than natural sweetness and placability must have gone to the making of such a temper of forgiveness. He must have been living near the Fountain of all mercy to have had so full a cup of it to offer. Because he had caught a gleam of the Divine pardon, he becomes a mirror of it; and we may fairly see in this ill-used brother, yearning over the half-sullen sinners, and seeking to open a way for his forgiveness to steal into their hearts, and rejoicing over his very sorrows which have fitted him to save them alive, and satisfy them in the days of famine, an adumbration of our Elder Brother's forgiving love and saving tenderness. IV. MESSAGE TO JACOB. 1. It bespeaks a simple nature, unspoiled by prosperity, to delight thus in his father's delight, and to wish the details of all his splendour to be told him. A statesman who takes most pleasure in his elevation because of the good he can do by it, and because it will please the old people at home, must be a pure and lovable man. The command has another

justification in the necessity to assure his father of the wisdom of so great a change. God had sent him into the promised land, and a very plain Divine injunction was needed to warrant his leaving it. Such a one was afterwards given in vision; but the most emphatic account of his son's honour and power was none the less required to make the old Jacob willing to abandon so much, and go into such strange conditions. 2. We have another instance of the difference between man's purposes and God's counsel in this message. Joseph's only thought is to afford his family temporary shelter during the coming five years of famine. Neither he nor they knew that this was the fulfilment of the covenant with Abraham, and the bringing of them into the land of their oppression for four centuries. No shadow of that future was cast upon their joy, and yet the steady march of God's plan was effected along the path which they were ignorantly preparing. The road-maker does not know what bands of mourners, or crowds of holiday makers, or troops of armed men, may pass along it. V. THE KISS OF FULL RECONCILIATION AND FRANK COMMUNION. The history of Jacob's household had hitherto been full of sins against family life. Now, at last, they taste the sweetness of fraternal love. Joseph, against whom they had sinned, takes the initiative, flinging himself with tears on the neck of Benjamin, his own mother's son, nearer to him than all the others, crowding his pent-up love in one long kiss. Then, with less of passionate affection, but more of pardoning love, he kisses his contrite brothers. The offender is ever less ready to show love than the offended. The first step towards reconciliation, whether of man with man or of man with God, comes from the aggrieved. We always hate those whom we have harmed; and if enmity were only ended by the advances of the wrong-doer, it would be perpetual. The injured has the prerogative of praying the injurer to be reconciled. So was it in Pharaoh's throne-room on that long past day; so is it still in the audience chamber of heaven. "He that might the vantage best have took, found out the remedy." "We love Him, because He first loved us." (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Joseph discovering himself to his brethren*:—"I am Joseph." 1. It is an expression of great humility. The governor of Egypt remembered that he was Joseph, a Hebrew—the son of an old pilgrim who now sojourned in Canaan, and the brother of these plain and vulgar strangers who depended on his goodness and solicited his clemency. 2. Here is soft and gentle reproof. He hints at their crime, but without menaces or reproaches. He alludes to it as if he only aimed to palliate it. 3. Here is the language of forgiveness. (1) Proceeding not merely from a sudden flow of passion, but from settled goodness of heart. (2) Permanent. 4. Here is a pious reference of his brethren to the wonderful works of Providence. Your Joseph, whom you had doomed to death or perpetual slavery, is employed of God to preserve you and your families from misery and ruin. 5. This is an expression of filial affection; for mark what immediately follows: "Doth my father yet live?" How tender, how affectionate, how dutiful the question. 6. Here is an expression of general benevolence. "I am Joseph, whom ye sold in Egypt. . . . God did send me before you, to preserve life." He considered himself as promoted to power, not for his own sake, but for the public good; and to this end he applied the power which he possessed. (*J. Lathrop, D.D.*) *The reconciliation*:—1. The modes in which our Lord makes Himself known to men are various as their lives and characters. But frequently the forerunning choice of a sinner by Christ is discovered in such gradual and ill-understood dealings as Joseph used with those brethren. It is the closing of a net around them. They seem to be doomed men—men who are never at all to get disentangled from their old sin. If anyone is in this baffled and heartless condition, fearing even good lest it turn to evil in his hand; afraid to take the money that lies in the sack's mouth, because he feels there is a snare in it; if any one is sensible that life has become unmanageable in his hands, and that he is being drawn on by an unseen power which he does not understand, then let him consider in the scene before us how such a condition ends or may end. There is always in Christ a greater love seeking the friendship of a sinner than there is in the sinner seeking for Christ. 2. In finding their brother again, those sons of Jacob found also their own better selves which they had long lost. They had been living in a lie, unable to look the past in the face, and so becoming more and more false. Trying to leave their sin behind them, they always found it rising in the path before them, and again they had to resort to some new mode of laying this uneasy ghost. So, too, do many of us live as if yet we had not found the life eternal, the kind of life that we can always go on with—rather as those who are but making the best of a life which can never be very valuable, nor ever perfect. There

seem voices calling us back, assuring us we must yet retrace our steps, that there are passages in our past with which we are not done, that there is an inevitable humiliation and penitence awaiting us. It is through that we can alone get back to the good we once saw and hoped for; there were right desires and resolves in us once, views of a well-spent life which have been forgotten and pressed out of remembrance, but all these rise again in the presence of Christ. 3. A third suggestion is made by this narrative. Joseph commanded from his presence all who might be merely curious spectators of his burst of feeling, and might, themselves unmoved, criticise this new feature of the governor's character. In all love there is a similar reserve. (*M. Dods, D.D.*) *Joseph's disclosure of himself to his brethren*:—Why was it he so long, and by artifices so strange, delayed the disclosure which an affectionate heart must have been yearning to make? There is a question antecedent to this, which forces itself on the student of the narrative, and to which Scripture can scarcely be said to furnish a reply. How came it that Joseph had made no inquiries after his family; or had not attempted to have had intercourse with his father, during the many years that Jacob had been bewailing his loss?—for more than twenty years had elapsed from his having been sold to the Ishmaelites to his meeting his brethren; yet he does not seem to have sent a single message to Jacob, though there was free communication between Egypt and Canaan. Fourteen of those years he had, indeed, been in trouble, and it may not have been in his power to transmit any account of himself; but, for the last six years, he had been ruler over the land; and you might have expected the first use made of his authority would have been to obtain tidings of his father—to ascertain whether he survived—and, if he did, to minister to his comforts in his declining years. Yet it appears that Joseph did nothing of the kind; he attempted no intercourse with his family, though his circumstances were such that, if attempted, it would have been readily effected. It is evident that Joseph considered himself as finally separated from his father and brethren, for we read, as his reason for calling his first-born Manasseh, “God hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house.” It might be inferred from this expression, that Joseph regarded it as an appointment of God that he should forget his father's house. At all events, there is ground enough for concluding that it was through Divine direction that he abstained from making himself known; and, though strange would be the silence of Joseph, if you supposed it to have proceeded from his own will, yet there are reasons enough to vindicate it, if maintained at the bidding of God. We would have you remember that Jacob had to undergo the retribution of his greivous fault, in having deceived Isaac his father, and gained by fraud, the blessing. The retribution commenced when he himself was deceived by Laban, who gave him Leah for Rachel; but it did not reach its full measure till he in turn was imposed on by his own sons, who persuaded him that Joseph was slain. God alone could determine for how long a time it was just that Jacob should be a victim of this cruel opposition; yet, when we understand that his being deceived was in recompense of his having deceived Isaac, we may readily believe that Joseph was not sooner allowed to make himself known, because the punishment of Jacob was not sooner complete. It would not be difficult to suppose other reasons; for, by effecting in so circuitous a manner, and after so long a time, the reunion of Joseph with the house of his father, God afforded occasions for the display of His over-ruling power and providence, which hardly could have occurred on any supposition, and which could not have been wanting but with great loss to the Church in every age. But, admitting that Joseph acted under the direction of God, in remaining so many years without intercourse with his father, and that therefore his silence is no proof of want of good affection, what are we to say of his conduct when his brethren were brought actually before him—of his harsh language—of his binding Simeon—of his putting the cup in Benjamin's sack? Joseph, it must be remembered, was an injured man, and the persons with whom he is called upon to deal are those from whose hands his injuries had come. Unto a man of less pious feeling, the temptation would have been strong of using his present superiority in avenging the wrongs which had been heaped upon his youth. While, however, Joseph had no thought of avenging himself on his brethren, he must still have borne in mind the evil of their characters; and knowing them, by sad experience, to have been men of deceit and cruelty, he would be naturally suspicious both of the uprightness of their actions, and the veracity of their words. Now, if we keep this in mind, it will serve as a clue to much that is intricate. It was Joseph's ruling desire to obtain accurate tidings; as

to the existence and welfare of Jacob and Benjamin; many years had rolled away since treachery and violence had torn him from his father—he had been as one dead unto his kindred, and his kindred as the dead unto him; therefore when his brethren who hated him, and cast him out, suddenly stood before him, his first impulse must have been to ascertain whether his father and the brother of his affections were yet among the living. And why, then, you may say, did he not follow the impulse—make himself known, and propose the question? Ah! he knew his brethren to be cruel and deceitful; they might have hated and practised against Benjamin, as they had done in regard to himself: and it was clear that, if Benjamin also had been their victim, they, when they found themselves in the power of Joseph, would have invented some false account as a shield from the anger which the truth must have provoked. Hence the method of direct questioning was not open to Joseph; he therefore tried an indirect method; brings an accusation against his brethren—the accusation of being spies—which he knew could only be refuted by some appeal to their domestic or national circumstances. Thus he throws them off their guard, and by making it their interest to tell the truth, he diminishes in a measure the likelihood of falsehood. Thus far, we ask you, was not the conduct of Joseph intelligible and exceptionable? He wanted information which he could not procure by ordinary means, therefore he took extraordinary means; for, if the brethren never returned, he would know too well that Benjamin had perished; but, if they returned, and brought Benjamin with them, his happiness would be complete. Hence, then, the harshness—though, by taking care that his brethren should depart laden with corn, and every man with his money in his sack, did he but, after all, give sufficient proof that the harshness was but assumed, and that kindness, the warmest and truest, was uppermost in his breast. But what shall we say of Joseph's conduct, when his brethren returned and brought Benjamin with them? It is somewhat more difficult to explain. Strange, that in place of at once falling upon Benjamin's neck, Joseph should have used deceit to make him seem a robber! Though the long delay of his brethren in Canaan might have strengthened the suspicions of Joseph, yet his suspicions must all have disappeared when Benjamin stood actually before him; and we hardly see why he need have put upon himself the painful restraint so pathetically described. "He made haste; for his bowels did yearn upon his brother: and he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there." And yet still he did not make himself known to his brethren, but allowed them to depart, providing, by concealment of the cup, for the after interruption of their journey. We may suppose that through this strange artifice, Joseph sought to ascertain the disposition of the ten brothers towards Benjamin; there was no doubt but that he was planning the bringing of the whole family to settle in Egypt, and it was needful, before carrying out this plan, that he should know whether the whole family were well agreed, or whether they were still divided by factions and jealousies: thus, by putting Benjamin apparently in peril, convicting him of theft, and then declaring his intention of punishing by enslaving him, he was morally sure of discovering the real feelings of the rest. For if they had hated Benjamin as they had hated him, they would treat his fate with indifference; whereas, if he were in any measure dear to them, the fact would become evident by the manifested emotions. The artifice succeeded—the agony which the ten brothers displayed, when they heard that Benjamin must be kept as a bondsman, put out of question that the son of Jacob's old age was beloved by the children of Leah, and removed the natural apprehension that the feuds of early years remained to mar the plan with which Joseph was occupied. And further, may it not be possible that Joseph wished to assure himself that the children of Rachel were as dear to Jacob now as they had been in their youth. He might have thought that Jacob's affections had possibly been alienated from Benjamin and himself; this he would be naturally desirous to ascertain, before he discovered himself in the ruler of Egypt. If the ten were quite ready to leave Benjamin behind, it would be too evident that they were under no fear of the consequences of meeting their father unattended by their brother, and Joseph would have reason to conclude that Jacob's love had been estranged from the children of Rachel. On the contrary, if the ten showed by their conduct that to return without Benjamin would indeed be to "bring down Jacob's gray hairs with sorrow to the grave," there would be no place for any suspicion: nothing would remain but for Joseph to throw aside his irksome disguise, and hasten to be enfolded in the arms of his parent. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *I am Joseph*—"I am Joseph!" Joseph, and yet more than Joseph. We are not the same twenty years afterwards that we

are to-day. The old name—yet may be a new nature. The old identity; yet there may be enlarged capacity, refined sensibilities, diviner tastes, holier tendencies. I am Joseph! It is as if the great far-spreading umbrageous oak said, "I am the acorn!" or the great tree said, "I am the little mustard-seed!" Literally it was Joseph; yet in a higher sense it was not Joseph, but Joseph increased, educated, drilled, magnified, put in his right position. You have no right to treat the man of twenty years ago as if twenty years had not elapsed. I don't know men whom I knew twenty years ago! I know their names; but they may be—if I have not seen them during the time, and if they have been reading, thinking, praying, growing—entirely different men. You must not judge them externally, but according to their intellectual, moral, and spiritual qualities. To treat a man whom you knew twenty years ago as if he were the same man is equal to handing him, in the strength and power of his years, the toys with which he amused his infancy. Let us destroy our identity, in so far as that identity is associated with incompleteness of strength, shallowness of nature, poverty of information, deficiency of wisdom; so that men may talk to us and not know us, and our most familiar acquaintance of twenty years ago may require to be introduced to us to-day as if he had never heard our name. But the point on which I wish to fasten your attention most particularly is this: That there are in human life days of revelation, when people get to know the meaning of what they have been looking at notwithstanding the appearances which were before their eyes. We shall see men as we never saw them before. The child will see his old despised mother some day as he never saw her. And you, young man, who have attained the patriarchal age of nineteen, and who smile at your old father when he quotes some old maxim and wants to read a chapter out of what he calls the Holy Bible, will one day see him as you never saw him. The angel of God that is in him will shine out upon you, and you will see whose counsel you have despised and whose tenderness you have contemned. We only see one another now and then. Sometimes the revelation is quick as a glance, impossible to detain as a flash of lightning. Sometimes the revelation comes in a tone of unusual pathos, and when we hear that tone for the first time we say, "We never knew the man before. Till we heard him express himself in the manner we thought him rough and coarse, wanting in self-control, and delicacy, and pathos; but that one tone! Why, no man could have uttered it but one who has often been closeted with God, and who has drank deeply into Christ's own cup of sorrow." (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Joseph weeps*:—It was his third weeping, the great weeping, although one other had more pain in it. It was the flood of love pent up and pressed back for so many years by man's sin and God's righteousness, now loosed by righteousness and greater love. It was noble, God-like weeping, which we need not fear to interpret by the tears of the Lord Jesus. It not only reminds us of the weeping of Jesus at the grave of Lazarus on the brow of Olivet; it helps us to understand these stranger tears. The spring-head of both was the same, the love of God—though here it appeared as but a little stream, there as the river of life. The immediate moving cause was the same, sympathy with the sorrowful, compassion for the erring—though here the objects of compassionate love were but some twelve persons, seventy at most, there a multitude whom no man can number. Even when He was about to reveal the fulness of His love at the grave of Lazarus, Jesus groaned in spirit and was troubled, because He felt how hard it was to bring men to believe and accept that love: Joseph's soul now travailed with anguish keener than that of Dothan, in the effort to persuade his trembling brothers that he did indeed love them, and wished nothing but their love in return. (*A. M. Symington, D.D.*) *The value of circumlocution*:—There is an old English proverb that tells us that "the longest way round" is, or may be, "the shortest way home." Sometimes there may be no other route at all but a roundabout or zigzag one. It would be impossible for the great lumbering Swiss diligence to climb the Simplon Pass and get over into Italy, were it not for that wonderful zigzag road that so patiently winds right and left, seeming to gain but a few feet in an hour, but at last emerging at the top of the Pass. Military engineers, too, know the value of zigzag. Except on this principle how could the besiegers of a fortress get their trenches up towards the walls? But a moral or spiritual path—that, surely, must never be tortuous: are we not to "make straight paths for our feet," and "look right on"? And yet there is at least one branch of Christian duty in which a patient zigzag course is often the most effectual; and that is in laying siege to another's soul. Nathan's parable is a familiar instance: what success could he have expected if he had attacked David with a

direct charge? Our Lord's treatment of the lawyer in the tenth chapter of St. Luke—not answering directly his question as to who his neighbour was, but telling him a story first and making him apply it—is a case of yet higher authority; and so is His dealing with the Syro-Phœnician woman. And does not God deal so with us now? And what was the object of these strange dealings—of this zigzag course? It was twofold: 1. to test their character, to see whether they repented of their past life, whether they were now good sons to Jacob, and good brothers to Benjamin; 2. If their disposition was not changed, to change it. (*E. Stock*). *A son's affection*:—While Octavius was at Samos after the battle of Actium, which made him master of the universe, he held a council to examine the prisoners who had been engaged in Antony's party. Among the rest there was brought before him an old man, Metellus, oppressed with years and infirmities, disfigured with a long beard, a neglected head of hair, and tattered clothes. The son of this Metellus was one of the judges; but it was with great difficulty he knew his father in the deplorable condition in which he saw him. At last, however, having recollected his features, instead of being ashamed to own him, he ran to embrace him, and begged Cæsar that they might be put to death together.

Ver. 4. Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you.—*Separation ending in union*:—It was by a strange and seemingly circuitous route that these brethren of Joseph were brought near to him. Between Joseph and his brethren there was an immeasurable distance—all the difference between a nature given over to God and one abandoned to the force of evil passion. We may see in this narrative a type of the ways and means God still employs for bringing the wandering brothers of Joseph's great Antitype near to Him. I. In order that the brothers may be really drawn near to Joseph, they have first to be separated from him by their own sin. II. The next step towards bringing them near is their own want. III. When they get into Joseph's presence they are suddenly subjected to the most unlooked-for and crushing trials. IV. They are smitten to the heart with the recollection of bygone sins; these are brought to their remembrance as sins against their brother. V. They were alone with Joseph when he made himself known to them. (*W. Hay Aitken, M.A.*) *Joseph's treatment of his brethren*:—I. THERE IS AN ILLUSTRATION HERE OFFERED ON THE RETRIBUTIVE POWER OF AN AWAKENED CONSCIENCE. II. NOTICE, ALSO, THE ILLUSTRATION OFFERED OF THE SEEKING LOVE OF GOD. It is Joseph who makes all the advances here. "I pray you": it is the monarch who invites, the judge who pleads. "Without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better." It was always so. Adam had hardly eaten of the forbidden fruit before the voice of the Lord was heard in the garden asking for him. Our Maker takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but would rather that the wicked should turn unto Him and live. III. HERE, TOO, IS AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE EXACT DESIGN OF THE GOSPEL. Men need many things: as those brethren needed food then, for themselves, their families, and their beasts. But Joseph knew that temporary relief would amount to little. What they most wanted for all the long future was simply himself in reconciliation. "Come near to me" is exactly what Jesus Christ has always been saying to such as labour and are heavy laden. IV. SO COMPLETE IS OUR ILLUSTRATION IN THIS STORY, THAT IT LIKEWISE EXHIBITS THE NEED OF LAW-WORK IN REDEMPTION. Much as he yearned over them, he would not even for an instant relieve them of the salutary consciousness of so grievous a sin. Hence his earliest words were: "I am Joseph, your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt." No doubt he meant to bring these men into greatest perplexity, and fill them with consternation. The first revelation of the Gospel is very much like a reiteration of the law. In some respects the rays from Calvary resemble those from Sinai; just as in some respects sunshine resembles lightning; but sunshine never strikes, and lightning often clears out a poison of impurity and so makes sunshine more welcome. V. MARK THE EXCELLENT ILLUSTRATION WE HAVE HERE OF THE REVELATION OF DIVINE GRACE. When those brothers in that awful interview stood suppliant and frightened at the feet of the ruler, there was pictured something very like the literal fulfilment of a dream they must have remembered, when Joseph told them of the eleven wheat-sheaves he had seen bowing before the one upright. "I am your brother": this one disclosure covered the whole ground. Sold—but a brother; a monarch—but a brother; a judge—but a brother! "I am Joseph": here he probably began to talk in their own language; they heard the familiar accents of their home-speech. Benjamin recognizes his own mother's son. VI. THERE IS AN ILLUSTRATION IN

THIS STORY OF THE COMPLETENESS OF PARDON, AND RELIEF FROM PAIN. Watch how solicitous Joseph is lest his brothers should be "grieved or angry with themselves" any longer over that old, acknowledged, but not forgotten sin. When our Saviour perceives that true repentance is already in the heart of a sinner; when He knows that he understands his whole responsibility for his sins; then He is prepared to administer for his comfort some of the sweet assurances he has of God's wisdom in causing even man's wrath to praise Him. Christ seems to say then: "I am the Lord of glory, whom ye with wicked hands have crucified and slain; but God has over-ruled even this crime to His own glory and your redemption; be not grieved with yourself therefore, over-much, for Divine foreknowledge sent Me before you to preserve life." VII. SEE HERE WHAT AN ILLUSTRATION WE HAVE OF THE SINFULNESS AND FOLLY OF REJECTING THE GOSPEL. Of course, there is nothing in the story which suggests the thought; but there is room for imagination just to make the conjecture: how would it seem? Suppose Simeon, just out of prison, had turned his back upon Joseph's offer! Suppose Benjamin, just delivered from accusation, had refused to have Joseph's arms around his neck! Suppose Judah, his eyes still moist with pleading, had rejected Joseph's kiss! And some have resisted the loving pleading and gracious tenderness of the Son of God who gave His life a ransom for us. (*Charles S. Robinson, D.D.*)

Joseph and his brethren.—I. We think that the condition and posture of Judah and his brethren at the feet of the throne of Joseph, trembling in alarm, well describe THE CONDITION AND POSITION OF EVERY TRULY AWAKENED SINNER. 1. By different methods Joseph had at last awakened the consciences of his ten brethren. The point which seemed to have been brought out most prominently before their consciences was this: "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us." And though, in the speech which Judah made, it was not necessary to accuse themselves of crime, yet in the confession, "God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants," Joseph could see evidently enough that the recollection of the pit and of the sale to the Ishmaelites was vividly before their mind's eye. Now, when the Lord the Holy Ghost arouses sinners' consciences, this is the great sin which he brings to mind: "Of sin because they believed not on Me." Once the careless soul thought it had very little to answer for: "I have not done much amiss," said he; "a speedy reformation may wipe out all that has been awry, and my faults will soon be forgotten and forgiven"; but now, on a sudden, the conscience perceives that the soul is guilty of despising, rejecting, and slaughtering Christ. 2. A second thought, however, which tended to make Joseph's brethren feel in a wretched plight was this: that they now discovered that they were in Joseph's hands. There stood Joseph, second to none but Pharaoh in all the empire of Egypt. Legions of warriors were at his beck and command; if he should say, "take these men, bind them hand and foot, or cut them in pieces," none could interpose; he was to them as a lion, and they were as his prey, which he could rend to pieces at his will. Now to the awakened sinner, this also is a part of his misery: that he is entirely in the hands of that very Christ whom he once despised; for that Christ who died has now become the judge of the quick and dead, He has power over all flesh, that He may give eternal life to as many as His Father has given Him. The Father judgeth no man, He has committed all judgment to the Son. Dost thou see this, sinner, He whom thou despised is thy Master? 3. Under a sense of all these things—note what the ten brethren did. They began to plead. Ah! nothing makes a man pray like a sense of sin. II. We turn, however, now to remark, that THE SINGULARLY ROUGH BEHAVIOUR OF JOSEPH IS A NOTABLE REPRESENTATION OF THE WAY IN WHICH CHRIST DEALS WITH SOULS UNDER CONVICTION OF SIN. Joseph always was their brother, always loved them, had a heart full of compassion to them even when he called them spies. Kind words were often hastening to his lips, yet for their good he showed himself to be as a stranger and even as an enemy, so that he might bring them very low and prostrate before the throne. Jesus Christ often does this with truly awakened souls whom He means to save. Perhaps to some of you who are to-day conscious of guilt but not of mercy, Christ seems as a stern and angry Judge; you think of Him as one who can by no means spare the guilty; your only idea of Him is of one who would say to you, "Get thee behind Me, Satan, thou savourest not the things that be of God." You went to Him in prayer; but instead of getting an answer He seemed to shut up your prayer in prison and keep it like Simeon bound before your eyes. Yea, instead of telling you that there was mercy, He said to you as with a

harsh voice, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it unto dogs." He appeared to shut his ear to your petitions and to hear none of your requests, and to say to you, "Except ye renounce a right eye sin and a right arm pleasure, and give up your Benjamin delights, ye shall see My face no more," and you have come to think, poor soul, that Christ is hard and stern, and whereas He is ever the gentle Mediator receiving sinners and eating with them, whereas His usual voice is "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest," to you He seemeth no such person, for He has put on a disguise, and ye understand not who and what He is. But you will perceive, brethren, in reading the narrative, that even when Joseph disguised himself there was still much kindness discoverable in his conduct; so to the awakened sinner, even while Jesus appears to deal hardly, there is something sweet and encouraging amid it all. Do you not remember what Joseph did for his brethren? Though he was their judge he was their host too; he invited them to a great feast; he gave to Benjamin five times as much as to any of them; and they feasted even at the king's table. So has it been with you. Christ has rebuked and chastened you, but still He has sent you messes from his royal table. Ay, and there is another thing He has done for you, He has given you corn to live upon while under bondage. You would have despaired utterly if it had not been for some little comfort that He afforded you; perhaps you would have put an end to your life—you might have gone desperately into worse sin than before, had it not been that He filled your sack at seasons with the corn of Egypt. But mark, He has never taken any of your money yet, and He never will. He has always put your money in the sack's mouth. You have come with your resolutions and with your good deeds, but when He has given you comfort He has always taken care to show you that He did not confer it because of any good thing you had in your hands. When you went down and brought double money with you, yet the double money too was returned. He would have nothing of you; He has taught you as much as that, and you begin to feel now that if He should bless you, it must be without money and without price. Ay, poor soul, and there is one other point upon which thine eye may rest with pleasure; He has sometimes spoken to thee comfortably. Did not Joseph say to Benjamin, "God be gracious unto thee, my son"? And so, sometimes, under a consoling sermon, though as yet you are not saved, you have had a few drops of comfort. Oh! ye have gone sometimes out of the house of prayer as light as the birds of the air, and though you could not say "He is mine and I am His," yet you had a sort of inkling that the match would come off one day. He had said—"God be gracious to thee, my son." You half thought, though you could not speak it loud enough to let your heart distinctly hear it, you half thought that the day would come when your sins would be forgiven; when the prisoner should leap to lose his chains; when you should know Joseph your brother to have accepted and loved your soul. I say, then, Christ disguises himself to poor awakened sinners just as Joseph did, but even amidst the sternness of His manner for awhile, there is such a sweet mixture of love, that no troubled one need run into despair. III. JOSEPH AFTERWARDS REVEALED HIMSELF TO HIS BRETHREN, AND SO THE LORD JESUS DOES IN DUE TIME SWEETLY REVEAL HIMSELF TO POOR CONSCIENCE-STRICKEN PENITENT SINNERS. 1. Notice that this discovery was made secretly. Christ does not show Himself to sinners in a crowd; every man must see the love of Christ for himself; we go to hell in bundles, but we go to heaven one by one. Each man must personally know in his own heart his own guilt; and privately and secretly, where no other heart can join with him, he must hear words of love from Christ. "Go and sin no more." "Thy sins which are many are all forgiven thee." 2. Mark, that as this was done in secret, the first thing Joseph showed them was his name. "I am Joseph." Blessed is that day to the sinner when Christ says to him, "I am Jesus, I am the Saviour"; when the soul discerns instead of the lawgiver, the Redeemer; when it looks to the wounds which its own sin has made, and sees the ransom-price flowing in drops of gore; looks to the head its own iniquity had crowned with thorns, and sees beaming there a crown of glory provided for the sinner. 3. Having revealed his name, the next thing he did was to reveal his relationship—"I am Joseph, your brother." Oh, blessed is that heart which sees Jesus to be its brother, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, the son of Mary as well as the Son of God. 4. And then will you please to notice, that having thus proved his affection, he gave them an invitation to approach. "Come near to me, I pray you." You are getting away in the corner. You want to hide away in the chamber alone; you do not want to tell anybody about your sorrow. Jesus says, "Come near to Me, I pray you. Do not hold your

griefs away from Me. Tell Me what it is you want. Confess to Me your guilt; ask Me for pardon, if you want it. Come near to Me, do not be afraid. I could not smite with a hand that bought you; I could not spurn you with the foot that was nailed for you to the tree. Come to Me!" Ah! this is the hardest work in the world, to get a sinner to come near to Christ. 5. I want you to notice again, having given the invitation, what consolation Joseph gave! He did not say, "I am not angry with you; I forgive you"; he said something sweeter than that—"Be not angry with yourselves," as much as to say, "As for me, ye need not question about that: be not grieved nor angry with yourselves." So my blessed, my adorable Master, says to a poor, cast down, dejected sinner—"As for My forgiving you, that is done. My heart is made of tenderness, My bowels melt with love; forgive yourself; be not grieved nor angry with yourself: it is true you have sinned, but I have died; it is true you have destroyed yourself, but I have saved you." 6. Last of all, having thus given them the consolation, he gave a quietus for their understanding in an explanation. He says, "It was not you, it was God that sent me hither." So doth Christ say to the poor soul that feels itself guilty of the Lord's crucifixion. "It was not you," says He, "it was God that sent Me to preserve your lives with a great deliverance." Man was the second agent in Christ's death, but God was the great first worker, for He was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God; man did it to destroy righteousness, but God did it to save even the ungodly. Man hath the crime, but God hath the triumphing; man rules, but God over-rules. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Forgiveness of injury*:—A little boy being asked what forgiveness is, gave the beautiful answer: "It is the odour that flowers breathe when they are trampled upon." Philip the Good, when some of his courtiers would have persuaded him to punish a prelate who had used him ill, he declined, saying, "It is a fine thing to have revenge in one's power; but it is a finer thing not to use it."

Ver. 5. **Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves.**—*The duty of self-forgiveness*:—Is it allowable, in any case, to forgive ourselves? Some of those who have a proper sense of man's responsibility to his Maker would be inclined at first to say, No. Most of those whose views of man's responsibility are inadequate would at once reply, Yes. It is only too evident, in fact, that they do forgive themselves where they ought not. But does it follow that their reply can never, in any case, be correct? The text implies, on the one hand, that we ought to grieve for our sins; and, on the other, that there is a proper limit to grief. I. LET US CONSIDER OUR SINS IN THEIR ASPECT TOWARDS GOD, the most serious aspect of all. Acts of enmity and rebellion, treating God's law with dishonour and scorn. Cause enough here for being grieved and angry with ourselves. Yet, if these sins are repented of, and if we have true faith in the Redeemer's blood, there is an appointed balm for this wound. II. THE EFFECTS OF OUR SINS UPON MAN. "One sinner destroyeth much good"—like an infectious disease introduced into a community. There is not a greater murderer in existence than the man who, through neglect or obstinacy, should introduce a fever into a city. Is the man very much better who sins against other men's souls? Yet we have done this, all of us, in our time; we have sinned against many a soul, and we have occasioned many a pang and many a sin by our sins. On this account, therefore, it well becomes us to be grieved; and yet, as before, not to grieve in the way of despair. For if our sins have been repented of and forgiven, they are not the things that they were, either in God's sight or in their effects upon men. (*Homilist*.) *Divine Providence in things evil*:—It were a mockery to tell us that we should have safety by the hand of Omnipotence, in regard to the powers of irrational nature; but that in all that concerns the free or the wicked actions of men, we must rely on ourselves or on chance. It were a crippled and insufficient Providence which should guard us against the serpent or the tornado, but which should leave us to ourselves the moment a moral and responsible agent came upon the stage. Yet this is the strange uncomfortable doctrine which prompts the language heard in many a Christian circle. Which of us has not listened to such words as these: "I could bear this trial if it were ordered of God, but it proceeds from man. It is not Providential, but from wicked human beings." There is in this a sad confusion. Such a government as is here assumed would be no Providence at all; and would render all rule impossible, as excluding the very agencies which are most important. And we venture to say that the Bible teaches no such doctrine. While it abhors the thought of making God the author of sin, it does not exclude sinful acts from His wise and holy plan. While it evermore denies God's participation in the evil of wicked deeds, it still

asserts that, in the directing and governing of such deeds, there is a sovereign Providence, working out its own wise and holy ends: "Man's goings are of the Lord; how then can a man understand his own way?" "A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps." The wrath of man shall praise Him, and the remainder of wrath He will restrain. Let it be clearly fixed in our minds, as the only true philosophy of this subject, that an act may be wicked as to the intent of its agent, and yet its result may be really intended by God. Were it not so we could have no relief under our worst sufferings, namely, those which we endure from depraved and malignant human creatures. But these also are Providential. Joseph's brethren committed a great sin. This none can deny, so far as they were concerned. Yet was it strictly and particularly Providential: "So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God." (*Christian Age*.) *A comforting thought for the penitent*:—To say to a hardened, reckless man that God will ever rule his sin for some good end, will only make him more regardless than ever. But when a man is truly penitent, and seems almost paralyzed by the perception of his guilt, to show him that God has brought good out of his evil will exalt God's grace and wisdom in his eyes, and lead him more implicitly to cling to Him. It is a comforting thought, that while we cannot undo the sin, God has kept it from undoing us, and has over-ruled it for greater good to ourselves and greater blessing to others than perhaps might otherwise have been attained. We can never be as we were before we committed it. Always there will be some sadness in our hearts and lives connected with it and springing out of it. But still, if we really repent of it and return to God, there may come to us "meat out of the eater, and sweet out of the bitter." It may give us sympathy with others, and fit us for being helpful to others; so that, though we may be sadly conscious of the evil of our course, we may yet see that through it all God was preparing us for the saving of those who, humanly speaking, but for our instrumentality would have gone down to perdition. But mark the condition—if we truly repent. There is no comfort otherwise; but that being secured, then the penitent may take the consolation, that out of his worst sin God can and may bring good both to himself and others, and he ought to look for the means of bringing that about. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Cranmer and the traitors; or, forgiveness of great injury*:—Archbishop Cranmer appeared almost alone in the higher classes as the friend of truth in evil times, and a plot was formed to take away his life. The providence of God, however, so ordered it that the papers which would have completed the plan were intercepted and traced to their authors, one of whom lived in the archbishop's family, and the other he had greatly served. He took these men apart in his palace, and told them that some persons in his confidence had disclosed his secrets, and even accused him of heresy. They loudly censured such villainy, and declared the traitors to be worthy of death; one of them adding, that if an executioner was wanted he would perform the office himself. Struck with their perfidy, after lifting up his voice to heaven, lamenting the depravity of man, and thanking God for his preservation, he produced their letters, and inquired if they knew them. They now fell on their knees, confessed their crimes, and implored forgiveness. Cranmer mildly expostulated with them on the evil of their conduct, forgave them, and never again alluded to their treachery. His forgiveness of injuries was so well known, that it became a byword, "Do my lord of Canterbury an ill-turn, and you make him your friend for ever." (*Moral and Religious Anecdotes*.) *Providence difficult to interpret*:—The book of Providence is not so easily read as that of nature; its wisdom in design and perfection in execution are by no means as plain. Here God's way is often in the sea, His path in the mighty waters, and His footsteps are not known. But that is because the scheme of Providence is not, like creation, a finished work. Take a man to a house when the architect is in the middle of his plan, and with walls half-built and arches half-sprung, rooms without doors, and pillars without capitals—what appears perfect order to the architect, who has the plan all in his eye, to the other will seem a scene of perfect confusion. And so stands man amid that vast scheme of Providence which God began six thousand years ago, and may not finish for as many thousand years to come. (*T. Guthrie*.) *God did send me before you*.—*Joseph's recognition of God's hand in his life*:—The words of Joseph in the text contrast somewhat strangely with the words spoken by his brethren of themselves. It is clear that the view he took of their conduct was the one most likely to give them ease. He assured them that after all they were but instruments in God's hands, that God had sent him, that God's providence was at work for good when they sold him as a slave. Both views are true and both important. The

brethren had done what they did as wickedly and maliciously as possible; nevertheless it was true that it was not they, but God, who had sent Joseph into Egypt. I. That God governs the world we do not—we dare not—doubt; but it is equally true that He governs in a way which we should not have expected, and that much of His handiwork appears strange. So strange, indeed, that we know that it has been in all times, and is in our time, easy to say, God cares not, God sees not; or even to adopt the bolder language of the fool, and say “There is no God.” Scriptural illustrations of the same kind of contradiction as we have in the text are to be found—(1) in the case of Esau and Jacob; (2) in the manner in which the hard-heartedness and folly of Pharaoh were made to contribute to the carrying out of God’s designs concerning the Israelites; (3) in the circumstances of our Lord’s sorrowful life on earth, and especially the circumstances connected with His shameful and yet life-giving death. II. Our own lives supply us with illustrations of the same truth. Who cannot call to mind cases in which God’s providence has brought about results in the strangest way, educing good from evil, turning that which seemed to be ruin into blessing, making even the sins and follies of men to declare His glory and to forward the spiritual interests of their brethren? We see human causes producing effects, but we may also see God’s hand everywhere; all things living and moving in Him; no sparrow falling without His leave; no hair of one of His saints perishing. (*Bishop Harvey Goodwin.*) *Providence in life*.—I. The story of Joseph is to all men for ever the best proof of the working of the hand of Providence. II. As through the life of Joseph, so through our life, there are threads which connect the different scenes and bind together the destinies of the different actors. III. This history and the inspired commentary on it in Psalm cv. teach us the wonderful continuity of God’s plan and the oneness of the thread that binds together the histories of Israel and of Egypt. (*Dean Butcher.*) *Joseph’s statement*.—The principles illustrated in Joseph’s statement are these: 1. God’s absolute control over all creatures and events. 2. That while sinners are encouraged to hope in His mercy, they are left without excuse for their sin. 3. That God orders all human affairs with a view to the preservation of His sacred and gifted family—the Church. *Human and Divine agency inseparably connected*.—That the Scripture ascribes the actions of men both to themselves and to God. I shall endeavour to illustrate the truth, the propriety, and the importance of this doctrine. I. We are to consider, THAT THE SCRIPTURE DOES ASCRIBE THE ACTIONS OF MEN BOTH TO THEMSELVES AND TO GOD. It will be universally allowed that the Scripture ascribes the actions of men to themselves. It ascribes to Abel his faith, to Cain his unbelief, to Job his patience, to Moses his meekness. Having just premised this, I proceed to adduce instances in which the Scripture ascribes the actions of men to God as well as to themselves. The first instance that occurs is in the history of Joseph. II. THE PROPRIETY OF ASCRIBING HUMAN ACTIONS TO BOTH HUMAN AND DIVINE AGENCY. Human agency is always inseparably connected with Divine agency. And though it may be proper in some cases to speak of man’s agency alone, and of God’s agency alone, yet it is always proper to ascribe the actions of men not only to themselves, but to God. The propriety of the Scripture phraseology on this subject is so plain and obvious, that it is strange so many have objected against it, and endeavoured to explain it away. But since this is the case, it seems very necessary to show—III. THE IMPORTANCE OF ASCRIBING THE ACTIONS OF MEN TO GOD, AS WELL AS TO THEMSELVES. We have no reason to suppose that the sacred writers would have used such a mode of speaking, unless it were necessary and important. It is the design of God, in all His works, to set His own character, and the character of all His rational and accountable creatures, in the truest and strongest light. This leads me to observe—1. It is a matter of importance that the actions of men should be ascribed to themselves. They are real and proper agents in all their voluntary exercises and exertions. 2. The importance of ascribing men’s actions to God as well as to themselves. He is really concerned in all their actions; and it is as important that His agency should be brought into view as that theirs should be brought into view; for His character can no more be known without ascribing His agency to Himself, than their characters can be known without ascribing their agency to themselves. Improvement: 1. In view of this subject, we learn when it is proper to ascribe the actions of men to themselves, and when it is proper to ascribe them to God. Whenever men are required or forbidden to act, and whenever they are approved or condemned for acting, there is a propriety in ascribing their actions to themselves, without any reference to the Divine efficiency. It is their own free, voluntary agency, which alone constitutes

their virtue or vice, and which renders them worthy of either praise or blame. Though they always act under a Divine influence, yet that influence neither increases their virtue nor diminishes their guilt, and of consequence ought never to be brought into view when they are to be praised or blamed for their conduct. But when the power, wisdom, goodness, or sovereignty of God in governing their views and actions are to be displayed, then it is proper to mention His, and only His, agency in the case. 2. Since the Scripture ascribes all the actions of men to God as well as to themselves, we may justly conclude that the Divine agency is as much concerned in their bad as in their good actions. 3. If the actions of men may be ascribed to God as well as to themselves, then it is easy to form a just and full view of Divine Providence. If God is actually concerned in all human actions, it necessarily follows that He constantly and absolutely governs the moral as well as the natural world. 4. If it be true that all the actions of men may be ascribed to God as well as to themselves, then it is proper to submit to God under all the evils which He brings upon us by the agency of created beings. 5. If the actions of men may be ascribed to God as well as to themselves, then God will be glorified by all their conduct. Whether they have a good or bad intention in acting, God has always a good design in causing them to act in the manner they do. 6. If the actions of men may be ascribed both to God and to themselves, then we may see the duty and nature of true repentance. 7. Finally, if it be true that the actions of men may be properly ascribed both to God and to themselves, then it is of great importance for mankind to believe and acknowledge this truth. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*)

Vers. 9-13. Thus saith thy son Joseph.—Lessons:—1. Providence may order traitors to be messengers of better news than they intended. 2. Gracious children are speedy to take off grief from their parents' hearts. 3. God orders those events of mercy to be declared unto His, which they sometimes would not believe. 4. Joseph's spirit owneth his afflicted father in all his own glory. 5. Joseph's heart ascribes all his glory unto God only. 6. Joseph contents not himself to be in plenty and glory, but to have his father with him (ver. 9). 7. Certain and fertile habitations are human motives to draw from barren places. 8. Nearness to dearest relations may persuade to change habitations (ver. 10). 9. Alimony is a duty of children to parents in straights. 10. Assurance of nourishment may well draw from places where bread is wanting. 11. God's continuance of famine should move souls to follow His providence for food. 12. It is beseeching God's servants to provide under Him against impoverishing of their families. So Joseph (ver. 11). 13. Eye-witnesses and they dear ones of God's gracious events, should persuade good souls to believe them (ver. 12). 14. Gracious souls may urge their dignity to help the distressed, but not in vain glory. 15. Grace makes nature speedy in the execution of its duty. 16. Gracious children desire earnestly their parents with them in their fulness (ver. 13). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*)

Ver. 14. And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck.—Tears of love:—This incident is the most unquestionable instance in the Bible of tears of love. No other feeling but love made Joseph weep. I. Tears of love are true evidences—and evidences which can scarcely speak falsely. II. Tears have much of the nature of sacrifice in them. III. Though there are no tears in heaven, yet loving tears on earth come nearer than anything else in the world to the alleluias of the saints, for they are the outbursts of an irrepressible emotion. IV. Tears of kindness act back again, and make the kindness from which they spring. In order to have the heart soft enough for tears—(1) You must lead a pure life; (2) You must feel that you are loved; (3) You must be subdued; (4) You must help yourself by action; (5) You must have pity. (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*) **Lessons:—**1. Grace forbids not natural working of affection in its measure. 2. Mutual workings of hearts in brethren is but natural (ver. 14). 3. Sincere kisses and tears of injured brethren to offenders are remarkable. 4. Brotherly communion may be freely had, when grace had put away all offences, and accepted offenders (ver. 15). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) **The first embrace for Benjamin:—**There was an instinctive delicacy in selecting that one for his first embraces who was best able to return them freely. It gave the others time. Not that he thought of that and planned it; but the instincts of a good heart are very wise. Benjamin could weep tears of unmingled joy, for he had love only to accept—not forgiveness as well. One looks eagerly through the story to find some word telling that the others wept, the ten men who were over forty years of age, the sinners convicted,

humbled, pardoned. Such a word would be very welcome; but I do not find it. We have to be content to take another lesson in the mystery of restoring love—that it is easier for God to forgive us than for us to forgive ourselves; that the part of Christ's work which most proves the omnipotence of His grace, is when He persuades us to believe that He has forgiven us. That once believed by the heart, tears flow fast. There is only One who can so look on us that we shall go forth and weep bitterly. Leaving Benjamin after a time, Joseph went from one to another of his brethren, kissing them and weeping on them. I see him beginning with Reuben and Simeon, ending with Judah. The appeal, if one may translate so tender an utterance of the heart into any words, meant this, "I love and forgive you: love me and trust me, trust me and love in return." "And after that his brethren talked with him." The struggle had been a hard one, but love had conquered. It matters little what they talked about—the wonders of Egypt, the store-houses, the capabilities of Goshen, Asenath and Manasseh and Ephraim, the state of the flocks at home, the children of each, their father, the dreams; the great thing was that they talked at all. It was not now as it had been at the banquet yesterday; restraint and stratagem had gone for ever; brother talked to brother, heart to heart. (*A. M. Symington, D.D.*)

Ver. 15. He kissed all his brethren.—*A day of reconciliation*:—A day of reconciliation! A family made one. Brethren coming together again after long separation. It is a beautiful picture. Why should it not be completed, where it needs completion, in our own day amongst ourselves? Ministers sometimes have misunderstandings and say unkind things about one another—and exile one another from love and confidence for years. Is there never to be a day of reconciliation and Christian forgetfulness of wrongs, even where positive wrong has been done? Families and households often get awry. The younger brother differs with his eldest brother—sisters fall out. One wants more than belongs to him; another is knocked to the wall because he is weak; and there comes in the heart bitterness and alienation, and often brothers and sisters never have a kind word to say about one another. Is it always to be so? Don't merely make it up, don't patch it up, don't cover it up—go right down to the base. You will never be made one, until you meet at the Cross and hear Him say, "He that doeth the will of My Father, which is in heaven, the same is My mother, and sister, and brother." It is in Christ's sorrow that we are to forget our woes, in Christ's sacrifice we find the answer to our sin, in Christ's union with the Father that we are to find all true and lasting reconciliation. But who is to begin? That is the wonderful question that is often asked us. Who is to begin? One would imagine that there were some very nice people about who only wanted somebody to tell them who was to begin. They want to be reconciled, only they don't know who is to begin. I can tell you. You are! That is exactly how it is. But I am the eldest—yes, and therefore ought to begin. But I am the youngest. Then why should the youngest be an obstinate pig-headed child? Who are you that you should not go and throw yourself down at your brother's feet and say, "I have done you wrong, pardon me!" Who is to begin? You! Which! Both! When! Now! Oh! beware of the morality which says, "I am looking for the opportunity, and if things should so get together——" Sir! death may be upon you before you reason out your wretched casuistry; the injured or the injurer may be in the grave before you get to the end of your long melancholy process of self-laudation and anti-Christian logic. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The reconciled brethren*:—I. JOSEPH'S AVOWAL. II. MUTUAL SALUTATIONS. III. THE MESSAGE TO JACOB. Learn: 1. To avoid strife. 2. To repel any revengeful feelings. 3. To be kind and ready to forgive. (*W. S. Smith, B.D.*) *Emblem of forgiveness*:—Nothing is more moving to man than the spectacle of reconciliation; our weaknesses are thus indemnified, and are not too costly, being the price we pay for the hour of forgiveness; and the archangel who has never felt anger has reason to envy the man who subdues it. When thou forgivest, the man who has pierced thy heart stands to thee in the relation of the sea-worm, that perforates the shell of the mussel, which straightway closes the wound with a pearl. (*W. Richter.*)

Vers. 16–20. Take your father and your households, and come unto me: and I will give you the good of the land of Egypt.—*Pharaoh's invitation to Jacob and his sons*:—I. THIS SPEAKS WELL AS TO HIS DELICATE CONSIDERATION FOR JOSEPH. II. THIS SHOWS THE VALUE HE SET UPON JOSEPH. III. THIS TEACHES US HOW GREAT

IS THE INFLUENCE OF CHARACTER. (T. H. Leale.) *Bring your father; or, Christmas gatherings*.—Family gatherings are old as history! Governments change. There was government Patriarchal—government by Judges—government by Kings in old Judea; and there are governments now, Imperialist—Monarchical—Republican. But the family remains ever and always, founded by God, and rooted in the constitution of human life, as the mountains are rooted in the earth. I. A GOOD MAN CARRIES THE OLD HOME IN HIS HEART. Joseph's was not a self-chosen pilgrimage; "so then, it was not you that sent me hither, but God." He knew that. It was a history over-ruled by God for highest ends. It is wise and well that enterprize and energy should characterize a nation's sons, but they need not forget the old home. Surely, however, if any one might have cut off the remembrances of home, it was the castaway Joseph! That he owed his brethren nothing everyone must admit—nothing, indeed, but that which all Christians owe to their enemies and to themselves—the sovereignty of love over enmity. This man, successful, honoured, uplifted to be Prime Minister of Egypt, tried to exile the old home from his heart. The narrative in a previous chapter tells us this—"And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: for God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house" (chap. xli. 51). But one sight of the dear old faces broke down all his power to exclude them from his love. II. IN A TRUE HOME EVERY LOST CHILD CREATES A BLANK. God wants every wandering child home. While we are yet a great way off, He comes forth to meet us. Jacob had many sons, and these sons had wives, and then fresh children came into the world—"his sons and his sons' sons"; "his daughters and his sons' daughters." Children—grandchildren! But these words, "Joseph is not!" constitute a little window into Jacob's heart. If you have ever lost a child, you still say in the words of the beautiful poem, "We are seven!" And if Joseph is away—far away—lost to you in the saddest of all senses, still he lives in your heart. III. THE TIME COMES WHEN THE FATHER VISITS THE SON. This is beautiful. And it is a parable of that which occurs sometimes now. The old home circle visits the successful son, and he heads the table, and feels not that he does his father honour, but that the father honours him by his presence; this is all-glorious. I am not sure that the old world, of which China is one of the permanent shoots, does not set us an illustrious example in this respect, viz., the honour due to age and parentage; but I am sure that ancient Greece might teach us reverence, for a young man would rise in an assembly there and give his place to an aged man at once. Flippant familiarity in speech is unseemly in relations between the young and the old, for speech is an index of character. Joseph's speech is touched with reverence, and he seems to feel a culmination of kindly providence in the fact that his father should know of his glory in Egypt. I trust that many a son's heart will leap in future days when he sees, amid the faces looking on with rapt interest in a season of honour and reward, the features of his father. IV. THE JOURNEY IS THAT OF A RELIGIOUS OLD MAN. Israel took his journey, and "came to Beer-sheba, and offered sacrifices unto the God of his father Isaac." Then he thought of his father. We smile at old men finding it difficult to think themselves old, but their childhood is only a little way behind. (W. M. Statham, M.A.)

Vers. 21-24. *Provision for the way.*—*Divine provision for human wants*.—I. But for the provision Joseph sent them for the way, Jacob and his sons' sons and daughters could never have crossed the hot desert. But the impossible had been made possible by the command of Pharaoh and the love of Joseph. The journey was accomplished successfully, the desert was traversed without peril, without excessive fatigue, by means of the waggons sent out of the land of Egypt. When Jacob saw the waggons his heart revived. II. Let us apply this to our Lord and to ourselves. Jesus Christ, the true Joseph, remembers us in His prosperity, and He sends an invitation to us by the desire of God the Father, who loveth us. He does not bid us come to Him in our own strength, relying only on the poor food which a famine-struck land yields—does not bid us toil across a burning desert, prowled over by the lion, without provision and protection. There are sacraments and helps and means of grace, which He has sent to relieve the weariness of the way, to carry us on, to support us when we faint, to encourage us lest we should despair. III. Let us not despise the means of grace. We may not ourselves want them, but others do. Go in your own waggon, or on your feet, if you can and dare, but upbraid not those who take refuge in means of transport you have not tried, or do not require. Those sacraments, those means of grace, those helps, ever new, yet old

as Christianity, have borne many and many a blessed one along to the "good land," who is now resting in Goshen and eating the fat of the land. (*S. Baring-Gould, M.A.*) *Joseph equips his brethren for their journey* :—I. HIS RESPECT AND HONOUR FOR HIS FATHER. This is seen—1. In the portion he gave to Benjamin. 2. In the portion he sent to his father. II. HIS SHREWD WISDOM (ver. 24). (*T. H. Leale.*)

Ver. 24. *See that ye fall not out by the way.*—*Good advice to Christians* :—I. THE RELATIONSHIP OF CHRISTIANS. They are brethren. II. THE COURSE OF CHRISTIANS. On their way from Egypt to Canaan, from house of bondage to Father's house above. III. THE DANGER OF CHRISTIANS. Falling out by the way—disagreeing, quarrelling, separating. IV. THE DUTY OF CHRISTIANS. To watch against this danger. Why? 1. Because brethren. 2. Because travelling to a place where there is no falling out. 3. Because you can't fall out without falling down—lowering Christian character. 4. Because you can't fall out without disobeying your Father, who tells you to love one another. 5. Because you can't fall out without giving your enemies occasion to triumph. Fall out with yourselves, and with Satan, but not with one another. (*J. F. Smythe.*) *Christians walking harmoniously on the road of life* :—They whom Joseph thus addressed were all—I. MEMBERS OF THE SAME FAMILY. Brethren : the relations Christians bear to each other (1 Pet. iii. 6 ; Rom. xii. 10 ; Heb. xiii. 1). II. PARTAKERS OF THE SAME GRACE. Forgiven ourselves, we are to be forgiving. III. ASSOCIATES IN THE SAME SERVICE. Concerted action is required of us. IV. TRAVELLING TO THE SAME HOME. (*J. F. Poulter, B.A.*) *Christian agreement* :—Well would this text apply to that quarrelling among nations, which under the name of war has been thought honourable and often profitable, whereas it must ever be in the end most ruinous and disgraceful to the whole family of mankind. See then that in this respect "ye fall not out by the way." See that you never be tempted, by any supposed honour or profit of war, to speak of it as desirable, or to wish for it in your hearts. Well would this text in like manner apply to natives of the same country, members of the same political community ; and to the tumult, and strife, which of late years more especially have distracted the peace of society. Well does this rule apply also to those who esteem themselves members of the same household of faith. What can be more scandalous in the eyes of the scoffer, what can be more inconsistent with true piety in ourselves, than that all we, who would fain hope that we are going to the same heaven, and going by the same road of true faith in Christ, should embitter our few and evil days on earth by religious, or rather irreligious, contentions with each other. I might go on to apply the text to the variances and disputes, which arise often to mar the peace of a neighbourhood, the harmony of a parish, or the union of a charitable or friendly society. I speak to you of your brethren and sisters, of your parents or children, of your masters or servants, of your husbands or wives. And of these severally, whatever members you may each have, in the household to which you belong, of these severally I say, "See that ye fall not out by the way." 1. Be humble. The more you are aware of your own failings, the more allowances you will make for those you live with. The less you will be disposed to fret at their selfishness and pride, the more heartily you are vexed at your own. 2. Be not selfish. Next to pride, if it be not the very same thing, stands selfishness, as the fruitful source of ill-temper. "Look not," then, "every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil. ii. 4). 3. Set a watch over your lips. And when an angry thought arises, for a while be resolutely silent. Words are to anger, as air to kindle flame. Without them it soon dies for want of vent. 4. Avoid whatever you have found to be your usual provocations to anger. 5. Take, then, in the last place, this one direction more, "Overcome evil with good." "A soft answer turneth away wrath." (*E. Blencowe, M.A.*) *Joseph's charge to his brethren* :—"Prevention is better than cure." Better keep out of debt than let someone pay your bills ; better for a family to take care that all causes of difference and disagreement should be removed, than to be constantly making up quarrels. Joseph then would say, "See that ye fall not out by the way"—1. Because ye are brethren. 2. Because ye are passing through an enemy's country. 3. Because ye are the bearers of precious treasure. 4. Because ye are representative men. All these thoughts will apply to the Church of Christ. (*A. F. Barfield.*) *See that ye fall not out by the way!*—*a necessary warning* :—How well he knew human nature ! They were going home with news which would reveal to their father that they had been the cause of their brother's disappearance, and had imposed on him with a deliberate falsehood ; and

for anything they knew, he might turn upon them and upbraid them with their cruelty and deceit. What so likely, therefore, as that they should begin to accuse each other—that crimination should lead to recrimination, and words to blows? Reuben might say again, “It was not my fault, for I sought to save his life, and I went back to the pit hoping to find him and restore him to our father.” Judah might respond, “But for me he would have died, and it is to my happy suggestion to sell him to the Ishmaelites that we are indebted for all the good fortune that seems now to be coming to us”; while the rest, conscious of their share in the nefarious transaction, might have sought to still the upbraidings of their consciences by uttering bitter things against each other. All that might have happened on their journey home, and so Joseph was not giving unnecessary counsel when he said, “See that ye fall not out by the way.” And they heeded his advice, for they reached home in peace; and it may be that, so far from quarrelling, they spent some of their time as they rode in conversing on the marvellous manner in which, in spite of their antagonism, and without their consciousness of anything in the least degree out of the way, the dreams of their brother had been fulfilled, and they had done obeisance at his feet. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

Luther's prayer :—Controversy may be sometimes needful; but the love of disputation is a serious evil. Luther, who contended earnestly for the truth, used to pray: “From a vainglorious doctor, a contentious pastor, and nice questions, the Lord deliver His Church!” *Melancthon and his mother* :—Philip Melancthon, being at the conferences at Spire, in 1529, made a little journey to Bretten, to see his mother. This good woman asked him what she must believe amidst so many disputes, and repeated to him her prayers, which contained nothing superstitious. “Go on, mother,” said he, “to believe and pray as you have done, and never trouble yourself about religious controversies.”

Fraternal affection :—Fraternal affection approaches very nearly to self-love, for there is but a short remove from our own concerns and happiness to theirs who came from the same stock, and are partakers of the same blood. Nothing, therefore, can be more unnatural than discord and animosity among members so allied, and nothing so beautiful as harmony and love. (*L. N. Stretch.*)

Church contention :—When Cæsar solicited the consulship he found Crassus and Pompey at variance, so that he could not apply to either of them for help, lest he should make the other his enemy. He determined to reconcile them by representing that if instead of fighting against each other, and thus raising enemies that might be formidable against them both, they would act in concert, by their united counsels and interest they might subdue all opposition. The scheme was successful, and Cæsar by their help attained a pinnacle of power; and though neither Crassus nor Pompey gained any particular advantage by the league, if they had but used their united power wisely they might have affected great good. He who can bind together those who are at variance may procure for the state or for the Church a marvellous blessing. Never is a foe so ready to advance as when he sees those who should be one to attack him wounding and slaying each other. The battle of the sects has not only provoked ill blood in the Church of Christ, but has weakened her for offensive movements, because when she ought to have been increasing her armaments and completing her equipments for an aggression on the enemy's territory, she has rather been engaged in quarrelling over some trivial point of doctrine, or perhaps some piece of church furniture, to her own dishonour and the enemy's triumph. (*New Handbook of Illustration.*) *Trivial dissensions* :—Dr. Cannon was once appealed to by a certain church where there was a great commotion in regard to the point, whether in newly painting their church edifice the colour should be white or yellow. When the committee had stated their case, and with an emphasis, not to say acrimony, which gave sad proof of the existence of a fearful feud upon the unimportant question, the doctor quietly said, “I should advise you, on the whole, to paint the house black. It is cheap, and a good colour to wear, and eminently appropriate for a body that ought to go in mourning over such a foolish quarrel among its members.” (*Homiletic Encyclopædia.*)

Ver. 27. When he saw the waggons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived.—*Probability an aid to faith* :—We see here how probabilities are the handmaids and the helpers of faith. Slight tokens become the aliment, the very food, on which action feeds, strengthens, nurtures itself, and goes forth to fulfil the work marked out by Providence for the life. 1. Jacob's heart fainted; but old men, dying persons, often feel that some unrealized object detains them here. Jacob was like watchers who have gone to the point and taken

lodgings, to be the first to hail the ship; and as pennon after pennon flutters in sight they hail it, but it is not the expected vessel, and the heart faints, until at last the well-known signal waves in the wind. Sense sees it, and faith revives. II. The lesson of the patriarch's history is that faith may not realize all it desires, but it may realize what confirms, revives, assures. "He saw the waggons": "Faith cometh by hearing"; it is a moral principle created in the mind, not so much by facts as probabilities. Faith is moved and swayed by antecedental considerations. So these waggons were, in all probability, an aid to faith, and his heart revived. Treasure up marks and tokens of another country; you will find they will not be wanting. III. If you deal faithfully with the tremendous hints and probabilities sacred to your own nature, sacred to the Holy Word, sacred to the infinite manifestation of God in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, they will hold you fast in the power of awful convictions, and in the embrace of infinite consolations. The waggons assured Jacob that Joseph was yet alive, and there are innumerable conveyances of grace which assure us that Jesus is yet alive. (*E. Parton Hood.*) *The joyful news told to Jacob*.—I. IT IS, AT FIRST, RECEIVED WITH INCREDULITY. II. IT IS AFTERWARDS ACCEPTED UPON OUTWARD EVIDENCE. III. IT ENABLED JACOB TO VINDICATE HIS OLD CHARACTER. 1. His faith triumphs. 2. His dark destiny is about to be cleared up. 3. He anticipates his peaceful end. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Joseph's waggons*.—I. No wonder certainly that Jacob could not believe his sons. You know from their history, and particularly from that part which is mingled with the earlier days of Joseph, how deceitfulness (inherited, too, from their parents and ancestry) had marked their conduct towards their father Jacob, whose life, I suspect, was often rendered very bitter by sad instances of their deceitfulness, and by the painful reflections upon his own conduct in his earlier days, which those instances would produce. Even Joseph's messages were not believed by Jacob, not because Jacob doubted them, but because he could not believe the messengers. II. And that Jacob believed at last, was convinced of the truthfulness of the messages, and going down to Egypt, he saw Joseph, often enjoyed his society, and finished his eventful pilgrimage there in peace, and with the full certainty of being buried in "the promised land." A sight of Joseph's waggons convinced him. III. We have in this affecting narrative an illustration of two important ways by which truth may be received, and indeed, through which it may be communicated. The difference betwixt the mode of teaching a truth by a simple revelation or message, and by the medium of the sight, is not, indeed, in the strictest sense of the term, that of an "objective" and a "subjective" truth; but it is very nearly this. For though indeed it may be said truly enough that teaching by means of any of the senses is "objective," there is nearly all the difference between "objective" and "subjective" in teaching by means of the sight and by means of words; because whatever the eye learns is learned by a real object, or by an object which does not profess to be the thing itself, but a recognized representation thereof. Thus the message of Joseph delivered by his brethren to their father was really (in my view) a "subjective" truth; I mean it was truth which he was to receive. But then, though the ear was the medium of reception, faith or credibility in the veracity of his children was necessary ere he could profit by it. And this faith he had not in them. He could not believe them, and he only became agitated; but the sight of the waggons convinced him. The truth was exhibited by another means; but I think also it was truth in another form. It was the truth that Joseph was alive, "objectively" brought home to Jacob by visible tangible realities. They were not like Joseph; they were not pictures, "carvings," imitations of him; but there was a reality, a matter of fact truthfulness about what he there saw before him, which, though not a convincing demonstration, was a thoroughly satisfying "objective" realization to the eye of what would not have happened but for the true loving tenderness of his long lost son. And this "objective" truth seen as an object by the eye gave reality to the "subjective" message, heard by the ear, indeed, but receivable only by the mind through faith, so that though it is said of that "subjective" truth Jacob believed not the messengers, it is immediately recorded of the "objective" truth that "when he saw the waggons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived, and he said, 'It is enough; Joseph, my son, is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die.'" IV. The application of these observations to the Lord's Supper, and indeed to either of the Sacraments, appears to me to be obvious and easy. Your only means of salvation is Christ Jesus, crucified for you and risen. God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself; Christ, the Son of God, who, by

His one oblation offered once for all, hath put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, forms, through the Holy Spirit, your great hope of acceptance with God. The messages sent to you from heaven are true, and abound in tenderness; they are like Joseph's message, full of truth and love. From various causes men demur to receive them. We who bring the messages are often not believed. You to whom the messages are delivered are conscious of many things which you think incapacitate you from applying them to yourselves. The blessed truths of salvation thus presented for your faith to receive and to make personally your own "subjectively," are too often not received. But then, amidst all this clatter of disputings, doubtings and arguing, what meaneth this service? What meaneth it that to-day, that every Sunday throughout Christendom, in thousands and thousands of churches, and by many thousands and even millions of Christians, a simple though significant act is celebrated, even as it has been since the last Passover, and will continue to be so "till He come" who at first appointed it? Why is it that Christians from time to time gather together to break this bread and to drink this cup? What mean ye by this service? It is "objectively" for you what the waggons proved to Jacob. It is a very simple, but "objective" act, which brings before you vividly the love of Christ, in giving His body and His blood upon the Cross for you. (*G. Venables, S.C.L.*)

The king's waggons:—The Egyptian capital was the focus of the world's wealth. In ships and barges there had been brought to it from India frankincense, and cinnamon, and ivory, and diamonds; from the north marble and iron; from Syria purple and silk; from Greece some of the finest horses of the world, and some of the most brilliant chariots; and from all the earth that which could best please the eye, and charm the ear, and gratify the taste. As you stand on the level beach of the sea, on a sunny day, you look either way and there are miles of breakers white with the ocean foam dashing shoreward, so it seemed as if the sea of the world's pomp and wealth, in the Egyptian capital, for miles and miles flung itself up into white breakers of marble temple, mausoleum, and obelisk. This was the place where Joseph, the shepherd boy, was called to stand next to Pharaoh in honour. What a contrast between this scene and his humble standing, and the pit into which his brothers threw him! Yet he was not forgetful of his early home—he was not ashamed of where he came from. The Bishop of Mentz, descended from a wheelwright, covered his house with spokes, and hammers, and wheels; and the King of Sicily, in honour of his father, who was a potter, refused to drink out of anything but earthen vessels. So Joseph was not afraid of his early surroundings, or of his old-time father, or of his brothers. When they came up from the famine-struck land to get corn from the king's corn-crib, Joseph, instead of chiding them for the way they had maltreated and abused him, sent them back with waggons, which Pharaoh furnished, laden with corn; and old Jacob, the father, in the very same waggon, was brought back that Joseph, the son, might see him, and give him a home all the rest of his days. Well, I hear the waggons—the king's waggons—rumbling down in front of the palace. On the outside of the palace, to see the waggons go off, stands Pharaoh in royal robes, and beside him prime-minister Joseph, with a chain of gold around his neck, and on his hand a ring, given by Pharaoh to him, so that any time he wanted to stamp the royal seal upon a document he could do so. Waggon after waggon rolled down from the palace, laden with corn, and meat, and changes of raiment, and everything that could help a famine-struck people. One day I see aged Jacob seated in the front of his house; he is possibly thinking of his absent boys (sons, however old they get, are never anything more than boys), and while he is seated there he sees dust arising, and he hears waggons rumbling, and he wonders what is coming now, for the whole land had been smitten with famine and was in silence. But after awhile the waggons come near enough, and he sees his sons in the waggons, and before they come up they shout: "Joseph is yet alive!" The old man faints dead away. I do not wonder at it. The boys tell the story how that the boy, the long-lost Joseph, has got to be the first man in the Egyptian palace. While they unload the waggons the wan and wasted creatures come up and ask for a handful of corn, and they are satisfied. One day the waggons are brought up for Jacob; the old father is about to go to see Joseph in the Egyptian palace. You know it is not a very easy thing to transplant an old tree, and Jacob has hard work to get away from the place where he had lived so long. He bids good-bye to the old place, and leaves his blessing with his neighbours; and then his sons steady him while he, determined to help himself, gets into the waggon, stiff, old, and decrepid. Yonder they go,

Jacob and his sons, and their wives and their children, eighty-two in all, followed by herds and flocks, which the herdsmen drive along. They are going out from famine to luxuriance, they are going from a plain country home to the finest palace under the sun. My friends, we are in a world by sin famine-struck, but the King is in constant communication with us, His waggons coming and going perpetually; and in the rest of my discourse I will show what the waggons bring and what they take back. 1. In the first place, like those that came from the Egyptian palace, the King's waggons now bring us corn and meat, and many changes of raiment. We are apt to think of the fields and the orchards as feeding us, but who makes the flax grow for the linen, and the wheat for the bread, and the wool on the sheep's back? None but a God could clothe and feed the world. None but a King's corn-crib could appease the world's famine. None but a King could tell how many waggons to send, and how heavily to load them, and when they are to start. Oh! thank God for bread—for bread! 2. I remark, again, that, like those that came from the Egyptian's palace, the King's waggons bring us good news. Jacob had not heard from his boy for a great many years. He had never thought of him but with a heart-ache. There was in Jacob's heart a room where lay the corpse of his unburied Joseph; and when the waggons came—the king's waggons—and told him that Joseph was yet alive, he faints dead away. Good news for Jacob! Good news for us! The King's waggons come down and tell us that our Joseph—Jesus—is yet alive; that He has forgiven us because we threw Him into the pit of suffering and the dungeon of shame. He has risen from thence to stand in a palace. The Bethlehem shepherds were awakened at midnight by the rattling of the waggons that brought the tidings. Our Joseph—Jesus—sends us a message of pardon, of life, of heaven; corn for our hunger, raiment for our nakedness. Joseph—Jesus—is yet alive! The King's waggons will, after a while, unload, and they will turn round, and they will go back to the palace, and I really think that you and I will go with them. The King will not leave us in this famine-struck world. The King has ordered that we be lifted into the waggons, and that we go over into Goshen, where there shall be pasturage for our largest flock of joy; and then we will drive up to the palace where there are glories awaiting us which will melt all the snow of Egyptian marble into forgetfulness. 3. I think that the King's waggons will take us up to see our lost friends. Jacob's chief anticipation was not of seeing the Nile, or of seeing the long colonnade of architectural beauty, or of seeing the throne-room. There was a focus to all his journeyings—to all his anticipations—and that was Joseph. Well, my friends, I do not think heaven would be worth much if our brother Jesus was not there. Oh! the joy of meeting our brother Joseph—Jesus! After we have talked about Him for ten, or fifty, or seventy years, to talk with Him! and to clasp hands with the Hero of the ages, not crouching as underlings in His presence, but as Jacob and Joseph hug each other. The king's waggons took Jacob up to see his lost boy; and so I really think that the King's waggons will take us up to see our lost kindred. How long is it since Joseph went out of your household? How many years is it, now, last Christmas, or the fourteenth of next month? It was a dark night when he died, and a stormy day it was at the burial; and the clouds wept with you, and the winds sighed for the dead. The bell at Greenwood's Gate rang only for a few moments, but your heart has been tolling, tolling, ever since. You have been under a delusion, like Jacob of old. You put his name first in the birth-record of the family Bible, and then you put it in the death-record of the family Bible, and you have been deceived. Joseph is yet alive! He is more alive than you are. Of all the sixteen thousand millions of children that statisticians say have gone into the future world, there is not one of them dead, and the King's waggons will take you up to see them. In my boyhood, for some time, we lived three miles from church, and on stormy days the children stayed at home, but father and mother always went to church. That was a habit they had. On those stormy Sabbaths when we stayed at home, the absence of our parents seemed very much protracted, for the roads were very bad, and they could not get on very fast. So we would go to the window at twelve o'clock to see if they were coming; and at a quarter to one; and then at one o'clock. After awhile. Mary or Daniel, or De Witt would shout, "The waggon's coming!" and then we would see it winding out of the woods, and over the brook, and through the lane, and up in the front of the old farmhouse; and then we would rush out, leaving the doors wide open, with many things to tell them, asking them many questions. Well, I think we are many of us in the King's waggons, and we are on the way home. The road is very bad, and we get on slowly; but after awhile we will come

winding out of the woods, and through the brook of death, and up in front of the old heavenly homestead; and our departed kindred who have been waiting and watching for us will rush out through the doors, and over the lawn, crying: "The waggons are coming! the King's waggons are coming!" Hark! the bell of the city hall strikes twelve. Twelve o'clock on earth; and likewise it is high noon in heaven. (*Dr. Talmage.*)

Ver. 28. **And Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive.**—*Joseph a type of Christ.*—Joseph is a type or figure of the Lord Jesus Christ. 1. Joseph, in his younger days, was distinguished from his brethren by a purity of life which became the more observable in contrast with their dissolute manners, and caused an evil report to be sent to their father. His brethren saw him afar off, and conspired to kill him. In this we have a true picture of the Jews' treatment of Christ. 2. Joseph was carried down into Egypt, even as was Christ in His earliest days. Joseph was cast into prison, emblematic of the casting of Jesus into the grave, the prison of death; Joseph was imprisoned with two accused persons—the chief butler and the chief baker of Pharaoh; Christ was crucified between two malefactors. It was in the third year that Joseph was liberated, and on the third day that our Saviour rose. 3. It is as a liberated man that Joseph is most signally the type of our Redeemer. Set free from prison, Joseph became the second in the kingdom, even as the Redeemer, rising from the prison of the grave, became possessed in His mediatorial capacity of all power in heaven and earth, and yet so possessed as to be subordinate to the Father. Joseph was raised up of God to be a preserver of life during years of famine. Christ, in His office of Mediator, distributes bread to the hungry. All men shall flock to Jesus, eager for the bread that came down from heaven. 4. Joseph's kinsmen were the last to send into Egypt for corn, just as the Jews have been longest refusing to own Christ as their Deliverer. (*H. Melville, B.D.*) *Joseph and his brethren.*—I. 1. The first truth which I would point out to you as being strikingly illustrated and confirmed by this history is this: that THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD REGULATES THE MINUTEST MATTERS, and that He doeth all things according to His will, in the armies of heaven, and amongst the inhabitants of the earth. None are so besotted as not to acknowledge the existence of a Supreme Being; but the extent of His agency, and the interest He takes in the affairs of men, are far from being duly appreciated. 2. Another truth which this history equally confirms is that WICKED MEN, THOUGH FOLLOWING THEIR OWN DEVICES AND ACTUATED SOLELY BY THEIR OWN EVIL INCLINATIONS, DO BUT BRING TO PASS THE SECRET PURPOSES OF THE MOST HIGH. No one, indeed, can read this history and not see the truth of the psalmist's exclamation, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee" (*Psa. lxxvi. 10*). And truly many events recorded in the Scriptures teach us the very same thing. What caused the gospel of Christ to be preached throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria by the early converts? The persecution raised at Jerusalem against the infant Church, and intended for its utter destruction (*Acts viii. 1*). Again, when the Apostle Paul had gone through part of Asia and Greece, it was God's intention that he should preach the gospel at Rome also; but who were the agents employed to bring about this His purpose? The Asiatic Jews, who raised a tumult which threatened the apostle's life; scribes and Pharisees and wicked men, who bound themselves by an oath to kill him; and two Roman governors, one of whom, though he doubted not his innocence, to please the Jews, left him in prison, and the other, who, from no better motive, obliged him to appeal to Cæsar, that he might not be taken back to Jerusalem. 3. Another truth which in this history we see clearly brought before us is that GOD'S PEOPLE ARE OFTEN TRIED BY GREAT AND LONG-CONTINUED AFFLICTION. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous" (*Psa. xxxiv. 19*). 4. Another truth which this history strongly confirms is that, HOWEVER LONG OR SOUNDLY CONSCIENCE MAY SLEEP, WHEN GOD IS PLEASED TO AROUSE IT, THE MOST STOUT-HEARTED SINNER WILL BE STRUCK WITH TERROR AND ALARM. II. But I will now direct your attention to some of the LESSONS OF INSTRUCTION WHICH THIS HISTORY MAY FURNISH US WITH. 1. And, first, we may learn from it to put full and entire trust in the promises of God, and not to be moved from our confidence by any apparently untoward events. 2. Learn from this history to maintain uprightness and integrity in all your dealings, and to combine an active use of means with an earnest prayer for a blessing upon them. When Jacob determined to send his sons a second time into Egypt, he bids them take back the money found in the mouths of their sacks, saying, "Peradventure it was an oversight." 3. Learn, again, from this history, that, as Joseph behaved towards

his brethren, so God often deals with His people, and with the same object, namely, to make them sensible of their sins and to effect their humiliation. 4. Learn, lastly, from the example of Joseph, not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good. (*T. Grantham.*) **I will go and see him before I die.**—*The old folks' visit*:—Jacob had long since passed the hundred-year milestone. In those times people were distinguished for longevity. In the centuries after persons lived to great age. What a strong and unfailing thing is parental attachment! Was it not almost time for Jacob to forget Joseph? The hot suns of many summers had blazed on the heath; the river Nile had overflowed and receded, overflowed and receded again and again; the seed had been sown and the harvest reaped; stars rose and set; years of plenty and years of famine had passed on, but the love of Jacob for Joseph in my text is overwhelming dramatic. Oh, that is a cord that is not snapped, though pulled at by many decades! Joseph was as fresh in Jacob's memory as ever, though at seventeen years of age the boy had disappeared from the old homestead. I found in our family record the story of an infant that had died fifty years ago, and I said to my parents, "What is this record, and what does it mean?" Their chief answer was a long, deep sigh. It was to them a very tender sorrow. What does all that mean? Why, it means our children departed are ours yet, and that cord of attachment reaching across the years will hold us until it brings us together in the palace as Jacob and Joseph were brought together. That is one thing that makes old people die happy. They realize it is reunion with those from whom they have long been separated. Oh parent, as you think of the darling panting and white in membranous croup, I want you to know it will be gloriously bettered in that land where there has never been a death, and where all the inhabitants will live on in the great future as long as God! Joseph was Joseph notwithstanding the palace, and your child will be your child notwithstanding all the reigning splendour of everlasting noon. What a thrilling visit was that of the old shepherd to the Prime Minister, Joseph! I see the old countryman, seated in the palace, looking around at the mirrors and the fountains and the carved pillars, and oh, how he wishes that Rachel, his wife, was alive; she could have come there with him to see their son in his great house. "Oh," says the old man, within himself, "I do wish Rachel could be here and see all this!" I visited at the farmhouse of the father of Millard Fillmore, when the son was President of the United States, and the octogenarian farmer entertained me until eleven o'clock at night, telling me what great things he had seen in his son's house at Washington, and what Daniel Webster said to him, and how grandly Millard treated his father in the White House. The old man's face was illuminated with the story until almost midnight. He had just been visiting his son at the capital. And I suppose it was something of the same joy that thrilled the heart of the old shepherd as he stood in the palace of the Prime Minister. It is a great day with you when your old parents come to visit you. Blessed is that home where Christian parents came to visit! Whatever may have been the style of the architecture when they came, it is a palace before they leave. By this time you will notice what kindly provision Joseph made for his father, Jacob. Joseph did not say, "I can't have the old man around this place. How clumsy he would look climbing up these marble stairs and walking over these mosaics. Then he would be putting his hands upon some of these frescoes. People would wonder where that old greenhorn came from. He would shock all the Egyptian court with his manners at table. Besides that, he might get sick on my hands, and he might talk to me as though I were only a boy, when I am the second man in all the realm. Of course he must not suffer, and if there is famine in his country—and I hear there is—I will send him some provisions, but I can't take a man from Padan-aram and introduce him into this polite Egyptian court. What a nuisance it is to have poor relations!" Joseph did not say that, but he rushed out to meet his father with perfect abandon of affection, and brought him up to the palace and introduced him to the king, and provided for all the rest of the father's days, and nothing was too good for the old man while living, and when he was dead, Joseph, with military escort, took his father's remains to the family cemetery at Machpelah, and put them down beside Rachel, Joseph's mother. Would God all children were as kind to their parents! "Over the hills to the poor-house" is the exquisite ballad of Will Carleton, who found an old woman who had been turned off by her prospered sons; but I think I may find in my text "Over the hills to the palace." As if to disgust us with unfilial conduct, the Bible presents us with the story of Micah, who stole a thousand shekels from his mother, and the story of Absalom, who tried to dethrone his father. But all

history is beautiful with stories of filial fidelity. Epimandes, the warrior, found his chief delight in reciting to his parents his victories. There goes Æneas from burning Troy, on his shoulders Anchises, his father. The Athenians punished with death any unfilial conduct. There goes beautiful Ruth escorting venerable Naomi across the desert amid the howling of the wolves and the barking of the jackals. John Lawrence, burned at the stake in Colchester, was cheered in the flames by his children, who said, "O God, strengthen Thy servant and keep Thy promise." And Christ in the hour of excruciation provided for His mother. Jacob kept his resolution, "I will go and see him before I die," and a little while after we find them walking the tessellated floor of the palace, Jacob and Joseph, the Prime minister proud of the shepherd. I may say in regard to the most of you that your parents have probably visited you for the last time, or will soon pay you such a visit, and I have wondered if they will ever visit you in the King's palace. "Oh," you say, "I am in the pit of sin." Joseph was in the pit. "Oh," you say, "I am in the prison of mine iniquity." Joseph was once in prison. "Oh," you say, "I didn't have a fair chance; I was denied maternal kindness." Joseph was denied maternal attendance. "Oh," you say, "I am far away from the land of my nativity." Joseph was far from home. "Oh," you say, "I have been betrayed and exasperated." Did not Joseph's brethren sell him to a passing Ishmaelitic caravan? Yet God brought him to that emblazoned residence, and if you will trust His grace in Jesus Christ you too will be empalaced. Oh, what a day that will be when the old folks come from an adjoining mansion in heaven, and find you amid the alabaster pillars of the throne-room and living with the King! They are coming up the steps now, and the epauletted guard of the palace rushes in and says, "Your father's coming, your mother's coming." And when, under the arches of precious stones and on the pavement of porphyry, you greet each other, the scene will eclipse the meeting on the Goshen highway, when Joseph and Jacob fell on each other's neck and wept a good while. (*Dr. Talmage.*) *The lost found:*—There was once a boy in Liverpool who went into the water to bathe, and he was carried out by the tide. Though he struggled long and hard, he was not able to swim against the ebbing tide, and he was taken far out to sea. He was picked up by a boat belonging to a vessel bound for Dublin. The poor little boy was almost lost. The sailors were all very kind to him when he was taken into the vessel. One gave him a cap, another a jacket, another a pair of shoes, and so on. But that evening a gentleman, who was walking near the place where the little boy had gone into the water, found his clothes lying on the shore. He searched and made inquiries, but no tidings were to be heard of the poor little boy. He found a piece of paper in the pocket of the boy's coat, by which he discovered who it was to whom the clothes belonged. The kind man went with a sad and heavy heart to break the news to the parents. He said to the father, "I am very sorry to tell you that I found these clothes on the shore, and could not find the lad to whom they belonged; I almost fear he has been drowned." The father could hardly speak for grief; the mother was wild with sorrow. They caused every inquiry to be made, but no account was to be had of their dear boy. The house was sad; the little children missed their playfellow; mourning was ordered; the mother spent her time crying, and the father's heart was heavy. He said little, but he felt much. The lad was taken back in a vessel bound for Liverpool, and arrived on the day the mourning was to be brought home. As soon as he reached Liverpool, he set off toward his father's house. He did not like to be seen in the strange cap and jacket and shoes which he had on, so he went by the lanes, where he would not meet those who knew him. At last he came to the hall door. He knocked. When the servant opened it, and saw who it was, she screamed with joy, and said, "Here is Master Tom!" His father rushed out, and, bursting into tears, embraced him. His mother fainted; there was no more spirit in her. What a happy evening they all, parents and children, spent! They did not want the mourning. The father could say with Jacob, "It is enough; my son is yet alive." (*E. P. Hammond.*)

CHAPTER XLVI.

Vers. 1-7. And Israel took his journey with all that he had.—*Israel's journey*

into Egypt:—I. A JOURNEY WHICH THE PATRIARCH HAD NEVER EXPECTED TO TAKE, AND WHICH WAS FRAUGHT WITH CONSEQUENCES WHICH HE HAD NEVER HOPED TO SEE. II. THE RELIGIOUS SPIRIT IN WHICH THE PATRIARCH ENTERED UPON THIS JOURNEY. III. WHEN THE PATRIARCH SOUGHT THE LORD AT BEER-SHEBA, HE APPEARED TO HIM AND BLESSED HIM. I. The Lord appeared to His servant, when he had offered up his sacrifices to Him. 2. The very gracious manner in which the Lord addressed His servant in this vision. 3. The Lord gave to His servant words of wise and kindly counsel, just what was suitable in the circumstances in which he was placed. IV. THE FULFILMENT OF THE PROMISE WHICH THE LORD GAVE TO ISRAEL IN THIS VISION CONCERNING HIS JOURNEY INTO EGYPT. (H. T. Holmes.) *The migration of Jacob's house to Egypt:—*I. IT WAS THE SECOND STAGE IN THE COVENANT HISTORY. II. IT WAS THE FULFILMENT OF THE DIVINE PLAN. III. IT WAS ENTERED UPON WITH DUE SOLEMNITY. IV. IT HAD THE APPROVAL OF GOD. God has always appeared in some special act or word in every great crisis of His people's history. As to Jacob—1. He found God as he had sought Him. "I am God, the God of thy father." The Name used reveals the Omnipotent God, the Mighty One who is able to fulfil His covenant engagements, and who could bring Jacob safely through all his difficulties, present and future. Israel had found his God faithful in all His gracious dealings, and he believed that he should still see the same loving kindness and truth for the time to come. 2. The will of God is clearly made known. "Fear not to go down to Egypt." He was distinctly assured that it was God's will that he should go there. 3. The protection of God is promised. "Fear not—I will go down with thee into Egypt." 4. The purpose of God is declared. "I will there make of thee a great nation." "I will surely bring thee up again." (T. H. Leale.)

*The family migration:—*I. THE DEPARTURE FROM CANAAN. 1. Jacob offers sacrifice. 2. God renews the promise. II. THE REUNION IN EGYPT. III. THE ABODE IN GOSHEN. Why was Joseph so anxious to establish his father's family in Goshen? Joseph felt that there were many dangers incident to the sojourn of the "Hebrews," his kinsfolk, in Egypt. 1. The danger of quarrels. The Egyptians might become jealous of the foreigners in their land. The Hebrews might, perhaps, presume too much on the favour shown by Pharaoh to Joseph and Jacob. 2. The danger from heathenism. There was much idolatry and animal worship in Egypt. The "magicians" and their arts might corrupt the minds of the children of Israel, and prevent them from the worship of the one true God. 3. The danger of his kinsmen forgetting Canaan as the land where their lot as a nation was fixed by God. He did not want them to be Egyptianized. They must, as far as possible, be kept a "separate" people. (W. S. Smith, B.D.) *Emigrate, but not without God:—*History repeats itself, and this old story fits into multitudinous modern instances. But not always is sufficient heed given to the sacrificing at Beer-sheba; and the point I make now is, that in all such changes we should seek, above all things else, the companionship of God. Nothing will harm us anywhere if God is with us, and we cannot have the highest good if we go even into the fairest Goshen on the continent without Him. Horace Greeley, long ago, set the fashion of saying, "Go West, young man, go West"; and there is wisdom in the advice, provided it be conjoined with the admonition, "But don't go without your God." Perhaps some here are meditating on the propriety of their pushing away into the places where the labour market is not overstocked, and the opportunities are far better than they are in a comparatively crowded city such as this. Nor do we say a word against the project. Go, by all means, if you are not afraid to work; but remember the sacrifice at Beer-sheba, and don't go without your God. Too many have done that, and have gone to ruin. But take Him with you, and He will be "your shield and your exceeding great reward." (W. M. Taylor, D.D.)

Vers. 3, 4, **And He said, I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt.**—*Divine assurance vouchsafed to Jacob:—*Not the invitation of Pharaoh, not the urgent message of Joseph, not even the warmth of his own love alone, carried Jacob out of Canaan. These furnished the occasion and the impulse, but the head of the covenant people did not leave the Land of Promise without the warrant of his covenant God. There were four promises. 1. "I will make of thee a great nation," a promise which ran far into the future. A people great in numbers, greater in their influence on all the earth to the end of time, should be formed of his seed, and formed in Egypt. 2. "I will go down with thee." Over every circumstance of the future, nearer and more remote, the Living and Almighty God would watch. 3. "I will also surely bring thee up again." The old promise of

the land would not be changed. For the purpose of forming the nation which should possess the land, were they now being taken into Egypt; when the nation had been formed according to God's promise, He would bring them back. 4. "And Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes." Long before the nation was formed, Jacob's time to die should come; but when it came it would be accompanied with this tender consolation, the loving touch of Joseph's hand on the eyelids he could no longer move. That was to be his last sensation. And it would convey to him far more than the joy of his son's love; it would be the pledge that his soul was passing into the hands of the faithful Redeemer who had given this promise so long before. Thus it was by faith that Israel went into Egypt, consciously led by the hand of God. (*A. M. Symington, D.D.*)

Vers. 8-27. **And these are the names of the children of Israel, which came into Egypt.**—*The catalogue of the children of Israel*:—I. IT MARKS THE COMMENCEMENT, AND GIVES THE OUTLINE OF, THE NATION'S HISTORY. II. IT MARKS THE TRIBE OF THE MESSIAH. III. THE NAMES ARE SIGNIFICANT. Thus the names of Reuben's sons signify: "teacher," "distinguished," "beautiful one," "noble one." These express a sanguine hope. Also the names of Levi's sons signify: "expulsion of the profane," "congregation of the consecrated," "practiser of discipline." These are the leading principles and proper characteristics of priestly rule. We hasten rapidly over Biblical names, but much instruction may be gathered from them. IV. THE FACTS CONNECTED WITH SOME OF THE NAMES ARE SUGGESTIVE. Thus Dinah, though condemned to a single life, is yet reckoned among the founders of the house of Israel in Egypt. This points to the elevation of woman, and to the idea of female inheritance. Again, Judah was the father's minister to Joseph. By his faithfulness, strength, and wisdom he rises in the opinion of his father. His distinguished place in the annals of the nation comes out, at length, in the grandeur of that prophetic word which declares God's loving purpose in this great history (Gen. xlix. 10). V. THE NUMBER OF THE NAMES IS ALSO SUGGESTIVE. "It is remarkable that it is the product of seven, the number of holiness; and ten, the number of completeness. It is still more remarkable that it is the number of the names of those who were the heads of the primitive nations. The Church is the counterpart of the world, and it is to be the instrument by which the kingdom of the world is to become the kingdom of Christ. When the Most High bestowed the inheritance on the nations, "when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the sons of Israel" (Deut. xxxii. 8). This curious sentence may have an immediate reference to the providential distribution of the human family over the habitable parts of the earth, according to the number of His church and of His dispensation of grace: but, at all events, it conveys the great and obvious principle, that all things whatsoever, in the affairs of men, are antecedently adapted with the most perfect exactitude to the benign reign of grace already realized in the children of God, and yet to be extended to all the sons and daughters of Adam. (*T. H. Leale.*)

Vers. 28-34. **They came into the land of Goshen.**—*The settlement of the children of Israel in Goshen*:—I. THE WISE POLICY OF THIS STEP. II. THE BEHAVIOUR OF JOSEPH. 1. He determines to announce their arrival to Pharaoh (ver. 31). 2. He gives instructions to his brethren (vers. 32, 34). (*T. H. Leale.*) *Jacob and Joseph*:—I. A DIVINE PROMISE. 1. The occasion on which it was given. Jacob having heard that Joseph was alive, was anxious to see his son once more. Felt he could hardly leave the promised land except he had Divine permission. He went as far as he dared—to Beer-sheba, in the extreme south, and there offered sacrifice unto the God of his father. Then it was, in a vision, that the promise was spoken. Divine mercy and condescension, responding to the father's desire. "Like as a father pitieth his children," &c. 2. The nature of it. (1) Confirmation of old promise (ver. 3.) Jacob had not forgotten it. But might not going down to Egypt prevent its fulfilment? (2) Promise of Divine presence and protection. "I will go," &c. (ver. 4). (3) Promise that the father shall see his long-lost son. 3. Practical effect of it. In the strength of the encouragement it imparted, Jacob, 130 years old, sets out for Egypt. II. A FATHER'S MESSENGER. Judah. He had taken a chief part in the separating of father and son, and we now see him most active in bringing about the meeting. Those who have done wrong may not be able to undo the wrong they have done, but should, if possible, make reparation. Recall the activity of Judah all through the history. His intercession for Benjamin,

&c. There seems to have been a radical change in him. III. A HAPPY MEETING. Jacob and Joseph. Some twenty-two years had passed since they had seen each other. It was no prodigal's return. Jacob would have been glad to see Joseph under any circumstances, but how great his pride at finding him thus exalted. Jacob, as a God-fearing man, had no need to be ashamed of the progress of his son. IV. AN HONEST COUNSELLOR. Joseph to his brethren. They were not to disguise their calling; although the Egyptians abandoned it. They were to begin in their new home on the right principles, were to be true and honest. How many resort to unmanly concealments of humble extraction and lowly avocations when away from home. Honesty always right, and therefore the best policy. In this case the effect is evident. The Israelites were located by themselves. Their exodus the more easy and practicable when the time came. Had they been spread through the country, their collection and departure had been most difficult. Learn: 1. To seek God's guidance in all our movements. 2. To look for the fulfilment of promise in an honest obedience. 3. Endeavour to repair results of past sins. Restitution and reparation. 4. Let conduct in absence of parents be such as to render the meeting happy. 5. Begin life on right principles. Honour, truth, honesty. (*J. C. Gray.*) *Duty and filial piety combined*:—A beautiful combination of official duty and filial piety! The whole land of Egypt is suffering from famine. Joseph is the controller and administrator of the resources of the land. He does not abandon his position and go away to Canaan; but he gets the chariot out and he must go part of the road. "I know I am father to Pharaoh and all his great people. I shall not be away long; I shall soon be back again to my duties. I must go a little way to meet the old man from home." Yes, I don't care what our duties are, we can add a little pathos to them if we like; whatever we be in life, we can add a little sentiment to our life. And what is life without sentiment? What are the flowers without an occasional sprinkling of dew? It may be a grand thing to sit on high stool and wait till the old man comes upstairs. But it is an infinitely grander thing, a "lordlier chivalry," to come off the stool and go away to meet him a mile or two on the road. Your home will be a better home—I don't care how poor the cot—if you will have a little sentiment in you, a little tenderness and nice feeling. These are things that sweeten life. I don't want a man to wait until there is an earthquake in order that he may call and say, "How do you do?" I don't want a man to do earthquakes for me. Sometimes I want a chair handed, and a door opened, and a kind pressure of the hand, and a gentle word. And as for the earthquakes, why—wait until they come. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Kindness to parents*:—The biographers of Abraham Lincoln, say: "He never, in all his prosperity lost sight of his parents. He continued to aid and befriend them in every way, even when he could ill-afford it, and when his benefactions were imprudently used." (*One Thousand New Illustrations.*) *Not ashamed of parentage*:—Joseph, a prince, was no whit ashamed of the poor old shepherd, before so many of his compeers and other courtiers, that accompanied him, and abominated such kind of persons. Colonel Edwards is much commended for his ingenuous reply to a countryman of his, newly come to him, into the low countries, out of Scotland. This fellow, desiring entertainment of him, told him, my lord his father and such knights and gentlemen, his cousins and kinsmen, were in good health. "Gentlemen," quoth Colonel Edwards to his friends by, "believe not one word he says; my father is but a poor banker, whom this knave would make a lord, to curry favour with me, and make you believe I am a great man born." The truly virtuous and valorous are no whit ashamed of their mean parentage. (*J. Trapp.*)

CHAPTER XLVII.

VER. 3. What is your occupation?—Pharaoh's question to the brethren of Joseph:—I. Evidently implying THAT EACH OF US HAS, OR IS INTENDED TO HAVE, AN "OCCUPATION." Now the word "occupation," in its primary meaning, signifies "employment" or "business"; and the text leads us to infer that each individual amongst us has some such employment or business, for the due discharge of which we are accountable to Him whose Providence has imposed it upon us. Had man been sent into the world with no other object than merely to

spend a few days or years in this fleeting scene, and then to pass off the stage of life and cease for ever to exist, the question as to any occupation he might have need never be raised. The more easily and pleasantly such a life could be got over, the better. With regard to the things of the present life, hear what the Scriptures declare: "Seest thou a man," says Solomon, "diligent in his business, he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men" (Prov. xxii. 29). The Apostle Paul, while urging the Romans to "fervency of spirit in the service of God," enforces the important admonition to be "not slothful in business" (Rom. xii. 11). If from precepts we pass on to examples, we find the duty of "diligence in business" strikingly set before us in the conduct of the holy men of old, the saints and servants of the Lord. And surely, brethren, with regard to things of infinitely higher moment, it must be needless to remind professing Christians that they have a word entrusted to them, an "occupation" which demands unwearied attention, incessant watchfulness, and fervent prayer. Throughout, by precept as well as by example, we are urged to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. ii. 12).

II. To inquire into the NATURE OF THIS OCCUPATION WITH RESPECT TO DIFFERENT CLASSES OF INDIVIDUALS. Altogether unoccupied we cannot be: if the service of God does not engage our attention, the service of Satan will. But when the question is proposed—"What is your occupation?" from how few, comparatively, have we the comfort of receiving the reply—"I am occupied about my Father's business!" Now, let us take a brief review of some of the various occupations in which different individuals are engaged.

1. Look at the man whose whole time is taken up in the accumulation of earthly riches and possessions, and ask him what is his occupation? He will tell you of the labour and fatigue which he has undergone, in search of his much-loved idols. And what reward can such a man expect, in return for all his worldly and selfish schemes? Truly, except he repent, he will find that he has been only "treasuring up unto himself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." 2. Look, again, at the man whose thoughts and time are engrossed with the pursuit of worldly ambition and consequence; and ask him what is his occupation? He will answer that his great object is to get himself a name upon earth. Truly may they be said to grasp at a shadow, and soon lose the reality. "Them that honour Me," says God, "I will honour; and they that despise Me"—however high they may stand with the world—"shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Sam. ii. 30). 3. Look, once again, at the man whose whole time is devoted to earthly pleasures and sinful enjoyments, and ask him "what is his occupation." His course of life answers for itself. You see him busied in the frivolous and unprofitable amusements of the world, and eagerly pursuing its vanities and follies. "What fruit have ye in those things whereof ye have cause to be ashamed? for the end of those things is death" (Rom. vi. 21). But now, go and ask the Christian "what is his occupation." "This," he will say, "this is my occupation, and these are the happy fruits of it; I have tried God, and I have not found Him a hard master: I have put His promises to the proof, and not one of them has failed; I now know that He 'is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that I could ask or think.' In His blessed service, therefore, through Divine grace, will I be occupied henceforth and for ever." Let this occupation be yours. (S. Coates, M.A.)

On occupation:—Activity is the life of nature. The planets rolling in their orbits, the earth revolving on her axis; the atmosphere purified by winds, the ocean by tides; the vapours rising from the ground and returning in freshening flowers, exhaled from the sea, and poured again by rivers into its bosom, proclaim the universal law. Turn to animated existence. See the air, the land, and the waters in commotion with countless tribes eagerly engaged in attack, in defence, in the construction of habitations, in the chase of prey, in employment suited to their sphere and conducive to their happiness. Is man born an exception to the general rule? Man is born to labour. For labour, man while yet innocent was formed (Gen. ii. 15). To that exertion which was ordained to be a source of unmitigated delight, painful contention and overwhelming fatigue, when man apostatised from his God, were superadded (Gen. iii. 17, 18). In the early years of the world employments now confined to the lowest classes were deemed not unbecoming persons of the most elevated rank. From every individual in his dominions, and from each according to his vocation, Pharaoh looked for diligent exertion. From every individual among us, as throughout His boundless empire, the supreme Lord of all demands habitual labour in the daily employment of the talents entrusted to our management. Let us then, in the first

place, contemplate the motives under the guidance of which we are, each of us, to labour : secondly, some of the general lines of human labour as connected with their attendant temptations ; and thirdly, the principal benefits immediately resulting from occupation. I. **WHATSOEVER YE DO, DO ALL TO THE GLORY OF GOD.** Behold the universal motive of a Christian ! Through the exuberance of the free bounty of God. To whom ought the gift to be consecrated ? To Him who bestowed it. For whose glory ought it to be employed ? For the glory of the Giver. To live unto Christ is to glorify God. To glorify God through Christ with your body and your spirit, which are His, is the appointed method of attaining the salvation which Christ has purchased. II. **ADVERT TO THE GENERAL LINES OF HUMAN LABOUR, AND TO THEIR ATTENDANT TEMPTATIONS.** III. Consider briefly some of the benefits resulting to the individual from occupation ; and you will confess that, if God enjoined labour as a judgment, he enjoined it also in mercy. 1. Labour, in the first place, not only is the medium of acquisition ; but naturally tends to improvement. Whether the body is to be strengthened or the mind to be cultivated ; by the labour of to-day are augmented the faculties of attaining similar objects to-morrow. 2. Labour is, in the next place, a powerful preservative from sin. The unoccupied hand is a ready instrument of mischief. 3. Occupation, originating in Christian principles and directed to Christian purposes, is essential, not only to the refreshing enjoyment of leisure (for the rest that refreshes is rest after toil) ; but to the acquisition of genuine composure, of serenity of conscience, of that peace of God which passeth all understanding. IV. **LET NOT OUR INVESTIGATIONS BE CLOSED WITHOUT SOME BRIEF AND PRACTICAL REMARKS.** 1. Consider with attention proportioned to the importance of the subject the universal obligation to labour. If you wish to withdraw your shoulder from the burden ; suspect the soundness of your Christian profession. For those whom you love, even at the desire of those whom you love, you delight to labour. Do you love God, and loiter when He commands you to work for Him ? 2. Be frequent in proposing to yourself the inquiry, "What is my occupation ?" Satisfy yourself, not merely that you are occupied in employments acceptable to God. To labour in trifles is not Christian occupation. To labour in sin is to labour for the devil. (*T. Gisborne, M.A.*) **Occupation :—I. OUR NEED OF AN OCCUPATION.** Divine provision implies human need. It also measures and meets it. 1. Economically. Work is to the race an absolute condition of existence. Since the fall the ground yields a full fruit only to labour (*Gen. iii. 17, 19*). Only on condition that he works can man be fed (*Prov. vi. 6, 10*). Idleness is an anomaly, a blunder, and a sin. 2. Physiologically. The health and growth of our powers depend on it. The body was not made to be still. It requires motion, and craves for it. A mind inert becomes enfeebled, whereas intellectual activity tends to intellectual strength. So also in the spiritual department : the spiritual nature grows by exercise, and languishes in inactivity. Opportunities of loving increase the capacity to love. 3. Morally : Idleness is the natural ally of immorality. The laziest lives are notoriously the most vicious. Good, honest work has a double action. It keeps down appetite and it keeps out of temptation's way. II. **THE OCCUPATION WE NEED.** Occupation, like other good things, may be abused, and so become the occasion of evil. This happens—1. When our occupation is followed to the point of drudgery. Distinguish work from toil. The one strengthens our powers, the other wastes them. 2. When our occupation is one-sided. A tree that makes much wood makes little fruit. A man who over-works his body neglects his mind. A man absorbed in secular matters neglects and will soon bring atrophy to his moral nature. Activity in one direction cannot be exaggerated but at the expense of neglect in another. We can do only one thing well at a time. The Christian who thrives finds time somehow for spiritual exercises, and the exclusive consideration of spiritual things. III. **THE PROPER END OF ALL OCCUPATION.** There must be not only work and lawful work, but the doing of this with lofty purpose. The true work is work done as service to God—"as to the Lord and not to men." Application : 1. Recognize the universal obligation to work. 2. Try to find your enjoyment in your work. 3. Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth unto eternal life. (*J. Edgar Henry, M.A.*)

Vers. 5, 6. In the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell.—*The best gifts of God bestowed on His people :—*I. In the first place, God giveth the best unto His true Israel. He gives them a land of rest, He gives them a land of safety, He gives them a land of abundance, and He giveth them the best things in

that land. He not only pardons them, but His pardon is a costly pardon. He not only gives them righteousness, but He gives them a glorious righteousness. Does He supply their wants? It is all fulness He gives them; even for the supply of the little ones, as you observe in the twenty-fourth verse: "And it shall come to pass, in the increase, that ye shall give the fifth part unto Pharaoh; and four parts shall be your own, for the seed of the field, and for your food, and for them of your households, and for food for your little ones," unfolding this great truth—that the supply which is in Christ, is not only for the least, but for the least wants of the least; that there is nothing minute in God's sight. He has provided for helplessness of body, for nervousness of spirit, for a distracted mind, for strong inward temptations, for outward trials, for domestic afflictions, for everything that concerns us in that straight way, the straightness of which at times no one can enter into but the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. II. But now observe, secondly, WHY IT IS GOD DOES THIS. 1. Wherever God acteth, He acted as God—greatly; what He doeth, He doeth as God, worthy God. You and I act below ourselves; God never can act below Himself. The great God in His forgiveness is great; in His righteousness He is great; in the abundant supplies of His grace He is great; in the freeness of His salvation He is great; in the sympathies of His love He is great; and that because He is God (see Isa. lv. 7-9; Hosea xi. 8, 9). 2. But there is another reason; that is, the love which He bears towards His Israel. Who can describe what that love is? 3. But there is another reason, and I think, if I were to lose sight of that, I should lose sight of the Gospel itself; every blessing that the Israel of God enjoy, they enjoy for the true Joseph's sake. It is not for their sakes, but it is for Christ's sake. III. THE PRACTICAL BEARING OF THIS IMPORTANT SUBJECT. 1. Great cause for deep thankfulness. 2. Then there is in the subject that which should lead to great stirring up of desire. We should desire that we may enter into the best of the land. 3. I am sure we have great cause for deep abasement as we think of the subject. God has given us the best; what have we given Him? (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*)

Ver. 7. And Joseph brought in Jacob his father.—*Joseph and his father*:—I. JOSEPH HONOURED HIS FATHER JACOB BY SHOWING HIM THE UTMOST RESPECT (*Gen. xlv. 29*). II. JOSEPH HONOURED HIS FATHER BY SHOWING HIS LOVE FOR HIM. One of our martyr-Presidents never stood higher in the nation's eyes than when he turned around, after his inauguration, and, before all the assembled thousands, greeted his mother with a filial kiss. III. JOSEPH HONOURED HIS FATHER BY HIS PURE AND NOBLE LIFE. Words of respect are comparatively worthless unless they have a life behind them. IV. JOSEPH HONOURED HIS FATHER BY PRESENTING HIM SO PROMPTLY TO PHARAOH. He shows not a particle of shame of his rusticity, Jacob's homespun must have contrasted strangely with Pharaoh's purple; Jacob's uncouth phrases of country-life with the king's polished diction. Joseph knew well enough how such people were ordinarily despised at the court, and yet how he omits no chance to show to Pharaoh how much he loved and honoured his father. The story is told of the Dean of Canterbury, afterwards Archbishop Tillotson, that one day after he had attained his churchly honours, an old man from the country, with uncouth manners, called at his door and inquired for John Tillotson. The footman was about to dismiss him with scorn for presuming to ask in that familiar way for his master, when the Archbishop caught sight of his visitor and flew down the stairs to embrace the old man before all the servants, exclaiming with tones of genuine delight, "It is my beloved father!" We all admire such exhibitions of filial love, which overcomes the fear of the cool conventionalities of the world, and we find from our lesson that Pharaoh was touched by his prime minister's loyalty to his poor relations, for he gave him this royal token of his pleasure: "The land of Egypt is before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and thy brethren to dwell," &c. (*F. E. Clark.*) *An interview with royalty*:—I desire to linger awhile on this thrilling scene. There are wise, good lessons in it. 1. I look upon it first of all and see an attractive picture of venerable old age. "The hoary head is a crown of glory," says Solomon, "if it be found in the way of righteousness." Age invests many things with a beauty of its own. An aged oak, wide-spread, gnarled, and weather-warped, stalwart, green, and stately; or an ancient castle, weather-worn and storm-swept, moss-clad and ivy-covered, its grey towers still standing bold and brave to all the winds of heaven; but of all attractive pictures that old Time can draw, nothing is more winsome than the silver locks and mellowed features of godly old age. They remind me of some retired Greenwich or Chelsea

veteran who can tell the tale of scars and wounds, of hair-breath escapes, of brave comrades, of stirring campaigns, of hard-fought battles; only this has been a holier war, followed by a dearer peace and more sweet reward and victories than ever followed Trafalgar or Waterloo. So with the godly character. It is beautiful in all its stages from youth to manhood; but surely, fairest of all when age, experience, and grace hath ripened it into saintliness, and something of the heavenly shines outward from the soul within. As I look upon this aged patriarch confronting all the splendours of Pharaoh's court, I see him standing on the utmost border, waiting to be ushered into the presence of a grand Monarch, into a fairer palace, and among a richer and nobler throng, and where he himself will be the wearer of a richer crown. As I look upon this strange scene in Pharaoh's palace, I see that there is something grander and more powerful in moral worth than in any kind or amount of material power or possessions. In the epistle to the Hebrews I find this sentence, "Without contradiction, the less is blessed of the greater." Jacob has something and can procure something which makes the monarch less than he, something which makes him better and greater than the king. It is the blessing of God. It is power with God. It is that influence from heaven and with heaven which belongs to moral goodness and virtue, and especially to aged piety everywhere and at all times. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh. Never forget that righteousness is far away greater than the riches. 2. And once more, as I look upon that striking scene in Pharaoh's palace and listen to the aged patriarch's words, I think of his testimony concerning life. He calls it a pilgrimage. Young men! have you ever thought of that? Behind you there is a stern uncompromising power that is always muttering, "Move on! Move on! March through the moments! hurry through the hours! tramp along the days! tread through the months! stride along the years! You can't halt! You can't step backward. Move on!" Oh, but this is a tremendous view of human life! God help us from this hour to walk aright; to keep the path of duty, the ways of the Lord, lest the later stages of our pilgrimage find us in swamp and quagmire, scorching desert or thorny jungle when our strength is exhausted and the dull night winds blow! 3. I notice, too, that Jacob calls his days evil days. He means by that they had been sorrowful, full of trouble and care. Well, his was a hard life, he had had disappointment and distress beyond the common. If you will read his history you will find that his own conduct had to answer largely for his cares; his sins were the seed of his sorrows; his wrong-doing caused the very most of his rough usage, and nobody knew that better than Jacob did himself. Sin is the mother of sorrow, and its seeds sown in the life are sure to bring a harvest of pain. There is an Australian weapon called the boomerang, which is thrown so as to describe a series of curves and comes back at last to the feet of the thrower. Sin is a boomerang which we throw off into space, but it turns upon its author, and strikes the soul that launched it. 4. Learn another lesson from this striking picture—a lesson of God's sure faithfulness. Jacob with all his faults had served and trusted God. His troubles and distresses had helped to bring him more fully into pious confidence and patient faith; and his trust in God brought about all things right at last. (*J. J. Wray.*)

Jacob and Pharaoh.—1. The chief value of this narrative is that it affords one of the most impressive of all illustrations of the providential purposes of God. 2. We gain here some insight into the business regulations of a successful government. Pharaoh appears to have been a model king. He managed the state on business principles. The first question he asked these strangers who had come to settle in his kingdom was, "What is your occupation?" Such a government expects its subjects to be men of business. No idlers were wanted there in time of famine; none but men of ability, active habits, prudence, capacity. 3. We find in this scene an example of courtesy. There is a touching simplicity and an air of vivid reality in this picture, which leads to intuitive recognition of its genuineness. Jacob respected Pharaoh's office, and Pharaoh respected Jacob's age. 4. We have here also a model for conversation. 5. This scene suggests a sad retrospect. Jacob as a prince had prevailed with God. He had gained the birthright, but he had not escaped the consequences of his own sins. Men do not escape the fruits of sin by receiving honours in the kingdom of God. God's grace may brighten the future, but nothing else than righteous living can make happy memories; and the shadows of youthful transgression stretch across a long life. 6. We have in this scene a remainder of our eternal relations with God. (*A. E. Dunning.*)

Jacob and Pharaoh.—I. A STRANGE MEETING. Meetings of historical characters and their results an interesting study (Diogenes and Alexander, Columbus and Ferdinand,

Luther and Charles V., Milton and Galileo, &c.). None more remarkable than this. 1. Strange circumstances led to it. 2. A strange introduction given to it. Joseph presented five of his brethren to the king. These probably were the five eldest, who were at this time advanced in life. 3. Strange conversation marked it. Pharaoh, apparently overwhelmed by the venerable aspect of Jacob, inquired his age. Jacob, talking to a much younger man, calls his own life short. 4. Strange consequences flowed from it. Nearly 400 years ago this meeting left its mark on history, never to be effaced. Consequences to Israel and Egypt. 5. After the farewell was spoken they appear to have never seen each other again. II. A STRANGE CONTRAST. 1. A patriarch, and a prince. The one the head of God's chosen people, now numbering a few souls, to become a nation; the other the head of a mighty people, already a great nation. 2. A servant of God, and a worshipper of idols. The one the head of a people who were to become great and powerful; the other the king of a nation that should afterwards be humbled. 3. An Israelitish shepherd, and an Egyptian monarch. The occupation of the one an abomination to the other. 4. A poor man, and a rich man. The one, through his son, the benefactor and the deliverer of the other. 5. A very aged man, and a man in the prime of life. Age of Pharaoh uncertain, but the age of Jacob 130 years. III. A STRANGE COMMENT, *i.e.*, on life. 1. It is a pilgrimage. Not a settled, permanent, certain state. A journey from the cradle to the grave. Among strange people, scenes, trials, and joys. Over hills of prosperity and across plains of content, down valleys of sorrow and poverty. 2. Counted by days. The unit of measurement very short. Know not what a day may bring forth. 3. Few. Yet 130 years. How few are our years! Few as compared with eternity; or even with life of many (Methuselah, &c.). Few, compared with hopes, projects, &c. 4. Evil. Full of sin, sorrow, &c. Little done that is good. Man born to trouble. Uncertain. Full of changes. 5. Yet the longest life only a pilgrimage, and reckoned by days. Learn : 1. The best meeting for us is the meeting of the penitent sinner with the merciful Saviour. Arrangements are made for it, good results will inevitably flow from it. The closet is the audience-chamber. 2. The best contrast for us is between the old state of nature and the new state of grace. May we all realize it, and enjoy its blessings. 3. Then our new life, hopes, &c., will be a comment on the Saviour's power, and on the work of the Holy Spirit (written epistles, &c.). And when this short pilgrimage is over, we shall, in eternity, comment upon the wonderful love of God, and the blessed life in heaven. (*J. C. Gray.*) *Joseph introduces Jacob and his family to Pharaoh:—*I. THE INTRODUCTION. 1. Of Joseph's brethren. In this appears—(1) Joseph's character for fidelity to his promise. (2) Joseph's respect for constituted authority. (3) The straightforwardness of Joseph's brethren (vers. 3, 4). 2. Of Joseph's father. (1) The reverence due to age. (2) The priesthood of age. II. THE RECEPTION. 1. Of the brethren. 2. Of Jacob. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Joseph's filial conduct:—*I. SEEKING ROYAL FAVOUR. 1. Approaching the king. 2. Speaking for others. 3. Presented to the king. II. SECURING ROYAL AID. 1. Kindly inquiry (ver. 3). 2. Truthful statement (ver. 4). 3. Generous permission (ver. 6). III. DISPENSING ROYAL BOUNTY. 1. The father honoured (ver. 7). 2. A home bestowed (ver. 11). 3. The family nourished (ver. 12). (*American Sunday School Times.*) *Growth by transplanting:—*I. The conduct of Joseph in reference to the settlement in Goshen is an example of THE POSSIBILITY OF UNITING WORLDLY PRUDENCE WITH HIGH RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLE AND GREAT GENEROSITY OF NATURE. He had promised his brothers a home in that fertile Eastern district, which afforded many advantages in its proximity to Canaan, its adaptation to pastoral life, and its vicinity to Joseph when in Zoan, the capital. But he had not consulted Pharaoh, and, however absolute his authority, it scarcely stretched to giving away Egyptian territory without leave. So his first care, when the wanderers arrive, is to manage the confirmation of the grant. He goes about it with considerable astuteness—a hereditary quality, which is redeemed from blame because used for unselfish purposes and unstained by deceit. He does not tell Pharaoh how far he had gone, but simply announces that his family are in Goshen, as if awaiting the monarch's further pleasure. Then he introduces a deputation, no doubt carefully chosen, of five of his brothers (as if the whole number would have been too formidable), previously instructed how to answer. He knows what Pharaoh is in the habit of asking, or he knows that he can lead him to ask the required question, which will bring out the fact of their being shepherds, and utilize the prejudice against that occupation, to insure separation in Goshen. All goes as he had arranged. Joseph is a saint and a politician. His shrewdness is never craft; sagacity is not alien to consecration.

No doubt it has to be carefully watched lest it degenerate; but prudence is as needful as enthusiasm, and he is the complete man who has a burning fire down in his heart to generate the force that drives him, and a steady hand on the helm, and a keen eye on the chart, to guide him. Be ye "wise as serpents," but also "harmless as doves." II. WE MAY SEE IN JOSEPH'S CONDUCT ALSO AN INSTANCE OF A MAN IN HIGH OFFICE AND NOT ASHAMED OF HIS HUMBLE RELATIONS. It is as if some high official in Paris were to walk in half-a-dozen peasants in blouse and sabots, and present them to the president as "my brothers." It was a brave thing to do; and it teaches a lesson which many people in America and England, who have made their way in the world, would be nobler and more esteemed if they learned. III. The brothers' word to Pharaoh is another instance of THAT IGNORANT CARRYING OUT OF THE DIVINE PURPOSES WHICH WE HAVE ALREADY HAD TO NOTICE. They thought of five years, and it was to be nearly as many centuries. They thought of temporary shelter and food; God meant an education of them and their descendants. Over all this story the unseen Hand hovers, chastising, guiding, impelling; and the human agents are free and yet fulfilling an eternal purpose, blind and yet accountable, responsible for motives, and mercifully ignorant of consequences. So we all play our little parts. We have no call to be curious as to what will come of our deeds. This end of the action, the motive of it, is our care; the other end, the outcome of it, is God's business to see to. IV. We may also observe HOW TRIVIAL INCIDENTS ARE WROUGHT INTO GOD'S SCHEME. The Egyptian hatred of the shepherd class secured one of the prime reasons for the removal from Canaan, the unimpeded growth of a tribe into a nation. V. THE INTERVIEW OF JACOB WITH PHARAOH IS PATHETIC AND BEAUTIFUL. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Jacob before Pharaoh*:—I. THE IMPRESSIVE SPECTACLE OF A VENERABLE OLD AGE. 1. Picture the old man's attitude of soul toward God, and death, and the world to come. 2. His retrospect of life, and how he now sees events in their true proportions and bearings. 3. His own subdued passions and amiable spirit. 4. His concern for, and interest in, the rising generation. II. THE SUPERIORITY OF MORAL OVER MATERIAL GREATNESS AND WORTH. "Jacob blessed Pharaoh" (Heb. viii. 7). III. A LESSON ON LIFE'S EVANESCENCE AND VANITY (ver. 9). 1. A natural reflection. 2. It may be a morbid and evil reflection. Better to imitate the Psalmist's thankful hopefulness (Psa. xxiii). IV. A LESSON OF TRUST IN GOD TO BRING ABOUT ALL THINGS RIGHT AT LAST. (*T. G. Horton.*) *Jacob and Pharaoh*:—I. THE PATRIARCH JACOB, IN HIS OLD AGE, A SOJOURNER IN EGYPT. II. JACOB AND THE PHARAOH OF EGYPT. III. JOSEPH, THE AFFECTIONATE SON AND NOBLE BROTHER. 1. The reality of Joseph's love for his brothers, as well as for his father, is found in the abundant provision he made for them all. 2. This evidence of Joseph's forgiveness of his brother's great wrong to him, and of his care for them, completes the picture of one of the most beautiful characters presented in history. 3. And this perfection of character, combining so many qualities, presents him to us not only as a beautiful model of manliness, of filial and fraternal love, but also as one of the most perfect types of our great exemplar, the Lord Jesus Christ. Lessons: 1. God's faithfulness to His people. 2. Notwithstanding the Divine love, God's people are not exempt from suffering. 3. A good son maketh the heart of his father to rejoice. 4. Let us learn more perfectly the duty of loving one another. (*D. C. Hughes, M.A.*)

Ver. 8. *Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou?—Old year's theme*: "How old art thou?"—I. A COMMON QUESTION. II. A SOLEMN QUESTION. 1. It is the solemnity of memory. 2. It is the solemnity of responsibility. 3. The question ought to create a solemn gratitude. III. JACOB'S ANSWER. IV. HIS LIFE MEASURED. "Days." It is best not to take life in the lump, but to study it in detail. V. HIS LIFE DESCRIBED. VI. HIS LIFE SHORT. 1. He compared them with the ages of his fathers, and they seemed few. 2. Perhaps he compared them also with the great age of the world. 3. Compared with the solemn eternity, how short is our mortal career! VII. HIS LIFE EVIL. A biography whose lines were written in tears. VIII. HIS LIFE A PILGRIMAGE. (*Chas. F. Deems, D.D.*) *Time reckoned*:—Life always seems short in the retrospect; and that light of past experience is the only true light. He only who has paced the ground knows it. Life's true measure is not years, but epochs of progress towards the ideal which the Creator has set before us. As the tree's chronicles are its rings, so those of the soul are its definite expansions. I. Ask yourself, how far am I advanced in my KNOWLEDGE OF TRUTH? Do I know God yet? Do I know Christ and Him crucified? Do I discern spiritual things, or am I yet but a babe "crying for the light"? II. How much have I

developed in CHARACTER, grown in spiritual size, toward the statue of the perfect man in Christ Jesus? III. What RECORD have I made in my Lord's service? Veteran means old; but the soldier attains the title not by years—rather by the campaigns and battles in which he was found faithful. What noble fights have I made against evil? What service rendered the needy? What comfort brought the sick? What help to discouraged souls? (*The Homiletic Review.*) *How old art thou?* The wise reckoning of time will be of essential use to us—it may save us from overwhelming and eternal disaster. I. How OLD ART THOU, O CHRISTIAN, computed by God's standard? 1. Old enough to be brought under infinite obligations to God's redeeming, converting, and preserving grace. 2. Old enough to have made great attainments in the Divine life. 3. Old enough to have learned the ways of a deceitful heart, and the power of the adversary of God and man. 4. Old enough to have caught the heavenly spirit of the Master, and from the land of Beulah to get now and then a ravishing view of the unutterable glory beyond. II. How OLD ART THOU, O IMPENITENT SINNER? 1. Old enough to have run up a fearful account against thy soul in "the book of God's remembrance." 2. Old enough to make the work of future repentance extremely bitter and difficult. 3. Old enough to make it well-nigh certain, if you still persist in impenitent sin, that you will never retrace your guilty steps and take hold on life. (*J. M. Sherwood, D.D.*) *What is your age?*—We do not care to know how old you are by the almanac. You may keep this secret, as some are wont to do. But we would like to know to-day what is your age, by some standard, other than that of time. I. ARE YOU MEASURING LIFE BY WEALTH? Longevity is not promised to the rich as such, nor to the poor; but those who observe the law of God, which is life to them that keep it (Prov. iv. 22; Deut. xxxii. 47). II. ARE YOU MEASURING LIFE BY REPUTATION? Let it be a name for being and doing good, and do not run after even this, but let it follow you, as it certainly will if you keep such an aim before you, though you may, modestly, not consent to it. Two immortalities are possible to you and me—one in this, and another in the other world. III. ARE YOU MEASURING LIFE BY ITS LENGTH? The sum of one's years who has spent none of them for the service of God is equal to zero. His life is a blank. IV. THE WISEST, SAFEST, TRUEST ESTIMATE OF LIFE. 1. Reflection. The thoughts he expresses are a good index of one's age. 2. Moderation. It is folly to rush through life at break-neck speed. He who goes softly, goes safely; and he who goes safely, goes far. 3. Religion (Prov. iv. 7). (*W. H. Luckenbach.*) *Pharaoh's question to Jacob:*—I. Let us consider THE QUESTION PUT BY PHARAOH TO JACOB—"How old art thou?" The propriety of looking back to and of considering the past period of our existence is pointed out in Scripture. Of my younger hearers I might ask, "How old art thou?" They could probably give an accurate reply to the question—"I am seven, eight, ten, or fifteen years old." Well, then, let me ask, what of that? or rather how much does it imply? What sins and neglect does it not remind you of? What duties does it not suggest? Or, I might speak to persons in middle life, or who are verging on its confines. You may have found prosperity, or at least some measure of comfort and respectability attendant on steadiness, sobriety and industry. Your temporal affairs may have been on the whole prosperous; your children may, like olive-branches, have grown up around you. Then, assuredly there is reason for thankfulness, and ground for acknowledging the goodness and long-suffering of a Father in heaven. There is yet a third and less numerous class, to whom the question in the text ought to be impressive—"How old art thou?" You have witnessed changes in society, almost revolutions of opinion. Many with whom you were once intimate have been removed; the haunts of youth are peopled almost entirely by strangers. All things admonish thee to prepare for meeting God; to set thy house in order; to improve the time that remains. II. Let us now turn to JACOB'S REPLY, in answer to Pharaoh's question. 1. As to its length, life may be spoken of as made up of comparatively few days. Looking forward, half, or even a quarter of a century, may seem a protracted time; looking back, it appears greatly diminished. 2. Jacob's address to Pharaoh embodied the statement that man's days upon earth may be considered as not only "few," but also as "evil." Nothing, indeed, which God has given to man ought to be viewed as in itself and as essentially evil. Present comfort, length of days, intercourse with society, diligence in business, temperate enjoyment, are all good, all lawful; but sin has interposed. The spiritual eyesight is clouded, and the spiritual energy has become benumbed. Man himself may be truly spoken of as man's worst foe. (*A. R. Bonar, D.D.*) *The pilgrim and the king:*—History presents to us few more striking contrasts than the Hebrew

pilgrim and the Egyptian king. "The things seen and temporal, and the things not seen and eternal," have seldom stood more fairly in front of each other than there. The old shepherd who had no possession on earth but a Divine promise—the king who wielded the sceptre of the most splendid monarchy in the world. But there was something in that old pilgrim which made him a meet companion for kings—a king, too, of an elder and mightier line. From the first dawn of civilization there were men moving about the pathways of that eastern world, playing indeed a chief part on its theatre, who had absolutely no right or power but that which their sense of a Divine vocation conferred upon them; and no means of influence, but such as the recognition of their spiritual calling by the princes among whom they lived, bestowed. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, were emphatically God's prophets. They had nothing if they had not that seal. The whole secret of their power was the belief that the God of Heaven was with them; that they were the friends and living organs of that supreme and only Lord. These lofty and earnest shepherds seemed to step down from a superior sphere; and some of its lustre streamed round them as they moved on God's errands around the already darkening pathways of the world. Jacob stood before the Egyptian monarch as the embodiment of that which had faded into a dim tradition in Egypt; it belonged to the glorious golden age of which all peoples had memories, out of which they were beginning to weave for themselves dreams of a paradise restored. The chief prince of the world felt humbled before this lonely, lofty pilgrim; as the representative of a mightier than Pharaoh was troubled by the calm glances of a poorer, sadder, more godlike pilgrim, who stood for judgment helpless before his bar. Spiritual power is the supreme power, and none know it like monarchs of genius. "Don't talk to me against the divinity of Christ," said Napoleon; "I know what man can do, and He was more than man who has done all this." The men who, like Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Napoleon, stand on the very pinnacle of earthly greatness, are the men who are most perplexed and awe-struck by the sense that there is a power above them which sweeps through their armies as magnetism sweeps through mountains, and has an armoury of words more mighty infinitely than their spears and swords. Something of this spiritual grandeur invested this aged and weary pilgrim, and drew the likeness of a crown around his brow as he stood before the Egyptian king. Aged he was, and bowed, and sad, and weary. He halted, too, as one who had been sore wounded in the battle of life. There were furrows seamed on his brow, and channels worn in his cheeks, which were eloquent of tears and cares. The expression of high intellectual power on his brow must have been dimmed somewhat by the traces of that suffering which made him the "man of sorrows" of his time. There was a promise in his face which his life of schemes and snares, fears and flights, had half broken; and yet there was a look of faith and a glow of hope which seemed to carry on the promise, and to lay it up with God to preserve and to complete. A strange, bewildering man. So sad, so broken; so grand, so powerful. A prince having power with man and with God, and bearing it in his gesture; a man who had prevailed, sore buffeted, in the battle in which Pharaoh and all his people had gone down into the dust. And he stood there before the world's chief potentate, who knew no superior will upon earth to his own. There was a nobleness of a kind about Pharaoh also. The man who on such a throne had an eye for the dignity of such a pilgrim was no vulgar king. He was a man of far-reaching plans and high achievements; and as he sat there smooth, sleek, royally garbed and tended, at the height of human power and splendour, and gazed on the sad old man before him, a sense of something in the universe to which his mortal might was but as a marsh-fire to a star, stole over him, and he bowed beneath the blessing of a superior hand. And what now of the pilgrim, and what of the king? Where is the state and the splendour of the Pharaohs? Their cities are buried beneath the sands of the desert; the dust of time has settled on their names. Their temples, their palaces, their treasures, are ruins; their wrecks have mingled with the sands of the Lybian waste. Their tombs alone endure, sad sentinels of the desert; sole witnesses that men of such state and splendour once lived in Egypt, and covered its soil with the monuments of their power and pride. And the pilgrim? His name after four thousand years shines more brightly than ever on the roll of earth's most mighty and illustrious spirits. Ages have but confirmed the title which he won in that long and stern night-wrestle with the angel. His little company who dwelt round him in his tents grew rapidly into a nation, which has exercised in all ages a transcendent influence on the progress of the world. And to this day the noblest and most cultivated in Christendom pore

earnestly over his history, and find in the way in which he won his principedom fresh inspirations of courage and of hope. (*J. B. Brown, B.A.*) *The measurement of years*:—There is a right way and a wrong way of measuring a door, or a wall, or an arch, or a tower; and so there is a right way and a wrong way of measuring our earthly existence. It is with reference to this higher meaning that I confront you, this morning, with the stupendous question of the text, and ask: "How old art thou?" I. There are many who measure their life by mere worldly gratification. When Lord Dundas was wished a happy new year, he said: "It will have to be a happier year than the past, for I hadn't one happy moment in all the twelve months that have gone." But that has not been the experience of most of us. We have found that though the world is blighted with sin, it is a very bright and beautiful place to reside in. We have had joys innumerable. There is no hostility between the Gospel and the merriments and the festivities of life. If there is any one who has a right to the enjoyments of the world, it is the Christian, for God has given him a lease to everything in the promise: "All are yours." But I have to tell you that a man who measures his life on earth by mere worldly gratification is a most unwise man. Our life is not to be a game of chess. It is not a dance in lighted hall, to quick music. It is not the froth of an ale pitcher. It is not the settlements of a wine cup. It is not a banquet with intoxication and roistering. It is the first step on a ladder that mounts into the skies, or the first step on a road that plunges in a horrible abyss. So that in this world we are only keying up the harp of eternal rapture, or forging the chain of an eternal bondage. II. Again: I remark that there are many who measure their life on earth by their sorrows and their misfortunes. Through a great many of your lives the ploughshare hath gone very deep, turning up a terrible furrow. The brightest life must have its shadows, and the smoothest path its thorns. On the happiest brood the hawk pounces. No escape from trouble of some kind. Misfortune, trial, vexation, for almost every one. Pope, applauded of all the world, has a stoop in the shoulder that annoys him so much that he has a tunnel dug, so that he may go unobserved from garden to grotto, and from grotto to garden. Canno, the famous Spanish artist, is disgusted with the crucifix that the priest holds before him, because it is such a poor specimen of sculpture. And yet it is unfair to measure a man's life by his misfortunes, because where there is one stalk of nightshade, there are fifty marigolds and harebells; where there is one cloud thunder-charged, there are hundreds that stray across the heavens, the glory of land and sky asleep in their bosom. III. Again: I remark that there are many people who measure their life on earth by the amount of money they have accumulated. They say: "The year 1847, 1857, 1867, was wasted." Why? Made no money. Now, it is all cant and insincerity to talk against money as though it had no value. It is refinement, and education, and ten thousand blessed surroundings. It is the spreading of the table that feeds your children's hunger. It is the lighting of the furnace that keeps you warm. Bonds, and mortgages, and leases have their use, but they make a poor yardstick with which to measure life. IV. But I remark: there are many who measure their life by their moral and spiritual development. It is not sinful egotism for a Christian man to say: "I am purer than I used to be. I am more consecrated to Christ than I used to be. I have got over a great many of the bad habits in which I used to indulge. I am a great deal better man than I used to be." It is not base egotism for a soldier to say: "I know more about military tactics than I used to before I took a musket in my hand, and learned to 'present arms,' and when I was a pest to the drill-officer." It is not base egotism for a sailor to say: "I know how better to 'pull' the windlass and clue down the mizzen topsail than I used to before I had ever seen a ship." And there is no sinful egotism when a Christian man, fighting the battles of the Lord, or, if you will have it, voyaging towards a haven of eternal rest, says: "I know more about spiritual tactics, and about voyaging towards heaven, than I used to." V. I remark again: there are many who are measuring life by the amount of good they can do. John Bradford said he counted that day nothing at all in which he had not, by pen or tongue, done some good. Contrast the death scene of a man who has measured life by the worldly standard with the death scene of a man who has measured life by the Christian standard. Quin, the actor, in his last moments said: "I hope this tragic scene will soon be over, and I hope to keep my dignity to the last." Malherbe said, in his last moments, to the confessor: "Hold your tongue! your miserable style puts me out of conceit of heaven." Lord Chesterfield, in his last moments, when he ought to have been praying for his soul, bothered

himself about the proprieties of the sick-room, and said: "Give Dayboles a chair." Godfrey Kneller spent his last hours on earth in drawing a diagram of his own monument. Compare the silly and horrible departure of such men with the seraphic glow on the face of Edward Payson, as he said in his last moment: "The breezes of heaven fan me. I float in a sea of glory." This is a good day in which to begin a new style of measurement. How old art thou? You see the Christian way of measuring life and the worldly way of measuring it. I leave it to you to say which is the wisest and best way. (*Dr. Talmage.*) *How old art thou?*—I. *How LONG HAVE YOU BEEN CONVERSANT WITH LIFE'S SUFFERINGS?* Take even the life of a believer. A devout pastor, closing tranquilly a prosperous career, intermingled with words of faith and hope the significant declaration, "It is a fight to be born, a fight to live, and a fight to die." And what do such facts teach us? They forbid idolatry of pleasures so disappointing and so piercing. They direct us for happiness to God and glory. They commend to our aspiration a better country, which is a heavenly—a country where possessions are unimperilled, bliss embittered, and sorrows are forgotten as the stream of brooks that pass away. II. *How LONG HAVE YOU BEEN CONVERSANT WITH SIN?* Who can look back on his past course and not be ashamed in the retrospect? What shortcomings—excesses—follies! What time lost! What privileges perverted! What cleavings to the dust! It is well to mourn over our trespasses. If this sorrow be sincere, it will be salutary. III. *How LONG HAVE YOU BEEN CONVERSANT WITH LIFE'S MERCIES?* God was merciful to Jacob; and what have been His mercies to you? They have not been few nor small. He has clothed you, fed you, sheltered you. When you have been sick, He has healed you; when you have been imperilled, He has rescued you. In the review of your past life every stage of it demands the acknowledgment, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped me." IV. I trust that many of you have not only been born, BUT BORN AGAIN—"born not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, by the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever." In that case we have to ask concerning a new life—a divine life, "How old art thou?" *How LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN CHRIST?* Since when have you turned from idols—idolized sins and pleasures—to serve the living and the true God? But whether or not you have this mercy in possession, know assuredly that you have it in offer. (*D. King, LL.D.*) *Two ways of measuring life:*—There was a very old man—eighty-three years of age—and somebody said to the old man, "How old are you?" He said, "I am three years old." "Three years old?" was the reply. "Why, you are eighty-three!" "No," he said. "My body is eighty-three years old, but my soul is only three years old. My old life is eighty years old, but my new life is three years old. I did not begin to live till three years ago. So my soul is only three years old." A person was asked, "Where were you born—in Brighton?" The man said, "I was born in London, and I was born in Liverpool!" "How can you be born in two places?" was the reply. "If you were born in London, you could not be born in Liverpool." "I was," said the man; "and I will let you see how that was. My body was born in London, but my soul was born in Liverpool. It was not till I lived in Liverpool that I cared about my soul!" (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*) *Good deeds healthy:*—Ancient Grecian and Roman ladies used to reckon their age from the date of their marriage. Many wise persons have reckoned their years from the time that they really began to live as they ought. Mere existence can hardly be said to be living.

"We live in deeds, not years—in thoughts, not breaths,
In feelings, not in figures on a dial:
We should count time by heart-throbs: he lives most
Who feels most, thinks the noblest, acts the best."

A good man was once told he might live six years if he gave up working, but he would die in two or three years if he continued to work. He replied he had much rather spend the shorter time on earth in trying to do good. But hard work seldom shortens life. John Wesley was an indefatigable worker, and when he was seventy-three years old he said he was better and stronger than he was at twenty-three years of age; and he attributed this, under God, to his early rising, his activity, his undisturbed sleep, and his even temper. Said he, "I feel and grieve, but I fret at nothing." Some, however, who do not observe and obey the laws of health, are cut off in the midst of their days. Young people should feel, "It is time to seek the Lord," for religion alone prepares for a really happy and profitable existence; then it ever becomes more and more difficult to turn to God and to live

aright the longer these duties are neglected; moreover, no one should give to the world and to Satan the best of their days and energies, and then hope to give to God and to their spiritual and eternal duties and interests, the paltry and miserable residue of their existence. When Cato was old, he said his greatest pleasure arose from the remembrance of the good deeds he had done (see also, Prov. xvi. 31; Lev. xix. 32). *Knowing the time of life*:—When Mr. Moggridge (universally known as Old Humphrey) was a lad, his father taught him how to know what o'clock it was. When the boy could tell the time, his father said, "I have taught you to know the time of the day; I must now teach you how to find out the time of your life. The Bible describes the years of man to be threescore and ten or fourscore years. Now, life is very uncertain, and you may not live a single day longer; but if we divide the fourscore years of an old man's life into twelve parts, like the dial of the clock, it will allow almost seven years for every figure. When a boy is seven years old, then it is one o'clock in his life; and this is the case with you: when you arrive at fourteen years, it will be two o'clock with you; and when at twenty-one, it will be three o'clock, should it please God thus to spare your life. In this manner you may always know the time of your life, and looking at the clock may perhaps remind you of it. My great grandfather, according to this calculation, died at twelve o'clock; my grandfather at eleven, and my father at ten. At what hour you and I shall die, Humphrey, is only known to Him to whom all things are known." *How old art thou?*—A venerable lady was once asked her age. "Ninety-three," was the reply. "The Judge of all the earth does not mean that I shall have any excuse for not being prepared to meet Him."

Ver. 9. And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.—*A pensive retrospect*:—I. LIFE HAS BEEN TO HIM A PILGRIMAGE. He thinks of all his wanderings from that far-off day when at Bethel he received the promise of God's presence "in all places whither thou goest," till this last happy and yet disturbing change. But he is thinking not only, perhaps not chiefly, of the circumstances, but of the spirit, of his life. This is, no doubt, the confession "that they were strangers and pilgrims" referred to in the Epistle to the Hebrews. He was a pilgrim, not because he had often changed his place of abode, but because he sought the city which had foundations, and therefore, could not be at home here. The goal of his life lay in the far future; and whether he looked for the promises to be fulfilled on earth, or had the unformulated consciousness of immortality, and saluted the dimly descried coast from afar while tossing on life's restless ocean, he was effectually detached from the present, and felt himself an alien in the existing order. We have to live by the same hope, and to let it work the same estrangement, if we would live noble lives. Not because all life is change, nor because it all marches steadily on to the grave, but because our true home—the community to which we really belong, the metropolis, the mother city of our souls—is above, are we to feel ourselves strangers upon earth. They who only take into account the transiency of life are made sad, or sometimes desperate, by the unwelcome thought. But they whose pilgrimage is a journey home may look that transiency full in the face, and be as glad because of it as colonists on their voyage to the old country which they call "home," though they were born on the other side of the world and have never seen its green fields. II. TO JACOB'S EYES HIS DAYS SEEM FEW. Abraham's one hundred and seventy-five years, Isaac's one hundred and eighty, were in his mind. But more than these was in his mind. The law of the moral perspective is other than that of the physical. The days in front, seen through the glass of anticipation, are drawn out; the days behind, viewed through the telescope of memory, are crowded together. What a moment looked all the long years of his struggling life—shorter now than even had once seemed the seven years of service for his Rachel, that love had made to fly past on such swift wings! That happy wedded life, how short it looked! A bright light for a moment, and

"Ere a man could say 'Behold!'

The jaws of darkness did devour it up."

It is well to lay the coolness of this thought on our fevered hearts, and, whether they be torn by sorrows or gladdened with bliss, to remember "this also will pass" and the longest stretch of dreary days be seen in retrospect, in their due relation to

eternity, as but a moment. That will not paralyze effort nor abate sweetness, but it will teach preparation, and deliver from the illusions of this solid-seeming shadow which we call life. III. THE PENSIVE RETROSPECT DARKENS, AS THE OLD MAN'S MEMORY DWELLS UPON THE PAST. His days have not only been few—that could be borne—but they have been “evil,” by which I understand not unfortunate so much as faulty. We have seen in former lessons the slow process by which the crafty Jacob had his sins purged out of him, and became “God’s wrestler.” Here we learn that old wrong-doing, even when forgiven—or, rather, when and because forgiven—leaves regretful memories life-long. The early treachery had been long ago repented of and pardoned by God and man. The nature which hatched it had been renewed. But here it starts up again, a ghost from the grave, and the memory of it is full of bitterness. No lapse of time deprives a sin of its power to sting. As in the old story of the man who was killed by a rattlesnake’s poison fang imbedded in a boot which had lain forgotten for years, we may be wounded by suddenly coming against it long after it is forgiven by God and almost forgotten by ourselves. Many a good man, although he knows that Christ’s blood has washed away his guilt, is made to possess the iniquities of his youth. “Thou shalt be ashamed and confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done.” IV. BUT THIS SHADED RETROSPECT IS ONE-SIDED. It is true, and in some moods seems all the truth; but Jacob saw more distinctly, and his name was rightly Israel, when, laying his trembling hands on the heads of Joseph’s sons, he laid there the blessing of “the God which fed me all my life long, . . . the Angel which redeemed me from all evil.” That was his last thought about his life as it began to be seen in the breaking light of eternal day. Pensive and penitent memory may call the years few and evil, but grateful faith even here, and still more the cleared vision of heaven, will discern more truly that they have been a long miracle of loving care, and that all their seeming evil has been transmuted into good. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The nothingness of life* :—The patriarch called his days few and evil, not because his life was shorter than his father’s, but because it was nearly over. When life is past, it is all one whether it has lasted two hundred years or fifty. And it is the fact that life is mortal which makes it under all circumstances equally feeble and despicable. I. THIS SENSE OF THE NOTHINGNESS OF LIFE IS MUCH DEEPENED WHEN WE CONTRAST IT WITH THE CAPABILITIES OF US WHO LIVE IT. Our earthly life gives promise of what it does not accomplish. It promises immortality, yet it is mortal; it contains life in death and eternity in time, and it attracts us by beginnings which faith alone brings to an end. II. Such being the unprofitableness of this life viewed in itself, IT IS PLAIN HOW WE SHOULD REGARD IT WHILE WE GO THROUGH IT. We should remember that it is scarcely more than an accident of our being—that it is no part of ourselves, who are immortal. The regenerate soul is taken into communion with saints and angels, and its “life is hid with Christ in God.” It looks at this world as a spectator might look at some show or pageant, except when called upon from time to time to take a part. (*J. H. Newman, D.D.*) *Jacob’s retrospect* :—Jacob looked back on his life and saw but three things—God, love, grief. These were all he had to speak of. They were a trinity of the past; they dwarfed everything else. I. “God appeared unto me at Luz.” This one first and great appearance of God was memorable in all his life, because it was the first. It stamped itself upon his life; even in old age the memory of it was not obscured, effaced, or weakened, but was with him in the valley of the shadow of death. II. Less august, but even more affecting, was the second of his three experiences—LOVE. Of all whom he had known, only two names remained to him in the twilight between this life and the other—God and Rachel. The simple mention of Rachel’s name by the side of that of God is itself a monument to her. III. The third of these experiences was that RACHEL WAS BURED. When Rachel died, the whole world had but one man in it, and he was solitary, and his name was Jacob. Application : 1. See how perfectly we are in unity with the life of this, one of the earliest men. How perfectly we understand him! How the simplest experiences touch us to the quick! 2. The filling up of life, however important in its day, is in retrospect very insignificant. 3. The significance of events is not to be judged by their outward productive force, but by their productiveness in the inward life. 4. In looking back through the events of life, though they are innumerable, yet those that remain at last are very few—not because all the others have perished, but because they group themselves and assume moral unity in the distance. (*H. W.*

Beecher.) *The retrospect*.—1. The character given of human life. He considers this life as a pilgrimage. 2. The estimate of its worth. He counted the days of the years of his life to be few and evil. 3. The consequent necessity of a provision for its ultimate result. I. We are to consider this life under the figure which the text sets before us. It is a pilgrimage. Let us dwell for a short time on the practical view of life which is taken by the true believer. 1. He does not regard this world as his home. There are many who live in it as if they were permanently fixed in it. But the Christian pilgrim is conscious that he has a home to which he is travelling. "There remaineth a rest for the people of God." II. We notice the estimate which true wisdom gives us of the real worth of this life, regarded in itself. "Few and evil," said the patriarch, "have the days of the years of my life been." Life is short. And oh! how short!—how limited! "The days of our years are threescore years and ten"; sometimes with difficulty they reach to fourscore years. But how few of our race reach even the nearer limit! But the wise estimate of human life is not only that it is short in its duration, but that it is evil in its nature. It is evil, as it is the scene of continual trial and affliction, as it is chequered by calamities of various kinds, which bow down the spirit, and gradually render the end of life desirable. But we observe, again, that life is full of evil, because it is full of sin. Jacob knew his own heart well, and the contemplation of his own history could afford him no self-satisfaction. Let the votary of this world make a fair estimate of his days. "They are few and evil." Can you make better of them? The cutting conviction of your heart, when you look within, is that they are so. You have no means of lengthening their duration. You cannot dismiss their oppressive sorrows. III. We notice, then, the absolute need of a provision for the ultimate result of life. In conclusion, the subject suggests to us a few practical remarks. 1. It becomes all those who make a Christian profession diligently to examine their own ground of hope for a better world. 2. Again, we are called upon by our professed principles to take care that we are not bound down by an improper attachment to the perishing goods of this world. 3. We are called upon by our principles, as pilgrims towards another and a better world, to do our utmost as faithful stewards of the gifts of God in alleviating the sufferings and the sorrows of our fellow-creatures. 4. There is a duty incumbent on us also to use every fair opportunity of inculcating on our fellow-men the consideration of the true character of this life and its speedy termination. (*E. Craig.*) *The greatness and the littleness of human life*.—I. CONTRAST THIS POOR VANISHING LIFE OF OURS WITH THE GREAT CAPABILITIES OF OUR SOULS. II. CONSIDER SOME FACTS OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE. 1. Consider the case of a man who dies full of days. 2. Consider the case of a man who dies before his time. 3. Consider the case of the death-beds of some of the saints. III. OUR DUTY IN THE PRESENCE OF THESE FACTS. 1. Seek eternal life. 2. Look forward to the compensations of another world. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Jacob before Pharaoh*.—I. LIFE AS A DISCIPLINE. 1. The changes of life often bring us nearer to the changeless God. 2. Bereavements teach us to set our affections on things above. 3. The heavy trials of life often remind of past sin and cause despondency, and yet reveal the wisdom and love of God. II. LIFE AS A PILGRIMAGE. 1. Life is long in anticipation, but short in retrospect. 2. Life is bright in anticipation, and sad in retrospect. 3. Life as a pilgrimage is an incentive to effort (Heb. xi. 13-16; 1 Pet. ii. 11-25). 4. Life as a pilgrimage is an encouragement to endurance. Conclusion: 1. What cause we have for gratitude, trust, hope! 2. To what are you looking forward? 3. What effect has your hope upon your life (1 John iii. 3)? 4. Who is your guide? Self, Satan, or God? (*A. F. Joscelyne, B.A.*) *Human life in retrospect*.—I. HUMAN LIFE IN RETROSPECT IS SADDENING. 1. Unsettled. 2. Brief. The shorter perhaps the better. 3. Evil. Because—(1) Never to be recalled. (2) Memory of moral imperfections more or less distressing. II. IT STANDS IN CONTRAST WITH IT IN PROSPECT. Hope makes life to the young a settled, lengthened, and joyous thing. III. IT SUGGESTS THE IDEA OF A BETTER EXISTENCE. Underlying this wail of the old patriarch, there was an impression of a life settled, long, and blessed. This impression was the standard by which he measured the ever-changing, brief, and unblest past. Truly, a belief in a future life is almost necessary to reconcile us to the present. (*Homilist.*) *Man's life on earth a pilgrimage*.—I. THAT THE LIFE OF MAN UPON EARTH IS A PILGRIMAGE. II. THAT MAN'S DAYS IN THIS PILGRIMAGE STATE ARE FEW AND EVIL. III. THE CAUSE OF THIS; AND WHETHER, AND HOW FAR, THE EVIL ADMITS OF A CURE. Inferences: 1. Is this a pilgrimage state? Then why should we be so much attached to or

affected with anything here—a country where we are pilgrims? 2. Are our days few? Then let us make haste, for we have a great work to do. 3. Are they evil? Then why are we in love with them? Why unwilling to go where days are evil no more? 4. Has God provided a cure? Then let us take care we do not reject it. (*J. Benson.*) *Life*:—I. *LIFE IN ITS GENERAL CHARACTER.* 1. It is evil. This may be understood as including two things—sin and affliction. Sin is evil and only evil, and that continually. This is man's true misery, and the only way to save man from misery is to save him from sin. Affliction is not misery; it may not have the sting of moral guilt in it, and therefore, although in itself an evil, by God's merciful guidance it may become the means of great good to us. 2. This leads us to remark that another feature in man's natural life is that it is met by the great redemption of Christ Jesus the Lord. The man who uttered the words of my text spoke also of the Divine Messenger who redeemed him from all evil. 3. Life may become a pilgrimage to heaven. You may travel through the wilderness to Canaan; you may now set out for a city which hath foundations, whose Maker and Builder is God. Will you? II. *LIFE AS TO THE PERIOD OF TIME IN WHICH IT FALLS.* 1. What a contrast between the time when the patriarch lived and our own! 2. And what is its state? 3. It is a time of great discovery and rapid and well-nigh universal communication. 4. The missionary work of the Church has only been preparatory; soon it will break forth in its proper strength. 5. The Church is being tried as silver is tried; every man's work is being tried of what sort it is. 6. There is a yearning in the Church of God for union; this we hail with delight! III. *LIFE IN ITS INDIVIDUALITY.* "My life." 1. Consider your life as a gift from God with its consequent responsibilities. 2. Your life as the time of your salvation. 3. But, again, let me remind you that your life is the opportunity for Christian activity. IV. *AND, LASTLY, LIFE AS TO ITS BREVITY, AND THE DIVISION OF ITS DURATION.* 1. Its shortness. It is not only a vanity, but a short-lived vanity. 2. But think for a moment of its swiftness. Have you ever seen a shadow run along the ground, darkening the places beautified by the beams of the sun, but quickly disappearing? Such is man's life; "for he fleeth as it were a shadow, and continueth not." A weaver's shuttle is very swift in its motion; in a moment it is thrown from one side of the web to the other; yet our days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle. "My days are swifter than a post," says one; "they flee away as the eagle that hasteth to the prey"; the eagle flying, not with his ordinary flight, for that is not sufficient to represent the swiftness of our days, but as when he flies upon his prey, which is with an extraordinary swiftness. (*T. E. Thoresby.*) *Life: its duration, shortness, and uncertainty*:—I. The general life of man was in ancient times, that is, in the first ages of the world, MUCH LONGER THAN AT PRESENT. As old as Methuselah has passed into a proverb. He lived 969 years. Adam lived 930 years. Noah lived longer than Adam by 20 years. He died at the age of 950. Lamech lived 777 years. But, after the flood, we scarcely read of one who lived up to even 200. And it is thought by some that, when God brought about the flood, He at the same time, by a Divine decree, shortened man's life. The three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, little surpassed this age; and we know that many of those connected with them sank into their graves at a very much earlier age. II. *THE LIFE OF MAN NOW IS NOT ONLY SHORT, BUT UNCERTAIN.* The death that happens, happens frequently in a place when we least expect it. Those who we think are going to die many times earlier, and those who we think have years of life before them drop unexpectedly into the grave. III. *THE LIFE OF MAN IS CHECKERED WITH EVIL.* "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been." All people have their troubles. To use the expressive language of Scripture, "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." As Christians we are expressly warned to be prepared for trouble. "In the world," says our Lord to His then immediate disciples, and doubtless He meant the same truth to be conveyed to us, "in the world," says He, "ye shall have tribulation." And, again, intimating the same truth, He says, "Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." But I need not accumulate texts on a truth so evident, and so fully verified by experience. Who is there without trouble? Who has not heavy cares on his mind? Who can, with joyous mind, say that his fond expectations have not been disappointed? (*W. Lupton, M.A.*) *The shortness of life*:—I. IT IS SHORT IN COMPARISON WITH THE LIVES OF THE EARLY MEMBERS OF THE HUMAN FAMILY. II. *HUMAN LIFE IS SHORT IN COMPARISON WITH OUR EXPECTATIONS OF ITS CONTINUANCE.* III. *HUMAN LIFE IS SHORT IN COMPARISON WITH ETERNITY.* IV. *HUMAN LIFE IS*

SHORT IN COMPARISON WITH THE WEIGHTY INTERESTS WHICH ARE AFFECTED AND UNALTERABLY SETTLED BY IT. V. HUMAN LIFE IS NOT ONLY SHORT, BUT ALTOGETHER UNSATISFACTORY. 1. The shortness of life is a consoling reflection to the Christian. 2. The shortness of life should admonish those who are impenitent immediately to enter on the work of their salvation. (*I. Foot, D.D.*) *Two views of life:—*

I. THERE IS A SENSE IN WHICH LIFE MAY BE REGARDED AS EVIL. 1. It appears so when we consider the disparity between the good it affords and the good we desire. "The earth hath He given to the children of men," and it is a goodly inheritance. Its sights and sounds are dear to our hearts; we love it as our first home—the only home we have hitherto known. But, like Jacob and his fathers when they sojourned in the promised land, we seek a better country; this world, with all its beauty, glory, and grandeur, does not satisfy our hearts. Our spiritual instincts make it impossible for us to find here perfect rest; they point us to the future, and are a prophecy of the world that shall be revealed. 2. Life may appear evil when we compare what it is with what in many cases it might be. Men spoil their own lives, and then complain that life is evil; they mar and rend the picture, and murmur because its beauty has disappeared; they run the ship upon the rocks, and weep to find her a wreck; they crush the flower with a rude hand, and are disappointed because it withers. II. But the words of Jacob do not exhaust the subject; IN THE HIGHEST, TRUEST SENSE LIFE IS GOOD AND NOT EVIL. 1. It is the gift of God. He thought it right, and wise, and kind that we should be. Our existence appeared to Him a good and desirable thing; and what is good in His sight is and must be so in reality, for He sees things as they are, and not as they seem. 2. Our life is under His control. Let us then trust His perfect love. Seeing that He is with us in the ship, we will not fear the voyage, stormy though it be. 3. Our present life is connected with an endless future. (*T. Jones.*) *The days of our pilgrimage:—*Pilgrimage is the broad condition of every life-course that passes upward, as well as onward, and has its bourne in God. Pharaoh speaks of years of life, Jacob of pilgrimage. Pharaoh measured existence by days of power and pleasure, by banquets, triumphs, and festivals of the gods. Jacob by the stages where, after stern battle, he had left a lust, a vice, a weakness buried; by the waning of the stars which lit his night of sorrow, and the rosy flush in the east which was already brightening, breaking into the morning of his everlasting day. It is a very wonderful fact that God's elect, His friends, in the early dawn of history, were men who lived upon promises, and who possessed absolutely not one clod of the land which God called their own, except the cave where they buried their dead. Very splendid, very wealthy, was their inheritance (Gen. xiii. 14–17). But the cave which they bought of Ephron (Gen. xxiii.) was their only possession in the land which yet was all their own. Pilgrimage of the hardest, sternest character was their portion; and the wonder is that they never made a moan over it, and never reproach the justice and fidelity of the Lord. Bravely they accepted their lot as pilgrims; and they blessed the angel who had guided their pilgrimage when their heads were bowed in death. What had they then which was a richer possession than those graves? Well, they had the land; all its beauty and splendour, morning pomp and golden evening mists, moonlight that silvered its ridges, shadows that slept in its hollows, stars that watched its folds through the dewy night, and the myriad gems that glittered a laughing welcome to the rising day. They had that; it was all their own. They lived with Nature as God's children alone can live with her, and were filled with her blessing. Yes! they had the land, as we may all have the land, as no lustful heathen could have the land; and with hearts bursting with joy and thankfulness they praised His name, whose bounty and tenderness had laid all this wealth of beauty and splendour at their feet. Yes! they had the land, and they held it by the tenure of praise. And the things which were seen were prophets to them of the things which were not seen. Through the vestibule they looked into the temple; they had vision of fairer homes, of brighter suns, in the world to which they had the mysterious entrance; where, too, they had seen the white-winged troops of angels gleaming in the celestial sunlight, and whence they had heard the voice of the Invisible King. The pilgrims held in fee two worlds. They had the promise of the life that now is (compare Lot and Abraham), and of the life that is to come. And bravely Jacob bears witness before Pharaoh of his pilgrim life and lot. To Pharaoh earth was the home; men were pilgrims in the shades. Here the sunlight, the sun warmth, the joy of a home; there, behind the veil, the king could see only a rout of shivering, shuddering ghosts. Jacob had his pilgrimage here; his home, his

kingdom, in eternity. Some sense of this perhaps flashed on the king as he gazed. It was a strange puzzle to him. Nebuchadnezzar, Herod, Pilate, Felix, were all perplexed by it in their times. These pilgrims, landless, penniless, powerless, were after all heaven's priests and kings. But there is something special in the experience which this pilgrim confesses before the king. "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been." A sad and weary old man. Would faithful Abraham or pious Isaac have borne this testimony? The life of the one was nobler, purer, grander, than Jacob's; the life of the other more simple and serene. The old age of either would have been fairer and brighter to look upon. Jacob's experience, on the other hand, has much to do with the habit of his nature and the sins and follies of his life. It is one of the most profoundly interesting biographies in history; because of the breadth of human experience it covers, the heights and the depths through which this princely pilgrim passed. He had a keen and subtle intellect, easily tempted to display itself in cunning, but with a lordly power in its compass when set on its noblest use. While he had a craving, grasping appetite for riches, and intense power of acquisition, joined with a grand faculty of spiritual insight and constant vision of the realities of the unseen world. A power at once to grope and to soar; now the huckster, now the seer. Two powerful natures struggling within for the mastery; the spirit wresting the victory from the flesh through bitter anguish and wasting pain. This false brother, this crafty steward, this scheming chief, this foolish father, had terrible lessons to learn at the hand of the Angel who was redeeming him from all evil; and it is the glory of the man that he had patience, courage, and faith to learn them, and to bless the Angel who had redeemed him as he bowed on his bed's head in death. He was such a pilgrim as most of us may be, with the double nature strongly developed. He might have made a successful venture of this life, as men count success, if God would have let him. But God endowed him with a nature which marred his prosperity, which would be aiming at unseen blessings, far-off fruits of birthright, and everlasting results. It is the battle of the two natures, both so strong and in such high development, which makes the striking interest of the patriarch's history. Few and evil were his days compared with his fathers, for his heart was rent by contending passions, his home was torn by hostile factions. The patriarch had won his freedom when he stood before Pharaoh; but the marks of the struggle, the dim eye, the furrowed brow, the sad lip, were on him. (*J. B. Brown, B.A.*)

Disappointment in life :—A recent writer, who spent some years on the banks of the Nile and on its waters, and who mixed freely with the inhabitants of Egypt, says: "Old Jacob's speech to Pharaoh really made me laugh, because it is so exactly like what a Fellah says to a Pacha, 'Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been,' Jacob being a most prosperous man, but it is manners to say all that." But Eastern manners need scarcely be called in to explain a sentiment which we find repeated by one who is generally esteemed the most self-sufficing of Europeans. "I have ever been esteemed," Goethe says, "one of Fortune's chiefest favourites; nor will I complain or find fault with the course my life has taken. Yet, truly, there has been nothing but toil and care; and I may say that, in all my seventy-five years, I have never had a month of genuine comfort. It has been the perpetual rolling of a stone, which I have always had to raise anew." Jacob's life had been almost ceaseless disquiet and disappointment. A man who had fled his country, who had been cheated into a marriage, who had been compelled by his own relative to live like a slave, who was only by flight able to save himself from a perpetual injustice, whose sons made his life bitter—one of them by the foulest outrage a father could suffer, two of them by making him, as he himself said, to stink in the nostrils of the inhabitants of the land he was trying to settle in, and all of them by conspiring to deprive him of the child he most dearly loved—a man who at last, when he seemed to have had experience of every form of human calamity, was compelled by famine to relinquish the land for the sake of which he had endured all and spent all, might surely be forgiven a little plaintiveness in looking back upon his past. The wonder is to find Jacob to the end unbroken, dignified, and clear-seeing, capable and commanding, loving and full of faith. (*M. Dods, D.D.*)

Jacob's pilgrimage :—It was very true of the past of Jacob's life that it had been a pilgrimage, for he had been twenty-one years a stranger in the land of Padan-aram, and even after his return to Canaan he had not dwelt continuously in one place. For years, indeed, he had been at Hebron, near the Machpelah cave, where the ashes of his fathers were entombed; but now again he was away from the only spots of earth in Shechem and in Hebron which legally he could call his own. So

with literal exactness he could say that his life had been a pilgrimage. But the expression had a forward as well as a backward look. It told that he was seeking a home beyond the grave, that he was desiring the better country, "even the heavenly," and that his hopes were anchored there. It indicated that his feelings regarding his fathers were not so distinct and definite indeed, but of the same kind as those of Baxter when he wrote concerning a venerable relative who died at the age of a hundred years: "She is gone after many of my choicest friends, and I am following even at the door. Had I been to enjoy them only here, it would have been but a short comfort mixed with many troubles which all our failings and sins, and some degree of unsuitableness between the nearest and dearest, cause. But I am going after them, to that blessed society where life and light and love, and therefore harmony, concord, and joy are perfect and everlasting." Thrice happy they who can look forward to such an end of their pilgrimage! (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

The shortness of life:—Remember that life at the longest is very short. Therefore, do at once that which you feel you ought to do at all. Yea, do first that which is most important. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Young man, do not leave it to a future day, but do it now; that all your life may be one of usefulness and enjoyment. Men of middle-age, you have a vivid sense of the rapidity with which your years have gone, but they will go just as rapidly in the future as in the past, and you will be on your death-bed before you know it; therefore, "what thy hands find to do, do it with thy might." Men of old-age, you have to make haste, for you have no time to lose. The ancient law said kindly as to the sale of an estate, "according to the number of the years thou shalt diminish the price"; the nearer they were to the Jubilee, the cheaper were they to sell their land. So the nearer you come to the end of your days, you ought to hold earthly things more loosely, and prize heavenly things more highly. When your business day is drawing to a close, you hasten to finish your work, and sometimes you do more in the last hour than in all that went before. As your paper becomes more filled you write more closely, to get all in that you want to say. And in the same way, the older you grow, you should become the more earnest in the service of your God in Christ. And if you have not yet begun to serve Him, I beseech you to begin now! When Napoleon came on the field of Marengo, it was late in the afternoon, and he saw that the battle was really lost. But looking at the western sun, he said, "There is just time to recover the day!" and giving out his orders with that rapid energy for which, combined with quick perception of what an emergency needed, he was so remarkable, he turned a defeat into a victory. So your sun is nearing its setting, but there is time, in the present opportunity, to "recover the day." Avail yourself of it, therefore, at once, lest your life should end in utter blank, eternal failure. (*Ibid.*)

A backward look:—A backward look is very different from a forward look in life. A quarter of a century, or a half-century, would seem a long way ahead to a young person; but how short it seems when it is remembered by those who have passed it! And our estimates of value vary as much as our estimates of time, in looking forward or backward. It is not those things which we thought most of while we were striving for them, that seem of highest worth when we have them, or when we remember how they missed us. Among the memories of Jacob, his pleasantest, we may be sure, were not his cheating Esau, or his deceiving his father, or his getting the advantage of Laban. Nor was it saddest to him to remember his disappointment in the loss of Joseph. There can be no doubt that the one-tenth which Jacob gave to the Lord was more of a treasure to him in memory than the nine-tenths he held on to; and that his being lamed at Peniel was a pleasanter recollection than his standing up so firmly to lie to Isaac at Beer-sheba. The days of the years of our lives will seem few enough at the best when we come to their close. Whether they are then to seem evil, or not, will depend on the use we now make of them. No day spent in the Lord's service, no self-denial or generous act for others, will ever be counted evil in its memory. Now is the time to make ready for a pleasant old age—if our lives should be long spared. (*H. C. Trumbull.*)

Jacob's confession:—We have a comment upon this answer, in Heb. xi. 13, 14, where it is called a "confession," and its implication is insisted on: "They that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country." We may see in it a charming example of spirituality, and how such a state of mind will find a way of introducing religion, even in answer to the most simple and common questions. We go into the company of a great man, and come away without once thinking of introducing religion: nay, it would seem to us almost rude to attempt it. But wherefore? Because of our want of spiritual-

mindedness. If our spirits were imbued with a sense of Divine things, we should think of the most common concerns of life in a religious way; and so thinking of them, it would be natural to speak of them. Jacob, in answer to this simple question, introduces several important truths, and that without any force or awkwardness. He insinuates to Pharaoh that he and his fathers before him were strangers and pilgrims upon the earth—that their portion was not in this world, but in another—that the life of man, though it extended to a hundred and thirty years, was but a few days—that those few days were mixed with evil; all which, if the king properly reflected on it, would lead him to set light by the earthly glory with which he was loaded, and to seek a crown which fadeth not away. (*A. Fuller.*) *Reflections on life*:—When I look back to the earlier and middle periods of my life, and now, in my old age, think how few are left of those who were young with me, I always think of a summer residence at a bathing-place. When you arrive, you make acquaintance and friends of those who have already been there some time, and who leave in a few weeks. The loss is painful. Then you turn to the second generation, with which you live a good while and become most intimate. But this goes also, and leaves us alone with the third, which comes just as we are going away, and with which we have nothing to do. I have been esteemed one of Fortune's chiefest favourites; nor will I complain or find fault with the course my life has taken. Yet, truly there has been nothing but toil and care; and I may say that in all my seventy-five years I have never had a month of genuine comfort. It has been the perpetual rolling of a stone, which I have always had to raise anew. (*Goethe.*) *Life a pilgrimage*:—If men have been termed pilgrims and life a journey, then we may add that the Christian pilgrim far surpasses all others in the following important particulars: in the goodness of the road, in the beauty of the prospects, in the excellence of the company, and in the vast superiority of the accommodation provided for the Christian traveller when he has finished his course. (*H. G. Salter.*) Theodore Monod said he would like the epitaph on his tombstone to be "Here Endeth the First Lesson." (*S. Smiles.*) *The true indication of old age*:—"Old age," remarks Bishop Patrick, "is not to be known by a withered face, but by a mortified spirit; not by the decays of the natural body, but by the weakness of the body of sin; not by the good we have enjoyed, but by the good we have done; and if we be prepared for death, we have lived long enough; if our life be a death, then no death can be untimely to us." *The course of a Christless life*:—"The whole course of a man's life out of Christ is nothing but a continual trading in vanity, running a circle of toil and labour, and reaping no profit at all. (*Archbishop Leighton.*) *Home after the journey of life*:—Mr Hughes tells a characteristic anecdote of starting one winter's night with his friend, Charles Kingsley, to walk down to Chelsea, and of their being caught in a dense fog before they had reached Hyde Park Corner. "Both of us," Mr. Hughes adds, "knew the way well, but we lost it half-a-dozen times, and Kingsley's spirit seemed to rise as the fog thickened!" "Isn't this like life?" he said, after one of our blunders; "a deep yellow fog all round, with a dim light here and there shining through. You grope your way on from one lamp to another, and you go up wrong streets and back again. But you get home at last—there's always light enough for that." (*Clerical Library.*)

Ver. 12. And Joseph nourished his father, and his brethren, and all his father's household, with bread.—*Types of the Holy Eucharist*:—I. WHO WAS THIS THAT FED HIS BRETHREN IN THE TIME OF DEARTH? (*Acts vii. 11.*) Joseph, "separate from his brethren" (*Gen. xlix. 26.*) "sold to be a bond servant" (*Psa. cv. 17.*) tried, afflicted, and imprisoned, so that "the iron entered into his soul" (*Psa. cv. 18.*), was a true type of Jesus our Lord, Who became a "stranger unto His brethren, an alien unto His mother's children" (*Psa. lxi. 8; lxxxviii. 7, 18.*) Who took upon Him the form of a servant" (*Phil. ii. 7.*) was afflicted and smitten (*Isa. liii. 4, 5, and cf. Psa. lxxxviii. 8.*) Then, too, as Joseph brought out of prison (*Psa. cv. 19, 20.*) set over all the land of Egypt (*Gen. xli. 41, 43; Psa. cv. 21.*) saluted as Zaphnath-Paaneah (*Gen. xli. 45.*) "the Saviour of the world" (*Neale*), sustained the life of all nations by miraculous supplies of bread (*Gen. xli 57.*): even so Jesus our Lord, the true Joseph, "taken from prison and from judgment" (*Isa. liii. 8.*) entrusted with all power (*Matt. xxviii. 18; Ephes. i. 20-23.*) "exalted to the right hand of God to be a Prince and a Saviour" (*Acts v. 31.*) now feeds countless thousands throughout all the world, with Himself, the Living Bread, in the Holy Eucharist. II. WHOM DID JOSEPH FEED? 1. All countries—for "all countries

came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn: because that the famine was so sore in all lands" (Gen. xli. 57). So in one sense our True Joseph "giveth food to all flesh" (Psa. cxxxvi. 25), and "openeth His hand, and filleth all things living with plenteousness" (Psa. cxlv. 16, civ. 27, 28). 2. Joseph fed his people, the Egyptians, for "when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread: and Pharaoh said unto all the Egyptians, Go unto Joseph; what he saith unto you, do. . . . And Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold unto the Egyptians" (Gen. xli. 55, 56). "And when money failed . . . all the Egyptians came unto Joseph, and said, Give us bread. . . . And Joseph gave them bread" (Gen. xlvii. 15, 17). So now Jesus our Lord, the True Joseph, prepares a table in the wilderness of this world, at which He feeds His people, not with common food, but with spiritual good things, help, benedictions, knowledge, grace, "to deliver their soul from death and to feed them in the time of dearth" (Psa. xxxiii. 18), so that they may eat and crave for that still greater food, the Holy Eucharist, of which He spake (Psa. lxxxi. 11), "open thy mouth," &c. 3. But Joseph specially cared for his brethren—his kinsfolk according to the flesh—for he brought them into his house and feasted them (Gen. xliii. 17, 34), he gave them provision for the way (Gen. xlii. 25). So now our own Joseph, Jesus our Lord, hath special care for His elect (Wisd. iii. 9), the saints of the Most High whom He is not ashamed to call His brethren (Heb. ii. 11), He brings them into His house, He makes them to sit down to meat, at His table in His kingdom, He comes forth and serves them, saying, "Come, eat of My bread and drink of the wine that I have mingled" (Prov. ix. 5), "for My flesh is meat indeed and My blood is drink indeed" (John vi. 55). Thus do the poor eat and are satisfied. They are full, yet hungry still.

III. WHEN DID JOSEPH FEED THEM? 1. "When the dearth was in all lands," "and the famine was over all the face of the earth," and was "sore in all lands" (Gen. xli. 54, 56, 57), "and there was no bread in all the land: for the famine was very sore, so that the land of Egypt and all the land of Canaan fainted by reason of the famine" (Gen. xlvii. 13), then "Joseph nourished his father and his brethren and all his father's household, with bread." So now, "in the time of dearth," when there is a sore and grievous famine in the weary land of this world and multitudes are perishing with hunger, because they cannot satisfy the cravings of their immortal spirit with the husks that the swine do eat (Luke xv. 16), our True Joseph feedeth the hungry, satisfieth the fainting soul with Himself, the bread of God, and saith to every soul that is hungering and thirsting after righteousness (Matt. v. 6), "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Psa. lxxxi. 11.) 2. After he had "made himself strange unto them" (Gen. xlii. 7, 8), he nourishes them with bread. So now Jesus our Lord appears "in another form," and makes Himself strange as it were unto us by veiling His beauty and His brightness under the veils of bread and wine, as it is written, "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour" (Isa. xlv. 15). 3. When his brethren had repented of their wickedness and fault, and were sorry for their sin—for they said, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother." So now it is when we have confessed our wickedness, and are sorry for our sins (Psa. xxxviii. 18, li. 3), when we have examined ourselves (1 Cor. xi. 28, 31, 32), when we "do truly and earnestly repent us of our sins . . . and have made our humble confession to Almighty God, meekly kneeling upon our knees"; then is it that our dear Lord vouchsafes to feed and nourish us with that True Wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and that True Bread that strengtheneth man's heart, in the Holy Communion. IV. WHERE DID JOSEPH NOURISH HIS BRETHREN WITH BREAD? 1. He fed and feasted them in his house, at his princely table, albeit sitting apart from them (Gen. xliii. 16, 17, 32); whereas the Greater One than Joseph, even Jesus our King, receiveth sinners and eateth with them (Luke xv. 2) at His own royal table of Sacred Communion (Luke xxii. 30), in His house the Church (1 Tim. iii. 15; Heb. iii. 6). 2. Also Joseph gave his brethren provision for the way (Gen. xlii. 25, xlv. 21): so our Blessed Lord invites us to draw nigh unto the altar of God, and "strengthen ourselves with the Bread of Life" now, whilst we are in the way, saying, "Arise and eat" of My Flesh and drink of My Blood, "because the journey is too great for thee" (1 Kings xix. 7). 3. He fed and nourished them in Goshen (Gen. xlv. 28, xlvii. 1, 4, 27, l. 8, 22); so it is in the true Goshen that Jesus our King Eternal feeds His brethren at the marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev. xix.), and reveals Himself to them face to face. V. HOW DID JOSEPH NOURISH HIS BRETHREN? 1. He fed his brethren at no expense to themselves—for "Joseph commanded to fill their sacks with corn, and to restore every

man's money into his sack, and to give them provision for the way; and thus did he unto them" (Gen. xlii. 25, and cf. xliii. 12, 21-24, xlv. 20-24, xlvii. 11, 12, 27, l. 21) not once nor twice. So Jesus our Saviour feeds us with His own most Blessed Body and Blood, and satisfies our mouth with good things, "without money and without price" (Isa. lv. 1, 2), again and yet again throughout our earthly pilgrimage. 2. He nourished them with corn (Gen. xlii. 19, l. 25), and wine (Gen. xliii. 84), and bread (Gen. xlvii. 12), and so "saved their lives by a great deliverance"; and yet the food which Joseph provided was perishable in its nature, and they who partook of it died at their appointed time. Whereas our True Joseph—Who is the Corn of Wheat (John xii. 24), the Wine that cheereth God and man (Judg. ix. 13), and the Bread of God which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world (John vi. 33)—gives us Food which is incorruptible, and is the seed of immortality, seeing that "This is the Bread which cometh down from heaven that a man may eat thereof, and not die," "if any man eat of this Bread he shall live for ever." (W. F. Shaw, B.D.)

Ver. 13-26. Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt, and in the Land of Canaan, for the corn which they bought: and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house.—*The morality of Joseph's administration*:—The significance of the transaction is obvious; it brought men back to first principles; made them feel, in a very practical way, their absolute dependence on God, and on that one man through whom God was pleased to deal with them. But what are we to think about its morality? Was Joseph right in buying men? The following considerations, are, to my own mind, satisfactory. 1. Joseph was acting under Divine guidance in an extraordinary emergency. It was not his own wisdom that foresaw the plenty and the famine, and which devised the plan he was raised up to carry out. It was God who gave him the message to Pharaoh, and it was God more than Pharaoh who exalted him to absolute power. 2. It is unreasonable to impute mean motives or cruelty to a man whose character, before this time and after it, was so singularly noble and good. 3. The people themselves proposed this arrangement, and they accepted it with gratitude. "And they said, Thou hast saved our lives: let us find grace in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's servants." 4. Left to themselves, where would they have been? Even supposing that every farmer from the cataracts to the seaboard had been as fully persuaded that famine was coming as men generally are that they must soon die, yet greed and the craving for present indulgence would have got the better of their prudence during the years of plenty; and long before the fourth year of continuous famine, Egypt would have become one grave. As it was, Joseph saved their lives, and saved them also from the utter moral ruin into which years of indolent pauperism would have sunk them. "As for the people, he removed them to cities from one end of the borders of Egypt, even to the other end." I understand this to mean, not that Joseph transported the population of the Delta to the vicinity of the Cataracts, and *vice versa*, but that he brought them in from the fields, where they could do nothing, and provided them some form of work in the towns. The fact is recorded to the honour of Joseph. When our own government has had to deal with famine, it has exhausted its ingenuity in making work for the relieved. "So far, then, is Joseph's plan of selling instead of giving the corn to the people, from being a matter of reprehension, that we ought to be astonished at a course of proceeding which anticipated the discoveries of the nineteenth century after Christ, and at the strength of mind which enabled the minister of the Egyptian crown to forego the vulgar popularity which profuse but unreasonable bounty can always secure." 5. The arrangement, as described by the sacred narrative, was a highly beneficent one. The record is very brief and subordinate, but its meaning becomes sufficiently clear on candid examination. (A. M. Symington, D.D.) *Joseph's policy vindicated*:—1. The believer in the divine inspiration of the Scriptures is not bound to vindicate the policy of Joseph in every particular. 2. It would be manifestly unfair to judge Joseph's policy by the principles of modern political economy or by those of New Testament enforcement and obligation. We must put him in the environment of his age, and we have no right to expect from him conformity to a standard which was not at that time in existence. 3. The policy itself was approved by those who had the best means of judging of its character, and who, as being directly and immediately concerned, would have felt its hardships if there had been any in the case. But, so far from regarding him as an oppressor, the people hailed him as a benefactor. 4. It must not be forgotten that Egypt is an

exceptional country, and that, from the constant dependence of the people on the irrigation of their fields, and the continual changes made in the surface of the country by the annual inundation of the river, in the way of obliterating landmarks, and removing part of the soil from the one side of the Nile to the other, the holding of all the lands by the crown would have special public advantages which could not well be either enjoyed or appreciated by the inhabitants of other territories. In conversation upon this subject the other day with the venerable author of "The Land and the Book," I discovered that he was inclined to find the explanation of Joseph's settlement with the people for their lands in the unusual character of the country itself; and from what he then said I gathered that he would fully agree with Bishop Browne, when, in the "Speaker's Commentary," he alleges, "The peculiar nature of the land, its dependence on the overflow of the Nile, and the unthrifty habits of the cultivators, made it desirable to establish a system of centralization, perhaps to introduce some general principle of irrigation, in modern phraseology, to promote the prosperity of the country by great government works; in preference to leaving all to the uncertainty of individual enterprise. If this were so, then the saying 'Thou hast saved our lives' was no language of Eastern adulation, but the verdict of a grateful people." 5. For the rest, this policy of Joseph's did not create a scarcity for the advantage either of himself or of the monarch, but it provided the means of meeting a scarcity; it did not withhold corn, and so earn the curse of the people, but it frankly brought it out as it was required, and sold it at a price that was mutually agreed upon; it did not insist on everything in the bond, no matter what hardship might be thereby occasioned, for, so far as appears, Joseph not only gave the people seed for their fields, but also gave them back their cattle, which he had meanwhile preserved to them; above all, it neither bought what was not in existence, nor sold what was not in actual possession, and so it had in it nothing which makes it in any respect a parallel case to those speculative combinations among ourselves with which some have sought to classify it. True, it left the government owners of the land, but, as we have seen, that was the most convenient settlement both for the carrying out of systematic works for the prevention of similar national calamities in the future, and for the stoppage of all litigation over matters of boundary; and one-fifth part of the produce, considering the fertility of the soil, was not an exorbitant rental, especially if it included all government imposts of every sort. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Joseph's conduct*:—This part of Joseph's conduct has been thought by some very exceptionable, as tending to reduce a nation to poverty and slavery. I am not sure that it was entirely right, though the parties concerned appear to have cast no reflection upon him. If it were not, it only proves that Joseph, though a good and great man, yet was not perfect. The following remarks, if they do not wholly exculpate him from blame, may at least serve greatly to extenuate the evil of his conduct: (1) He does not appear to have been employed by the country, but by the king only, and that for himself. He did not buy up corn during the plentiful years, at the public expense, but at that of the king, paying the people the full price for their commodities, and as it would seem out of the king's private purse. (2) In supplying their wants, it was absolutely necessary to distribute the provisions, not by gift, but by sale; and that, according to what we should call the market price; otherwise the whole would have been consumed in half the time, and the country have perished. (3) The slavery to which they were reduced was merely that of being tenants to the king, and who accepted of one-fifth of the produce for his rent. Indeed it was scarcely possible for a whole nation to be greatly oppressed, without being driven to redress themselves; and, probably, what they paid in aftertimes as a rent, was much the same thing as we pay in taxes, enabling the king to maintain his state, and support his government, without any other burdens. There is no mention, I believe, in history of this event producing any ill effects upon the country. Finally: Whatever he did, it was not for himself, or his kindred, but for the king, by whom he was employed. The utmost therefore that can be made of it to his disadvantage, does not affect the disinterestedness of his character. (*A. Fuller.*)

Vers. 27, 28. And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen.—The children of Israel in Goshen:—I. THEIR QUIET POSSESSION OF THE LAND. 1. They had the means and appliances of prosperity. 2. They enjoyed their freedom by a firm and honourable tenure. II. THEIR PROSPERITY. (*T. H. Leale.*)

Vers. 29, 30. Bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt.—Lessons:—1. Approaching

death should make men put their houses in order, and prepare for the grave. 2. The best of sons are best trusted with the interring of parents. 3. Favour, benevolence, and fidelity dying parents may beg of surviving children. 4. Parents may bind children not to bury them in places inconvenient (ver. 29). 5. The law of nature may appoint burial with fathers, much more the law of faith. 6. The faith of the Patriarchs did work as to the place of burial to appoint it. 7. The testamental word of parents, though hard, yet should be sacred with good sons (ver. 30). 8. Holy worship of God is meet from dying saints, for His gracious disposal to the grave. (*G. Hughes, B.D.*) *Prepared for death*.—Montmorency, constable of France, having been mortally wounded at an engagement, was exhorted by those who stood around him to die like a good Christian, and with the same courage which he had shown in his lifetime. To this he most nobly replied in the following manner:—"Gentlemen and fellow-soldiers, I thank you all very kindly for your anxious care and concern about me; but the man who has been enabled to endeavour to live well for fourscore years past can never need to seek now how to die well for a quarter of an hour." (*Dictionary of Religious Anecdote.*) *Ready for death*.—At the time when His Majesty, George the Third, desirous that himself and family should repose in a less public sepulchre than that of Westminster Abbey, had ordered a royal tomb to be constructed at Windsor, Mr. Wyatt, his architect, waited upon him with a detailed report and plan of the building, and of the manner in which he proposed to arrange its various recesses. The king minutely examined the whole, and when finished, Mr. Wyatt, in thanking His Majesty said he had ventured to occupy so much of His Majesty's time and attention with these details in order that it might not be necessary to bring so painful a subject again under his notice. To this the good king replied, "Mr. Wyatt, I request that you will bring the subject before me whenever you please. I shall attend with as much pleasure to the building of a tomb to receive me when I am dead as I would to the decoration of a drawing-room to hold me while living, for, Mr. Wyatt, if it please God that I shall live to be ninety or a hundred years old I am willing to stay; but if it please God to take me this night I am ready to obey the summons." (*Ibid.*) *Love of home in death*.—It is almost the universal custom in America, and seems to be growing in favour here, for great men to be buried in the place where they have mostly lived, and among their own kith and kin. Washington lies at Mount Vernon; Lincoln at Springfield; Emerson and Hawthorne under the pines of New England; Irving on the banks of the Hudson; Clay in Kentucky. They are laid to rest not in some central city or great structure, but where they have lived, and where their families and neighbours may accompany them in their long sleep. (*One Thousand New Illustrations.*) *Preparation for death*.—This may suggest to those who have family arrangements to make, that they should not defer the making of them until they come to be in the article of death, but should settle their affairs while yet they are in full health, in the possession of a sound mind, and in calm, unbiassed spirit. If, for example, a will has to be made by a man—and every man, if he have anything to leave, both for his own sake and for the sake of those who are most nearly related to him, should make a will—why should he postpone the making of it until he come to die? It will not bring death any sooner if he should make it at once, and it may prevent many evils if it is made now. Then, if God should greatly prosper him in future years, and should thus alter his circumstances, let him destroy the former will and make another, lest terrible injustice and hardship be done to the survivors by putting them back into a scale of living to which they have not for long been accustomed, and leaving them with a pitiful provision instead of an ample sustenance such as could easily have been provided. I have known cases of great suffering just from this cause. Let every man keep his affairs well in hand, so that those around him shall have to mourn only his departure when he dies, and shall have no cause to blame him for want of thought for his nearest and his dearest relations. If there is anything that you feel you ought to do in the way of settling your affairs, so as to secure peace and comfort among the members of your family when you die, do it at once, for the uncertainty of life is proverbial, and you know not what a day may bring forth. You cannot read the newspapers for a week together without discovering that many unseemly squabbles, over the division of property might have been prevented if those who in business were so energetic in the making of money had possessed only the foresight to arrange calmly, and in circumstances in which there could be no ground for the insinuation either of undue influence on the part of others, or of incompetence on their own, for its division. If there is anything you

feel impelled to say or do before you die, then say or do it now, and the older you are, let the now be only the more emphatic. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Jacob's request to be buried in Canaan*:—This request was rooted in something deeper than the merely natural desire of a man to have his body laid beside those of his nearest kindred. Under the New Testament dispensation, indeed, we have learned that it makes no matter where our bodies are buried, for by His brief occupancy of the tomb of Joseph the Lord Jesus Christ has consecrated the whole earth as a cemetery for His people; and by His resurrection from the grave He has given us the assurance that they that sleep in Him, wheresoever their resting-places are, shall hear His voice at the last great day, and shall come forth in spiritual and incorruptible forms to meet Him in the skies. The mere locality of our grave, therefore, is of comparatively small importance, whether we are laid away under the arctic snows, like the brave explorers who accompanied the dauntless Franklin, or beneath the shade of tropical shrubs on the rim of the Dark Continent, like those missionary martyrs who by their sepulchres have taken possession of the Machpelah in that new Land of Promise, or in the dark, unfathomed caves of ocean, with the white foam of the waves for our shroud, and the whistling of the winds for our requiem. It is all one to the Christian where his body is laid. And yet even the Christian has the natural desire to be laid beside his kindred; so that in all our cemeteries we have family lots, and in many of our old country homesteads we come yet upon the quiet and secluded enclosure where the ashes of the first settlers and those of their successors lie. But Jacob's desire that his body should be laid in Machpelah had a deeper root than nature. The land of Canaan was his by God's covenant. He had not yet obtained it. For aught that he could see, he was to die without entering on its possession; but even in his death he would show that he still believed that his children would have its ownership, and therefore he made Joseph swear that he would bury him in the sepulchre of his fathers. Nor was this all. He wanted his sons and his descendants to know that Egypt was not their rest. He desired to fix their minds on Canaan, and to fan in their hearts the desire to return thither when God should open up the way. (*Ibid.*) *Buried where born*:—The inclination to return in old age to the place which is endeared by the recollections of infancy is very general. It is mentioned by Goldsmith, with that finished delicacy of description which scarcely admits of improvement, and by Chalien, in some of the most beautiful lines in the French language. It is thus described in some of the practical prose of Chateaubriand: "After having wandered over the globe, man, by an affecting species of instinct, likes to return and die on the spot which gave him birth, and to sit for a moment, on the border of the grave, under the same tree which overshadowed his cradle." As John Leyden lay dying in India, whither he had gone to make his fortune, his heart dwelt on its childhood-memories, and his last words were about the little rural hamlet where he was born.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

VERS. 1-7. Thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, . . . are mine.—*Jacob's adoption of Joseph's two sons*:—I. THE AUTHORITY WHICH HE CLAIMED FOR THIS ACT. He refers to a leading point in the covenant history. God the Almighty, who is able to perform His Word, had appeared to him, had promised to make him a great nation, and to give him seed the land of Canaan (ver. 3). God had spoken to him, and this is his authority. On this he bases all the family hopes. The mention of God's appearance and promise would inspire confidence in Joseph. II. THE PURPOSE HE HAD IN VIEW. 1. To deliver them from the corrupting influences of the world. Though they had an Egyptian mother, and belonged to that nation by birth and circumstances, yet they were not to be suffered to remain Egyptians. Ordinary men would regard them as having brilliant prospects in the world. But it was a far nobler thing that they should espouse the cause of God, and cast in their lot with His people. 2. To give them a recognized place in the covenant family. This would impart a dignity and meaning to their life, and an impulse and an elevation to all their thoughts Godward. 3. To do special honour to Joseph. III. THE BAD MEMORIES WHICH AWOKE. 1. They were selected in the room of Jacob's two sons, who had forfeited the blessing. Instead of Reuben and Simeon. They had

grievously sinned, and thus lost their inheritance. The portion of Reuben was given to Ephraim; and of Simeon to Manasseh. The grounds of this are given in 1 Chron. v. 1; see also Gen. xxxiv., xlix, 5-7; Num. xxvi. 28-37; 1 Chron. vii. 14-29. 2. They reminded him of one whom he had loved and lost (ver. 7). (*T. H. Leale.*) *Jacob adopts Joseph's sons*:—I. THE OLD MAN'S SICKNESS. The pain and sorrow of dying mitigated by the presence and kind offices of dear friends. The joy of Jacob when it is told him that Joseph is coming. He strengthened himself, and sat up. Good news infuse new life. How strong in death are those who feel that Christ, the Great Deliverer, is near. II. THE OLD MAN'S MEMORY. In youth hope is strong, in old age, memory. The memory of the aged recalls distant things. The recent are apt to be forgotten. Before the old man's mind memory rolls out the picture of his journey from Padan. Happy shall we be if, among our memories of the past, we can recall an early attachment of truth, &c., especially to Jesus. The past never dies. Memory carries the present forward into the future. III. THE OLD MAN'S BLESSING. 1. Valuable. The blessing of a good old man not to be slighted. The blessing of such a man as Jacob most precious. It involved the transmission of covenant mercies. Jacob's relation to the people of God, federal and representative. 2. Discriminating. He distinguished between the elder and younger son. By supernatural illumination he specially indicated the supremacy of the younger. 3. Prophetic. He not only foretold the pre-eminence of Ephraim, but predicted their admitted greatness by all Israel. 4. Practical. He gave, as the covenant owner of the promised land, great material wealth to these adopted children of Joseph. His blessing had the force of law—a last will and testament. The bequest was allowed. 5. Pious. He referred what he did to the will of God. Acknowledged the good hand of the Lord his God, and the angel who redeemed him from all evil. Learn: (1) The sickness which is unto death will soon be upon us. (2) The duty of being kind to the sick and afflicted. (3) To guard the treasures of memory. And take care that there shall be among them the memory of forgiven sin. (4) To seek to deserve the blessing of the aged. (5) Above all to seek early the blessing and favour of God. (*J. C. Gray.*) *Manasseh and Ephraim*:—We have in this chapter a further illustration of the truth, which runs throughout Scripture, of the first-born being set aside and the younger being chosen. So bent are we upon expecting God to move in our own circle, and according to our ideas of things, that it is hard to dislodge it from the mind. It is well that this law should be reversed, to show us that "God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor His ways our ways," and lest we should imagine that grace must always wait upon nature. It is a truth with which we are presented in every phase of our history, that God is constantly reversing our order of things. These crossed hands of blessing meet us everywhere. Like Joseph here, we have some favourite plan or scheme, and we are always expecting God will bless it. He suddenly crosses all our plans and puts before us not only what we had never thought of, but perhaps something we had despised. Or we had prayed for some favourite son on whom we had set very high expectations, when we find God crossing our plans, and blessing another whose talents or abilities we had looked down upon. Like Joseph we are constantly thrusting forward some Manasseh to bless, and God is continually crossing us by taking up some Ephraim and blessing him. Like Joseph, too, we are "displeased" when things do not turn out as we expected them, but in some very opposite way, and we rush to set God right by taking up some other course of our own. Sometimes we never can understand the meaning of these crossings in life. They baffle us, and we begin to think God is neither hearing our prayers nor caring for us. We are constantly saying as Joseph, "Not so, my father; for this is the first-born: put thy right hand on his head." "Not this course, not this plan, not this way, not this place"—such are some of the thoughts which possess us, and which we are constantly thrusting before God. It needs a lifetime's discipline sometimes to make men see that "God's ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts." The soul has to be constantly emptied from vessel to vessel, to be bruised and broken, before it can learn it. Mark, in the next place, the character of the blessing: "And he blessed Joseph and said, God," &c. Here we have distinctly the Triune blessing brought before us—the grand source from which all blessings flow. The first clause is that of the Father; the second that of the Holy Spirit; the third that of the Son. God in His threefold Person and office as the Almighty Father, the Supplier of all grace to the soul, and the Redeemer from all evil. From such a source we are warranted in expecting large blessings, even that Ephraim's seed should become "a multitude of

nations," or, as the word means, "the fulness of nations." And where and when is this blessing to be fulfilled? It will be fulfilled in Israel's own land, when the Lord shall return from heaven the second time as "the King of the Jews," to reign over them. And so God declares, through Jacob: "Behold, I will make thee fruitful and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people, and will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession." Mark the words, "this land"; and "for an everlasting possession." Jerusalem belongs to the Jews. The Turk may hold it temporarily, or any other power, but they are usurpers. Jerusalem belongs to the Jews. God gave it them. It is, and it shall be, theirs "for ever." (*F. Whitfield, M.A.*)

Vers. 8-14. **Israel beheld Joseph's sons.**—*Lessons*:—1. Prudence in good men may divert nature from the remembrance of sad events. About Rachel. 2. Weak nature may see in part that which it doth not discern. So Jacob. 3. Reason suggests inquiry to know what sight doth not discern (ver. 8). 4. Sons in strength should help the weakness of aged parents. So Joseph to his father. 5. It concerns fathers to own their children especially in order to a blessing. So Joseph his. 6. Godly parents account their children God's gift unto them. So Joseph. 7. It is a mercy remarkable to have children for blessing in a strange place. 8. Gracious fathers desire their children's children to bless them (ver. 9). 9. Old age makes the saints subject to the same infirmities as other men. So to Jacob. 10. Dimness of sight is a usual symptom of old age. 11. Weakness in sight makes mistakes that need direction in the holiest men. 12. Good fathers yield to the desires of bringing children to them that can bless them. 13. Kisses and embracings are not unseemly from holy ancestors to their seed's seed in order to blessing (ver. 10). 14. It is meet for the holy ancestors to acquaint the sons of God's dealings with them. 15. Hopelessness of mercy with good souls makes them remember it more sweetly. 16. God's mercies sometimes over-reach hope and expectation of His people. 17. Saints delight to show their over-abounding mercies to His praise (ver. 11). 18. Suitable motions to dispose for a ministerial blessing is but meet. 19. Filial obeisance in honour of parents is a just duty in expectation of a blessing (ver. 12). 20. There are right-hand and left-hand blessings, which God giveth by His ministers, greater and less. 21. Good men may aim one to the right, and another to the left-hand blessing, whom God changeth. 22. It is needful to come near to the ministers of blessing if men desire to have it (ver. 13). (*G. Hughes, B.D.*)

Vers. 15, 16. **And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads, &c.**—*Jacob's death-bed*:—When St. Paul wished to select from the history of Jacob an instance of faith, he took the scene described in the text, when Joseph brings his two sons to the deathbed of his father. The text is therefore to be considered as one in which faith was signally exhibited. I. Jacob seems to make it his object, and to represent it as a privilege, that he should take the lads out of the family of Joseph, though that family was then one of the noblest in Egypt, and transplant them into his own, though it had no outward distinction but what it derived from its connection with the other. Faith gave him this consciousness of superiority; he knew that his posterity were to constitute a peculiar people, from which would at length arise the Redeemer. He felt it far more of an advantage for Ephraim and Manasseh to be counted with the tribes than numbered among the princes of Egypt. II. Observe the peculiarity of Jacob's language with regard to his preserver, and his decided preference of the younger brother to the elder, in spite of the remonstrances of Joseph. "There was faith, and illustrious faith, in both. By the "Angel who redeemed him from all evil," he must have meant the Second Person of the Trinity; he shows that he had glimmerings of the finished work of Christ. The preference of the younger son to the elder was typical of the preference of the Gentile Church to the Jewish. Acting on what he felt convinced was the purpose of God, Jacob did violence to his own inclination and that of those whom he most longed to please. III. Jacob's worshipping (referred to in Heb. xi.) may be taken as proving his faith. What has a dying man to do with worshipping, unless he is a believer in another state? He leans upon the top of his staff as if he would acknowledge the goodness of his heavenly Father, remind himself of the troubles through which he had been brought, and of the Hand which alone had been his guardian and guide. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *The last days of Jacob*:—I. WE SEE HERE THE BEAUTY OF FILIAL

PIETY. Jacob was only a shepherd, and Joseph was an exalted and powerful statesman. Had there been a trace of meanness and pride and self-seeking in the son, he might easily have waited till the patriarch was dead before doing him honour. Death often compels a child to respect a neglected parent. But Joseph was a great man, so great that the distinction of station had no influence upon his mind. Like many other great men, his personal attachments were intense, and his loyalty to his family was deep and unchanged. Besides this, his father was the heir of the covenant whose mercies would enrich him more than all Egypt's lands, and he could not alienate himself from that future commonwealth of Israel to which his faith pointed. This journey of Joseph to his father shows the man, and the man of God. He felt that the less was to be blessed of the greater. II. WE ARE INTERESTED IN JACOB'S OWN VIEW OF HIS LIFE. When Israel strengthened himself for this last interview, and there came to him a flash of his old prowess and undaunted vigour, his memory was aroused, and the past in its great features lay spread out before him. The dark parts of his life seemed to remind him of Divine mercies, and from the summit he had gained appeared to him only as the shadows of summer clouds on distant hills. III. THE BLESSING WAS A SOLEMN ACT OF PROPHECY, FAITH, AND WORSHIP. IV. SEE HERE THE DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY. Oldest son, the most promising child, does not always, perhaps not usually, share the largest part of the joys and honours of life. Parental hopes are often thwarted, and we desire in vain to change the manifest development of character and circumstance. In the history of nations, outside Israel, we witness the same phenomenon, and wonder why the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong; why smaller states eclipse greater ones, and why heroes and leaders spring from such unexpected quarters. All is of God. In the workings of redemption around us every day we meet the same fact. One is taken and another left. Nor can we read the reasons. (E. N. Packard.) *The blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh*.—I. ITS NATURE AND PROPERTY. 1. They were blessed in the person of Joseph. He is blessed in his sons (vers. 15, 20). The principle is recognized of blessing mankind in the name and for the sake of another. 2. With the covenant blessing. Not with that of the gods of Egypt, though he had cause to be grateful to that nation. He would have his children to know the true fount of blessedness. He invoked the blessing of the God of his fathers (ver. 15). The assurance that others have shared the gifts of grace with us is a support to our faith. We of the Church belong to a holy nation, which has a great and venerable past. 3. With the blessing of which he himself had experience. "The God which fed me all my life long until this day" (ver. 15). He felt that God had tended and cared for him like a shepherd. 4. With a different blessing for each. He bestows the larger blessing upon the younger (ver. 19). II. ITS OUTWARD FORM. It was conveyed by the imposition of hands (ver. 14). The blessing was not merely a wish or a hope, but a reality. This laying on of hands was the outward means or symbol of its conveyance. Outward forms impress, they steady the mind, and assist contemplation. The blessing was as real as the outward act which accompanied it, the reality of nature leading on to the reality of grace. III. ITS WARRANT. 1. The covenant position in which God had placed him. He stood with his fathers, Abraham and Isaac, in the same covenant relation with God (vers. 15, 16). 2. The act was Divinely directed. Old Jacob crossed his hands, and thus in bestowing the blessing reversed the order of nature (vers. 14, 17). He refused to be corrected by Joseph, for though his sight was dim, his spiritual eye discerned the will of God. He guided his hands "wittingly," with full knowledge of the decree of the Most High. God, who distributes His gifts as He will, prefers the younger to the elder. Nature and grace often take cross directions. (T. H. Leale.) *Jacob's prayer for the sons of Joseph*.—I. THE GLORIOUS PERSONAGE ADDRESSED. "The Angel," &c. 1. The title of this glorious personage. 2. His achievements. II. THE INTERESTING PRAYER PRESENTED. 1. What is sought? "Bless." (1) Knowledge and wisdom. (2) Genuine religion. (3) That God may make them extensively useful. 2. Who should thus pray? (1) Lovers of their species. (2) Patriots. (3) Parents. (4) Sunday-school teachers. (5) Fellow-Christians. All who love Jesus Christ. 3. The manner of presenting this supplication. (1) Under a consciousness of the necessity of the Divine blessing. (2) In strong faith. (3) In connection with our own efforts. (J. Burns, D. D.) *The last days of Jacob*.—I. THE HEIRS OF THE BLESSING—A SURPRISE. 1. The adoption of Joseph's two sons to be reckoned among the patriarchs, equal with Jacob's own sons, while Joseph personally is left out, was doubtless a surprise. (1) Because Joseph's personal character would seem to warrant the perpetuity of his own name

in tribal pre-eminence. (2) Because this adoption increased the tribes to thirteen. (3) We find, however, that this was a conscious, or unconscious, anticipation of the elimination of the tribe of Levi, by its elevation to priestly honour in place of the first-born. (4) We also find that this adoption was a mark of special honour to Joseph, in having a double inheritance in his sons, and also in having the birth-right forfeited by Reuben, on account of his sin (chap. xlviii. 22; 1 Chron. v. 1, 2).

2. This adoption of Joseph's two sons was by Divine direction. II. THE CHARACTER OF THE BLESSING IS SUGGESTIVE. 1. The "elevated glow" of the dying patriarch must be regarded as the result of the Divine power that wrought upon him. 2. The spirit and terms of the blessing are very touching and instructive. (1) Gratitude for the care, protection, and guidance of God is here beautifully expressed. (2) The reference to "the Angel" that redeemed him is a suggestive allusion to "the quality of Jehovah and His Angel." 3. The sovereignty of God in the expression of His choice of the younger over the elder must be fully recognized. III. THE PATRIARCH'S PERSONAL CONDITION WHEN THE BLESSING WAS BESTOWED. 1. Physical. 2. Mental. 3. Spiritual. LESSONS:—1. The sovereignty of God. 2. Divine sovereignty is not exercised in unreasoning arbitrariness, but in perfect harmony with the laws of justice and love. 3. Learn how gloriously a child of God can die. (D. C. Hughes, M.A.) *Jacob owning Divine care, and blessing his grandchildren:—*

I. To ILLUSTRATE THE TEXT. 1. Here is Jacob's recollection and acknowledgment of the Divine goodness and care. He acknowledgeth God, as the God of his pious ancestors, and as his constant preserver and benefactor. II. To CONSIDER WHAT INSTRUCTIVE LESSONS AGED CHRISTIANS MAY DRAW FROM HENCE. 1. It is their duty to recollect and acknowledge their long experience of God's goodness and care. (1) It will promote and cherish your gratitude to God. (2) It will tend to prevent your murmuring under the burdens and infirmities of age. (3) It will promote your continued activity in God's service. (4) It will encourage your prayers and your hope. 2. It is the duty of aged and dying Christians to bless and pray for their descendants. (1) It is a becoming expression of your faith and trust in God and regard for your children. (2) It will be likely to make a good impression upon their hearts, and so qualify them for the Divine blessing. (3) It is the way to procure the Divine blessing for them. Concluding reflections: 1. Let children desire and value the prayer and blessing of their aged, dying parents. 2. Let the children of good men labour to secure the blessing for themselves. (J. Orton.)

*The last days:—*There is a splendour peculiar to the meridian sun. There is a majestic and uncontrollable energy, and boldness, with which it spreads light and blessedness on all around. The sun shining in its strength is a grand and exhilarating sight. But there is a still deeper interest attendant on its decline; when the warm and mellow tints of evening soften the dazzling brightness of its ray; and when surrounded, but not obscured by clouds, and rich in a golden radiance, on which the eye lingers with chastened and inexpressible delight, it sinks below the horizon. It is with similar feelings that we regard the faithful servant of God, when he comes towards the close of a long, consistent, and useful life. It is when viewed in this light, that the last hours of the patriarch Jacob become valuable to us. All is resolved into the Divine care. All the vicissitudes of his course, when thus scrutinized, by the accurate discernment of one who from long experience could not be deceived, appear but as evidences to him of the gracious and providential guardianship of his Almighty Friend and Father. 1. He admits without reserve the providential care of God through a long life. "God Almighty that appeared unto me in the land of Canaan, and blessed me, hath fed me all my life long unto this day." Many there are whose last year's savour of a very different spirit from this. They have set out in life with false and unwarranted expectations of prosperity. They began without God for their friend, and they lived a life of business or of folly. They never cherished any hope, but the hope of extracting happiness from a world which was never calculated to give it. And what has been the result? Year after year has brought its disappointments. 2. There is another essential point of difference between the experience of this venerable Patriarch and yours. Jacob recognizes fully the gracious, as well as the protecting care of his God. In looking back upon his way, he broadly and joyfully admits the truth of God's redeeming mercy. This is the great secret of the exalted sublimity of his character, and the serenity of his end. We can recognize then in the creed of Jacob, precisely the same ground of hope as that of which we ourselves now rest. As truly as we see Christians in the full confidence of the faith of the gospel approaching their dying hour, and saying, "I have fought the good fight, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid

up for me a crown of righteousness." "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain"; so truly do we see Jacob in the exercise of the very same faith—a faith in a nameless Saviour. Learn that you can leave no better blessing to your children and your friends, than the mantle of your own piety—a measure of your own Christian hope. The last lesson is encouragement. Be encouraged to seek the Lord early, and to trust him through life. Jacob is one of an innumerable host of instances adducible in proof of the faithfulness of God. "He will never fail them that trust in Him." (*E. Craig.*) *Joseph's blessing*.—1. Though Ephraim and Manasseh were each constituted heads of tribes, yet they were blessed in the person of their father Joseph. Here, as elsewhere, God would exemplify the great principle on which He designed to act in blessing mankind in the name and for the sake of another. 2. Jacob, though now among the Egyptians, and kindly treated by them, yet makes no mention of their gods, but holds up to his posterity the living and true God. In proportion as Egypt was kind to the young people, such would be their danger of being seduced; but let them remember the dying words of their venerable ancestor, and know from whence their blessedness cometh. 3. The God whose blessing was bestowed upon them was not only the true God, but the God of their fathers; a God in covenant with the family, who loved them, and was loved and served by them. "God, before whom my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, did walk." How sweet and endearing the character; and what a recommendation of these holy patterns to the young people! Nor was He merely the God of Abraham and Isaac, but Jacob himself also could speak well of His name; adding, "The God who fed me all my life long unto this day!" Sweet and solemn are the recommendations of aged piety. "Speak reproachfully of Christ," said the persecutors to Polycarp, when leading him to the stake. "Eighty-six years I have served Him," answered the venerable man, "during all which time He never did me an injury; how then can I blaspheme Him who is my King, and my Saviour?" Harken, oh, young people, to this affecting language! It is a principle dictated by common prudence, "Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not": and how much more forcibly does it apply to the God of your fathers! 4. This God is called "the Angel who redeemed him from all evil." Who this was it is not difficult to decide. It was the Angel, no doubt, with whom Jacob wrestled and prevailed, and concerning whom he said, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." 5. The blessing of God under all these endearing characters is invoked upon the lads, their forefathers' names put upon them, and abundant increase promised to them. Surely it is good to be connected with them that fear God; yet those only who are of faith will ultimately be blessed with their faithful predecessors. (*A. Fuller.*) *A bit of history for old and young*.—1. Our text tells us that Jacob blessed Joseph, and we perceive that he blessed him through blessing his children; which leads us to the next remark, that no choicer favour could fall upon ourselves than to see our children favoured of the Lord. Joseph is doubly blessed by seeing Ephraim and Manasseh blessed. 2. Those of us who are parents are bound to do our best, that our children may be partakers with us of the Divine inheritance. As Joseph took Ephraim and Manasseh to see their aged grandfather, let us bring our children where blessings may be expected. 3. Furthermore, observe that if we want to bless young people, one of the likeliest means of doing so will be our personal testimony to the goodness of God. Young men and women usually feel great interest in their fathers' life-story—if it be a worthy one—and what they hear from them of their personal experience of the goodness of God will abide with them. This is one of the best ways in which to bless the lads. The benediction of Jacob was intertwined with his biography; the blessing which he had himself enjoyed he wished for them, and as he invoked it he helped to secure it by his personal testimony. 4. One thing further: I want you to note, that Jacob, in desiring to bless his grandsons, introduced them to God. He speaks of "God before whom my fathers did walk: God who blessed me all my life long." This is the great distinction between man and man: there are two races, he that feareth God, and he that feareth Him not. The religion of this present age, such as it is, has a wrong direction in its course. It seeks after what is called "the enthusiasm of humanity," but what we want far more is enthusiasm for God. We shall never go right unless God is first, midst, and last. All this is introduction; so now we must come at once and plunge into the discourse. Jacob's testimony, wherewith he blessed the sons of Joseph, has in it four points. 1. First HE SPEAKS OF ANCESTRAL MERCIES; he begins with that "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk." As with a pencil he sketches the lives of Abraham and Isaac. 1. They were men who recognized God

and worshipped Him, beyond all others of their age. God was to them a real existence: they spake with God, and God spake with them; they were friends of God, and enjoyed familiar acquaintance with Him. 2. They not only recognized God, but they owned Him in daily life. I take the expression, "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk," to mean that He was their God in common life. They not only knelt before God when they prayed, but they walked before Him in everything. This is the kind of life for you and for me; whether we live in a great house or in a poor cottage, if we walk before God we shall lead a happy and a noble life, whether that life be public or obscure. Oh that our young people would firmly believe this! 3. They walked before God; that is they obeyed His commands. His call they heard, His bidding they followed. To them the will of the Lord was paramount: He was law and life to them, for they loved and feared Him. They were prompt to hear the behests of God, and rose up early to fulfil them. They acted as in the immediate presence of the All-seeing. 4. To the full they trusted Him. In this sense they always saw Him. We sometimes talk about tracing Him. We cannot trace Him, except as we trust Him; and because they trusted, they traced Him. 5. They enjoyed the favour of God, for this also is intended by walking before Him. His face was towards them: they sunned themselves in His smile. God's love was their true treasure. God was their wealth, their strength, their exceeding joy. I say again, happy sons who have such ancestors! happier still, if they follow in their track! So Jacob spoke of Abraham and Isaac, and so can some of us speak of those who went before us. Those of us who can look back upon godly ancestors now in heaven must feel that many ties bind us to follow the same course of life. 6. There is a charm about that which was prized by our fathers. Heirlooms are treasured, and the best heirloom in a family is the knowledge of God. The way of holiness in which your fathers went is a fitting way for you, and it is seemly that you maintain the godly traditions of your house. In the old times they expected sons to follow the secular calling of their fathers; and although that may be regarded as an old-world mistake, yet it is well when sons and daughters receive the same spiritual call as their parents. Grace is not tied to families, but yet the Lord delights to bless to a thousand generations. Very far are we from believing that the new birth is of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man. The will of God reigns here supreme, and absolute; but yet there is a sweet fitness in the passing on of holy loyalty from grandsire to father, and from father to son. A godly ancestry casts responsibility upon young people. These Ephraims and Manassehs perceive that their fathers knew the Lord, and the question arises, Why should they not know Him? Oh my beloved young friends, the God of your fathers will be found of you and be your God. The prayers of your fathers have gone before you; let them be followed by your own. A godly ancestry should invest a man's case with great hopefulness. May he not argue, "If God blessed my ancestors, why should He not bless me?" II. Now he comes to deal with PERSONAL MERCIES. The old man's voice faltered as he said, "The God which fed me all my life long." The translation would be better if it ran, "The God which shepherded me all my life long." 1. He spoke of the Lord as his shepherd. Jacob had been a shepherd, and therefore he knew what shepherding included: the figure is full of meaning. There had been a good deal of Jacob about Jacob, and he had tried to shepherd himself. Poor sheep that he was, while under his own guidance he had been caught in many thorns, and had wandered in many wildernesses. Because he would be so much a shepherd to himself, he had been hard put to it. But over all, despite his wilfulness, the shepherding of the covenant God had been exercised towards him, and he acknowledged it. Oh dear saints of God, you to whom years are being multiplied, give praise to your God for having been your shepherd. Bear your witness to the shepherding of God, for this may lead others to become the sheep of His pasture. 2. This shepherding had been perfect. Our version rightly says that the Lord had fed Jacob all his life long. Take that sense of it, and you who have a daily struggle for subsistence will see much beauty in it. Mercies are all the sweeter when seen to come from the hand of God. But besides being fed Jacob had been led, even as sheep are guided by the shepherd who goes before them. His journeys, for that period, had been unusually long, perilous, and frequent. He had fled from home to Padan-aram; after long years he had come back again to Canaan, and had met his brother Esau; and after that, in his old age, he had journeyed into Egypt. To go to California or New Zealand in these times is nothing at all compared to those journeys in Jacob's day. But he says, "God has shepherded me all my life long"; and he means that the

great changes of his life had been wisely ordered. Life ends in blighted hope if you have not hope in God. But with God you are as a sheep with a shepherd—cared for, guided, guarded, fed, and led, and your end shall be peace without end. III. Thirdly, bear with me while I follow Jacob in his word upon REDEEMING MERCIES. "The Angel which redeemed me from all evil." There was to Joseph a mysterious Personage who was God, and yet the Angel or messenger of God. He puts this Angel in apposition with the Elohim: for this Angel was God. Yet was He his Redeemer. Brothers and sisters, let us also tell of the redeeming mercies of the Lord Jesus towards us. You remember, too, when that pinch came in business, so that you could not see how to provide things honest in the sight of all men; then Jesus revealed His love and bade you think of the lilies and the ravens, which neither spin nor sow, and yet are clothed majestically and fare sumptuously. Many a time has the Lord delivered you because He delighted in you. IV. Jacob has spoken of ancestral mercies, personal mercies and redeeming mercies, and now he deals with FUTURE MERCIES, as he cries "Bless the lads." He began with blessing Joseph, and he finishes with blessing his lads. Oh dear friends, if God has blessed you, I know you will want Him to bless others. There is the stream of mercy, deep, broad, and clear; you have drunk of it, and are refreshed, but it is as full as ever. It will flow on, will it not? In closing, I wish to bear a personal testimony by narrating an incident in my own life. I have been preaching in Essex this week, and I took the opportunity to visit the place where my grandfather preached so long, and where I spent my earliest days. Last Wednesday was to me a day in which I walked like a man in a dream. Everybody seemed bound to recall some event or other of my childhood. What a story of Divine love and mercy did it bring before my mind! Among other things, I sat down in a place that must ever be sacred to me. There stood in my grandfather's manse garden two arbours made of yew trees, cut into sugar-loaf fashion. Though the old manse has given way to a new one, and the old chapel has gone also, yet the yew trees flourish as aforetime. I sat down in the right hand arbour and bethought me of what had happened there many years ago. When I was a young child staying with my grandfather, there came to preach in the village Mr. Knill, who had been a missionary at St. Petersburg, and a mighty preacher of the gospel. He came to preach for the London Missionary Society, and arrived on the Saturday at the manse. He was a great soul-winner, and he soon spied out the boy. He said to me, "Where do you sleep? for I want to call you up in the morning." I showed him my little room. At six o'clock he called me up, and we went into that arbour. There, in the sweetest way, he told me of the love of Jesus, and of the blessedness of trusting in Him and loving Him in our childhood. With many a story he preached Christ to me, and told me how good God had been to him, and then he prayed that I might know the Lord and serve Him. He knelt down in that arbour and prayed for me with his arms about my neck. He did not seem content unless I kept with him in the interval between the services, and he heard my childish talk with patient love. On Monday morning he did as on the Sabbath, and again on Tuesday. Three times he taught me and prayed with me, and before he had to leave, my grandfather had come back from the place where he had gone to preach, and all the family were gathered to morning prayer. Then, in the presence of them all, Mr. Knill took me on his knee, and said, "This child will one day preach the gospel, and he will preach it to great multitudes. I am persuaded that he will preach in the chapel of Rowland Hill, where (I think he said) I am now the minister." He spoke very solemnly, and called upon all present to witness what he said. Then he gave me sixpence as a reward if I would learn the hymn—

"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform."

I was made to promise that when I preached in Rowland Hill's chapel that hymn should be sung. Think of that as a promise from a child! Would it ever be other than an idle dream? Years flew by. After I had begun for some little time to preach in London, Dr. Alexander Fletcher had to give the annual sermon to children in Surrey Chapel, but as he was taken ill, I was asked in a hurry to preach to the children. "Yes," I said, "I will, if the children will sing 'God moves in a mysterious way.' I have made a promise long ago that so that should be sung." And so it was; I preached in Rowland Hill's chapel, and the hymn was sung. My emotions on that occasion I cannot describe. Still that was not the chapel which

Mr. Knill intended. All unsought by me, the minister at Wotton-under-Edge, which was Mr. Hill's summer residence, invited me to preach there. I went on the condition that the congregation should sing, "God moves in a mysterious way"—which was also done. After that I went to preach for Mr. Richard Knill himself, who was then at Chester. What a meeting we had! Mark this! he was preaching in the theatre! His preaching in a theatre took away from me all fear about preaching in secular buildings, and set me free for the campaigns in Exeter Hall and the Surrey Music Hall. How much this had to do with other theatre services you know. After more than forty years of the Lord's loving-kindness, I sat again in that arbour! No doubt it is a mere trifle for outsiders to hear, but to me it was an overwhelming moment. The present minister of Stambourn meeting-house, and the members of his family, including his son and his grandchildren, were in the garden, and I could not help calling them together around that arbour, while I praised the Lord for His goodness. One irresistible impulse was upon me: it was to pray God to bless those lads that stood around me. Do you not see how the memory begat the prayer? I wanted them to remember when they grew up my testimony of God's goodness to me; and for that same reason I tell it to you young people who are around me this morning. God has blessed me all my life long, and redeemed me from all evil, and I pray that He may be your God. You that have godly parents, I would specially address. I beseech you to follow in their footsteps, that you may one day speak of the Lord as they were able to do in their day. Remember that special promise, "I love them that love Me; and those that seek Me early shall find Me." May the Holy Spirit lead you to seek Him this day; and you shall live to praise His name as Jacob did. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Jacob blessing Joseph's children*:—I. First of all, THE REFERENCE TO JACOB'S FOREFATHERS: he says, "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk." How various must be the thoughts suggested to all our minds by that same expression—"God, before whom my fathers did walk!" How many of us can say that it was the God of Abraham before whom our fathers did walk? How many must be constrained to say that it was the "god of this world" "before whom their fathers did walk!" It is an awful question which we read in the prophet, "Your fathers, where are they?" How solemnly it recalls the history of our own youth! How solemnly it bids us ask, "Were those we loved in the flesh in Christ, or were they out of Christ?" But I stay not to dwell upon that: it is clear that the feelings which were in the mind of the patriarch were those of joy and gratitude; he knew who was "the God of his fathers"; he knew that their God was his God. In the expression, therefore, "God, before whom my fathers did walk," he doubtless had reference to the sovereign grace of God, which had called Abraham from the midst of an idolatrous nation, to be "the father of the faithful"—to be in whose "seed all the families of the earth should be blessed." His mind, therefore, was filled with love to that God who had made Abraham "to differ," and who had so mercifully kept Abraham, even to the end. II. But, secondly, let us speak of THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT WHICH IS HERE GIVEN OF JACOB'S EXPERIENCE when he says, "the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil." He appears here, I think, to refer to God's providential care of him, as well as to the spiritual mercies vouchsafed to him, when he says, "the God who fed me all my life long." For he would refer to His support in his early days at home. He would refer also to the manifest way in which God's presence was vouchsafed to him at the time he was in the family of Laban; and even perhaps now he was referring also to the mysterious manner in which God had been pleased to allow his son—his beloved son Joseph—to be taken from him for a time, when he was constrained to exclaim, "All these things are against me." But now, having been taught of God the reason of the Lord's dealings; having seen how good was brought out of evil; having perceived that the Lord had sent Joseph before him, so that he might be the instrument in the Lord's hand of feeding him in the time of want and famine, he says, "the God which fed me all my life long unto this day." But I apprehend that, grateful as the patriarch must have felt for these temporal mercies, his feelings upon this point were very far less intense than they were for those spiritual mercies which God had so graciously vouchsafed to him; for we see him also saying, "the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads." "The Angel who redeemed." And who was this Angel whose blessing he was invoking? Had it not been the Angel of the covenant, the very expression made use of by the patriarch must have been the language of blasphemy; but, instead of that, we know that it was the Angel of the covenant,

even the Lord Jesus Christ Himself; and from that we gather what the nature of those spiritual mercies are to which the patriarch more especially alludes: "The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads." III. But, thirdly, we must remark upon THE BLESSING WHICH IS INVOKED: the patriarch says, "bless the lads." He doubtless desired that there should be daily food provided for them; he doubtless desired that God's care should constantly watch over them; but there was something far greater than this he desired for them. He desired the full blessings of God's redeeming love, so that he might be able to feel that that Angel which had "redeemed him from all evil" would also redeem those children which were before him, and that they might have all that comfortable experience which he himself enjoyed. And what could be the groundwork of such anticipations existing in the aged patriarch's breast? Think you, he considered that they would merit these blessings at the hands of God, while he disclaimed all merit himself? There were no feelings of this kind in his breast, for he had been taught of God; but he knew what God he had to deal with; he felt that he had to deal with a covenant-keeping God, and he was assured that all those blessings which he besought were covenant mercies in Christ Jesus. (*H. M. Villiers, M.A.*)

Jacob blessing Joseph:—I. WE ARE TO CONSIDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES AND THE IMPORT OF JACOB'S BLESSING: "And Jacob blessed Joseph." But more particularly—1. Contemplate the persons before us: Jacob, Joseph, and his two sons. 2. Mark now the place where these persons met. 3. Remember the time when these persons met. It was the time of Jacob's death. 4. Observe the import of the solemn action in our text. It is a dying blessing! "God—bless the lads!" God is the author of every blessing. We are, secondly—II. TO CONSIDER THE INSTRUCTION WHICH THE BLESSING CONVEYS. 1. This blessing teaches the nature of true religion. It is "walking before God." 2. This blessing teaches the benefits of practical godliness. 3. This blessing teaches the advantages of pious parents. "The God of my fathers." The children of pious parents have the advantage of religious instruction. Again: such children have the advantage of fervent and constant prayer for their eternal welfare. Further: such children have the advantage of religious example. Finally: such children, like Jacob's sons, may have the advantage of their parents' dying testimony and last blessing. 4. This blessing teaches the importance of educating the young. (*J. Carwood, M.A.*)

An old man's blessing:—I. A DISTINCTION OF BLESSING. Jacob was, doubtless, divinely guided to make this distinction. The choice he made was inspired by God; and God's will was discerned and obeyed. We may learn to avoid pride, envy, and ambition, and to abide by God's will and the Divine disposal of events and circumstances (comp. 1 Sam. ii. 7; Psal. lxxv. 6, 7; 1 Cor. xiii. 11).

II. A CONTINUITY OF BLESSING (read verses 15 and 16, and note the reference to Abraham and Isaac). III. A FUTURITY OF BLESSING. IV. A UNITY OF BLESSING. The lots of one and another among God's people may differ. But all that is good, and hopeful, and blessed, comes from the One source of blessing—the One God, Guide, Deliverer. Conclusion: Let us ask ourselves these questions: Are we trying to learn from our elders God's truth? Are we seeking to live as those who look for God's blessing as the best thing? Do we wish to hand down the truth and promises of the Lord to those that come after us (Psal. lxxviii. 3, 4)? (*W. S. Smith, B.D.*)

And he blessed Joseph:—In blessing his seed, he blesses himself. In exalting his two sons into the rank and right of his brothers, he bestows upon them the double portion of the first-born. In the terms of the blessing, Jacob first signalizes the threefold function which the Lord discharges in effecting the salvation of a sinner. "The God, before whom walked my fathers," is the Author of salvation, the Judge who dispenses justice and mercy, the Father, before whom the adopted and regenerate child walks. From Him salvation comes, to Him the saved returns, to walk before Him and be perfect. "The God, who fed me from my being unto this day," is the Creator and Upholder of life, the Quickener and Sanctifier, the potential Agent, who works both to will and to do in the soul. "The Angel that redeemed me from all evil" is the all-sufficient Friend, who wards off evil by Himself, satisfying the demands of justice and resisting the devices of malice. There is a beautiful propriety of feeling in Jacob ascribing to his fathers the walking before God, while he thankfully acknowledges the grace of the Quickener and Justifier to himself. The Angel is explicitly applied to the Supreme Being in this ministerial function. The God is the emphatic description of the true, living God, as contra-distinguished from all false gods. "Bless the lads." The word "bless" is in the singular number. For Jacob's threefold periphrasis is intended

to describe the one God, who wills, works, and wards. "And let my name be put upon them." Let them be counted among my immediate sons, and let them be related to Abraham and Isaac, as my other sons are. This is the only thing that is special in the blessing. "Let them grow into a multitude." The word "grow" in the original refers to the spawning or extraordinary increase of the finny tribe. The after-history of Ephraim and Manasseh will be found to correspond with this special prediction. (*Prof. J. G. Murphy.*) *The redeeming Angel*:—I wonder if you know who the "Angel" is? Who do you think is "the Angel that redeemed him from all evil"? Do you know what the word "angel" means? It means a messenger—a good messenger. And the angels in heaven are so called because they carry messages. It is a nice thing to carry messages, if we carry them well. If we carry kind messages, and do it in an accurate way, like Christ, it is being like the angels in heaven—it is being like Jesus Christ. I hope you will be all good messengers. Perhaps you will have a very important message to carry, and you ought to do it well. I have a very important one to carry to-day. Therefore I am an angel, for ministers are angels. But it is not an angel from heaven, it is not a minister, it is not a common man, that is meant here. Jesus Christ is meant—Jesus Christ is the "Angel." I want to help you now to understand another word: What is it to be "redeemed"? "Which redeemed me from all evil." Can you think? Does "redeemed" mean "saved me," "delivered me"? Is it the same as if it said, "The Angel that delivered me from all evil"? Not quite. That would only be half the meaning. If I were to save you from being drowned, and it was no trouble to me to save you, and if I did not expose my own life, I should not "redeem" you; but if I did it at great danger, at great pain, or at great loss to myself, then it might be called "redeeming." To "redeem" is to save at great cost to one's self; because the word means "buy"—to buy back. Therefore, if I spend a great deal of money, and become much poorer by it, in order to do you good, then I "redeem" you. That is the meaning of the word "redeemed." Did you ever think what was the value of your soul—how much? When I see something very valuable, I sometimes say, "How much did it cost?" "How much did that watch cost?" "How much did that diamond cost?" How much did your soul cost? Thousands of thousands of pounds? The earth? The world? All the stars? Everything that was ever made? Much more! It cost Jesus Christ, who made everything—the life of Jesus Christ! And how had He "redeemed" us from sin? A poor heathen, who had become a Christian, wanted to explain how he became a Christian to another heathen who did not know anything about it; and he took a little worm—a poor, little, miserable worm; and he put the worm on a stone; and he put all round the stone where the worm was some straw. He then lighted the straw, and when it was all blazing he ran through the lighted straw, and took up the little worm in his hand when it was wriggling in the fire. The hot fire had scorched and drawn it up. "This," he said, "is just what I was—a poor, miserable worm, with a fire all round me; and I should have died, and gone to hell; but Christ ran in, took me up in His arms, and saved me; and here I am, a saved one." I will tell you a remarkable thing which happened in a town in the West of England. One Sunday a clergyman was to preach a sermon. The people in the town did not know him—he was a stranger there; but he was known to be a very excellent clergyman, and a very clever man. A great many people went to hear him preach; and when the prayers were over, the clergyman went into the pulpit. The congregation noticed that he seemed to feel something very much; for he was silent some time, and could not begin his sermon. He hid his face in his hands, and the congregation thought he was unwell; but he was not. However, before he gave out his text, he told them something like this: "I want to say something. Fifteen years ago I was in this town, and I was in this church. I was then very young, and I came to hear the sermon. That evening three young men came to this church. They were very wicked young men. You may suppose how wicked, for they came not only to laugh, but they came actually to throw stones at the clergyman. They filled their pockets with stones, and determined they would throw at him. When the sermon began they were sitting together; and when the clergyman had gone on a little way, one said to the other, 'Now throw! now throw!' This is what they said, 'Now throw at the stupid old blockhead! now throw!' The second said, 'No; wait a little; I want to hear the end of what he is saying now, to see what he makes of it.' They waited. But presently he said, 'Now you can throw: I heard the end of it; there was nothing in it.' The third said, 'No, no; don't throw: what he says is very good; don't hurt the good old

man.' Then the two others left the church, saying something very wicked; they swore at him, and went away very angry, because he had spoiled their fun in not letting them throw." The clergyman went on to say: "The first of those three young men was hanged some years ago for forgery; the second was a poor, miserable man, brought to poverty and rags, miserable in mind, and miserable in body; and the third is now going to preach to you! Listen!" So "the Angel" "redeemed" that poor boy (for he was only a boy when he went to throw stones) "from all evil." It is not only sin; there are other "evils." There are a great many troubles in life, are not there? Have not you a great many troubles? I am sure you have some. It is a great mistake to say to children, "Oh! you have no troubles." I think children have quite as many as grown-up people—perhaps more. But people often say to children, "You have no troubles now; you have them all to come by-and-by." That is not the case. I believe you have quite as many troubles as we have; but Christ "redeems" you from all trouble. Now there are two ways Christ can do it. Perhaps Christ will say, "Trouble shall not come to that boy or girl." That is one way; but He could do it another way. He could say, "Yes, trouble shall come; but when it comes, it shall be turned into joy. I will make him so happy in his troubles, that he shall be glad. His sorrow shall be turned into joy." Which, think you, will be the best: for trouble not to come at all, or, when it comes, to be turned into joy? I will tell you now about God "redeeming" a little girl in another way. Her name was Alvi, but she was always called Allie. She was three years old; and one day little Allie jumped upon her father's knee, and said, "Pa, when's spring?" Her papa stroked her little curly head, and patted her on her cheeks, and she looked up and smiled, and said, "I fat as butter." She said again, "I loves my pa, I does; I loves my pa." And her papa loved her very much. She said, "When's spring, pa?" The father said, "Why do you want to know when spring is? Do you want to see the pretty flowers, and hear the birds sing, and play in the sunshine?" She said, "No, pa; me go to church in spring." "Do you wish to go to church, Allie?" "Very much, pa." "Why, Allie?" "God there, God there!" "And do you love God, Allie?" "Oh! so much, papa, so much!" "Well, my dear," papa said to little Allie, "to-morrow is spring; spring will be to-morrow." And little Allie jumped down from her father's knee, saying, "To-morrow! to-morrow! Allie is so happy! To-morrow! to-morrow! to-morrow!" And she went about the house singing, "Allie is so happy! To-morrow, to-morrow, to-morrow! Allie so happy!" That night Allie was very tired; she wanted to go to bed an hour before her proper time. During the night she fell into a burning fever, and they sent for a doctor. When he came, he shook his head and said, "Too late! too late! nothing can be done." They sent for four doctors, and all said, "Too late! too late!" And when the morning came, little Allie was dead; she was gone to heaven. Her mamma stood and looked at her, and thought of what she had said the day before—"To-morrow, to-morrow! Allie so happy to-morrow!" And she wiped away her tears at the thought. So God "redeemed" little Allie. (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*) *The dying blessing*:—A few days previous to his death, Dr. Belfrage, of Falkirk, hearing his infant son's voice in an adjoining room, desired that he should be brought to him. When the child was lifted into the bed the dying father placed his hands upon his head, and said in the language of Jacob: "The God before whom my fathers did walk, the God who fed me all my life long to this day, the Angel who redeemed me from all evil, bless the lad." When the boy was removed he added: "Remember and tell John Henry of this; tell him of these prayers, and how earnest I was that he might become early acquainted with his father's God." Happy are they who have their parents' prayers.

Vers. 21-22. *Behold, I die.*—*Jacob in the prospect of death*:—We have here a threefold picture. I. OF STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS. 1. The strength of faith. 2. The strength of godliness. 3. The strength of peace. II. OF SUCCESS IN FAILURE. III. OF LIFE IN DEATH. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Closing days*:—I. A PERIOD OF UNRUFFLED PEACE AND PROSPERITY. II. A SEASON OF GRATEFUL RETROSPECT. III. A SUBLIME DEATH-SCENE. (*T. S. Dickson, M.A.*) *Death contemplated*:—I. AN ABSORBING CRISIS. 1. Its nature. 2. Its cause. Result of sin. 3. Its consequences. Everlasting. II. AN AWAKENING CONSIDERATION. "Behold." That word suggests to us suitable preparation. In prospect, then, of that amazing hour we ought—1. To review our past lives. 2. To realise our dying hour. 3. To think of our future prospects. (*C. Clayton, M.A.*) *The dying believer*:—I. LET US CONSIDER THE SPIRIT

OF THE WORDS OF THE DYING PATRIARCH IN REFERENCE TO HIMSELF. "I die," as if he had said, I die in peace; I die without reluctance; I have lived long enough; I am satisfied with life; I am willing to depart. What may have been the considerations which induced this state of feeling? 1. He was satisfied with the amount of enjoyment which the God of his life had granted him. 2. The patriarch was satisfied with that duration of life which had been allotted him. 3. The dying patriarch was satisfied with the prospect of a better life which was opening before him. Having thus considered the words of the text, in reference to the views entertained by the patriarch as to himself, let us regard them. II. AS SUGGESTIVE OF THE REASONS OF HIS REPOSE IN REFERENCE TO HIS SURVIVING RELATIVES. 1. The manifestations of the Divine mercy to himself, encouraged his hopes as to his surviving relatives. 2. He was persuaded that the paternal benediction he was authorized to pronounce, had an aspect peculiarly favourable to his descendants. 3. The patriarch felt assured that the covenant made with Abraham, and Isaac, and himself, secured the presence and blessing of God to his survivors, even to the remotest age. (*H. F. Burder, M.A.*)

Premotions of death.—The first symptom of approaching death with some, is the strong presentiment that they are about to die. Oganon, the mathematician, while in apparent health, rejected pupils from the feeling that he was on the eve of resting from his labours; and he expired soon after, of an apoplectic stroke. Fletcher, the divine, had a dream which shadowed out his impending dissolution, and believing it to be the merciful warning of Heaven, he sent for a sculptor and ordered his tomb. "Begin your work forthwith," he said at parting; "there is no time to lose." And unless the artist had obeyed the admonition, death would have proved the quicker workman of the two. Mozart wrote his Requiem under the conviction that the monument he was raising to his genius, would, by the power of association, prove a universal monument to his remains. When life was fleeting very fast, he called for the score, and musing over it, said, "Did I not tell you truly that it was for myself that I composed this death chant." Another great artist in a different department, convinced that his hand was about to lose its cunning, chose a subject emblematical of the coming event. His friends inquired the nature of his next design; and Hogarth replied, "The end of all things." "In that case," rejoined one, "there will be an end of the painter." What was uttered in jest was answered in earnest, with a solemn look and heavy sigh: "There will," he said; "and the sooner my work is done the better." He commenced next day, laboured upon it with unremitting diligence, and when he had given it the last touch, seized his pallet, broke it in pieces and said: "I have finished." The print was published in March under the title of "Finis"; and in October, the curious eyes which saw the manners in the face were closed in the dust. Our ancestors, who, prone to look in the air for causes which were to be found upon the earth, attributed these intimations to various supernatural agencies. John Hunter solved the mystery, if so it can be called, in a single sentence. "We sometimes," he says, "feel within ourselves that we shall not live; for the living powers become weak, and the nerves communicate the intelligence to the brain." His own case has often been quoted among the marvels of which he offered this rational explanation. He intimated, on leaving home, that if a discussion which awaited him at the hospital took an angry turn, it would prove his death. A colleague gave him the lie; the coarse word verified the prophecy, and he expired almost immediately, in an adjoining room. There was everything to lament in the circumstance, but nothing at which to wonder, except that any person could show such disrespect to the great genius, a single year of whose existence was worth the united lives of his opponents. Hunter, in uttering the prediction, had only to take counsel in his own experience, without the intervention of invisible spirits. He had long laboured under a disease of the heart, and he felt the disorder had reached the point at which any sharp agitation would bring on the crisis. Circumstances, which at another time would excite no attention, are accepted as an omen when health is failing. The order for the Requiem with Mozart, the dream with Fletcher, turned the current of their thoughts to the grave. Foote, prior to his departure for the continent, stood contemplating the picture of a brother author, and exclaimed, his eyes full of tears, "Poor Weston!" In the same dejected tone he added, after a pause, "soon others shall say, Poor Foote!" And to the surprise of his friends, a few days proved the justice of his prognostication. The expectation of the event had a share in producing it, for a slight shock completes the destruction of prostrate energies. The case of Wolsey was singular. The morning before he died, he asked Cavendish the hour, and was answered "past eight." "Eight of the clock!" replied Wolsey, "that cannot be; eight of the clock, nay, nay, it cannot be eight

of the clock, for by eight of the clock shall you lose your master." The day he miscalculated, the hour came true; on the following morning, as the clock struck eight, his troubled spirit passed from life. Cavendish and the bystanders, thought he must have had a revelation of the time of his death; and from the way in which the fact had taken possession of his mind, we suspect that he relied on astrological prediction, which had the credit of a revelation in his own esteem. Persons in health have died from the expectation of dying. It was common for those who perished by violence to summon their destroyers to appear, within a stated time, before the tribunal of their God; and we have many perfectly attested instances in which, through fear and remorse, the perpetrators withered under the curse, and died. Pestilence does not kill with the rapidity of terror. The profligate abbess of a convent, the Princess Gonzaga of Cleves, and Guise, the profligate Archbishop of Rheims, took it into their heads, for a jest, to visit one of the nuns by night, and exhort her as a person who was visibly dying. While in the performance of this heartless scheme, they whispered to each other, "She is departing." She departed in earnest. Her vigour, instead of detecting the trick, sank beneath the alarm; and the profane pair discovered, in the midst of their sport, that they were making merry with a corpse. (*T. Walker.*) *Jacob's death bed*:—This is the nearest approach in the Bible to that which is commonly termed a death-bed scene. There is no sadder phrase than that—"a death-bed scene"; for a man, when he comes to die, has something different to do than mere acting; it is not then his business to show other people how a Christian can die, but prepare himself to meet his God. It is sad also because the dying hour is often unsatisfactory, often far from triumph; in the Book of Ecclesiastes we read, "How dieth the wise man, as the fool." For there is stupor, sadness, powerlessness; and spiritual darkness also frequently clouds the last moments of the pious man. This dying hour must however have made an impression on these young men. In death itself there is nothing naturally instructive; but in this death there was simplicity, they saw the sight of an old man gathered ripe unto his fathers, and they would remember in their gaiety and strength what all life at last must come to. Consider too the effect that must have been produced on Joseph. There had been nothing, that we are aware of, with which he had to reproach himself in his conduct to his father; there was therefore no remorse mixed with his sorrow, he was spared the sharpest pang of all. How different must the feeling of the other brethren have been; they would remember that there lay one dying whom they had wronged, one whom they had deceived. (*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*) *The last days of Jacob*:—The history is a simple one, yet with wondrous perspective. Seventeen years did Israel dwell in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen, and when he was a hundred and forty and seven years old, the time drew nigh that Israel must die. Who can fight the army of the Years? Those silent soldiers never lose a war. They fire no base cannon, they use no vulgar steel, they strike with invisible but irresistible hands. Noisy force loses something by its very noise. The silent years bury the tumultuous throng. We have all to be taken down. The strongest tower amongst us, heaven-reaching in its altitude, must be taken down—a stone at a time, or shaken with one rude shock to the level ground: man must die. Israel had then but one favour to ask. So it comes to us all. We who have spent a life-time in petitioning for assistance have at the last but one request to make. "Take me," said one of England's brightest wits in his dying moments, "to the window that I may feel the morning air." "Light, more light," said another man greater still, expressing some wondrous necessity best left as a mystery. "Bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt," said dying Jacob to his son Joseph, "but bury me in the burying-place of my fathers." What other heaven had the Old Testament man? The graveyard was a kind of comfort to him. He must be buried in a given place marked off and sacredly guarded. He had not lived up into that universal humanity which says—All places are consecrated, and every point is equally near heaven with every other point, if so be God dig the grave and watch it. By-and-by we shall hear another speech in the tone of Divine revelation; by-and-by we shall get rid of these localities, and limitations, and prisons, for the Lion of the tribe of Judah will open up some wider space of thought, and contemplation, and service. With Joseph's oath dying Jacob was satisfied. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Jacob's end*:—The close of Jacob's career stands in most pleasing contrast with all the previous scenes of his eventful history. It reminds one of a serene evening, after a tempestuous day: the sun, which during the day had been hidden from view by clouds, mists, and fogs, sets in majesty and brightness, gilding with his beams the western sky

and holding out the cheering prospect of a bright to-morrow. Thus is it with our aged patriarch. The supplanting, the bargain-making, the cunning, the management, the shifting, the shuffling, the unbelieving selfish fears—all those dark clouds of nature and of earth seem to have passed away, and he comes forth, in all the calm elevation of faith, to bestow blessings, and impart dignities, in that holy skilfulness, which communion with God can alone impart. Though nature's eyes are dim, faith's vision is sharp. He is not to be deceived as to the relative positions assigned to Ephraim and Manasseh, in the counsels of God. He has not, like his father Isaac, in chapter xxvii., to "tremble very exceedingly," in view of an almost fatal mistake. Quite the reverse. His intelligent reply to his less instructed son is, "I know it, my son, I know it." The power of sense has not, as in Isaac's case, dimmed his spiritual vision. He has been taught, in the school of experience, the importance of keeping close to the Divine purpose, and nature's influence cannot move him from thence. In chapter xlviii. 11, we have a very beautiful example of the mode in which our God ever rises above all our thoughts, and proves Himself better than all our fears. "And Israel said unto Joseph, I had not thought to see thy face; and, lo, God hath showed me also thy seed." To nature's view, Joseph was dead; whereas in God's view he was alive, and seated in the highest place of authority, next the throne. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Cor. ii. 9). Would that our souls could rise higher in their apprehension of God and His ways. (C. H. M.) *Jacob and Israel*:—It is interesting to notice the way in which the titles "Jacob" and "Israel" are introduced in the close of the Book of Genesis; as, for example, "One told Jacob, and said, Behold thy son Joseph cometh unto thee: and Israel strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed." Then, it is immediately added, "And Jacob said unto Joseph, God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz." Now, we know, there is nothing in Scripture without its specific meaning, and hence this interchange of names contains some instruction. In general, it may be remarked, that "Jacob" sets forth the depth to which God has descended; "Israel," the height to which Jacob was raised. (*Ibid.*) *Men die but God remains*:—When John Owen was dying, he said, "I am leaving the ship of the Church in a storm; but whilst the Great Pilot is in it, the loss of a poor under-rower will be inconsiderable." And when a young man whose heart was in the foreign mission work, had to die, he said, "God can evangelize the world without me." So when we may lose earthly friends, comforters, guides, and helpers, we may and ought ever to fall back on our all-sufficient and ever-present God and Heavenly Father. All the lamps in a house or in a town may be extinguished when the sun rises; all the pumps may also be demolished or taken away, whilst there is a reservoir ever full, from which every one may have an abundant supply of the best water. So we need not be dismayed when we lose any or all earthly friends and advantages, so long as we have God left. They who have God for their Father, and Friend, and Portion, have all things in Him. He is the best Teacher, Guide, Protector, and Provider. But sometimes God has to deprive us of our earthly friends and possessions in order to lead us to trust Him as we ought. *The folly of anxiety about death*:—What if the leaves were to fall a-weeping, and say, "It will be so painful for us to be pulled from our stalks when autumn comes?" Foolish fear! summer goes, and autumn succeeds. The glory of death is upon the leaves; and the gentle breeze that blows takes them softly and silently from the bough, and they float slowly down like fiery sparks upon the moss. It is hard to die when the time is not ripe. When it is, it will be easy, we need not die while we are living. (H. W. Beecher.) *Death, a ferry-boat*:—Death to God's people is but a ferry-boat. Every day and every hour the boat pushes off with some of the saints, and returns for more. *Waiting for death*:—The Christian, at his death, should not be like the child, who is forced by the rod to quit his play, but like one who is wearied of it and willing to go to bed. Neither ought he to be like the mariner, whose vessel is drifted by the violence of the tempest from the shore, tossed to and fro upon the ocean, and at last suffers wreck and destruction; but like one who is ready for the voyage, and, the moment the wind is favourable, cheerfully weighs anchor, and, full of hope and joy, launches forth into the deep. (Gotthold.) *Peace in death*:—The ship has set sail, and kept on her course many days and nights, with no other incidents than those that are common to all. Suddenly land appears; but what the character the coast may be, the voyagers cannot discern through the tumult. The first effect of a near approach to land is a very great commotion in the waters. It is one of the coral islands of the South Pacific, encircled by a ring

of fearful breakers at some little distance from the shore. Forward the ship must go; the waves are higher and angrier than any they have seen in the open sea. Presently through them, partly over them, they are borne at a bound; strained, giddy, and almost senseless, they find themselves within that sentinel ridge of crested waves that guard the shore; and the portion of sea that still lies before them is calm and clear like glass. It seems a lake of paradise, and not an earthly thing at all. It is inexpressibly sweet to lie on its bosom after the long voyage and the barren ridge. All the heavens are mirrored in the waters; and along its edge lies a flowery land. Across the belt of sea the ship glides gently, and gently touches soon that lovely shore. So many a Christian has been thrown into a great tumult when the shore of eternity suddenly appeared before him. A great fear tossed and sickened him for some days; but, when that barrier was passed, he experienced a peace deeper, stiller, sweeter, than any he ever knew before. A little space of life's voyage remained after the fear of death had sunk into a calm, and before the immortal felt the solace of eternal rest. (*W. Arnot.*)

CHAPTER XLIX.

VERS. 1, 2. Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days.—*Jacob as a prophet of the Lord*:—In this dying speech of Jacob to his sons we have the characteristics of true prophecy. I. THE NATURE OF ITS CONTENTS. II. THE NATURE OF THE STYLE EMPLOYED. It is vague and mysterious; there are no accurate and minute details, but all is given in shadowy outline; and this forbids us to suppose that it was written in after-ages in order to fit into history. III. THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF ACCOUNTING FOR THESE DELIVERANCES UPON NATURAL PRINCIPLES. Jacob was now a weak and aged man; the last sickness was upon him. And yet he speaks in this sublime style, the proper vehicle of exalted thought and feeling. Inspiration is the only solution. That which reveals so much of God's thoughts and ways must be from God. IV. THE STAGE OF PROPHETIC DEVELOPMENT WHICH IT INDICATES. The prophecy of Messiah now becomes clearer. First, it is "the seed," in general terms; then "thy seed," Abraham's. Now, the very tribe out of which the Messiah is to spring is announced. We have here the full bloom of patriarchal prophecy. The language rises to that poetic form which is peculiar to the Messianic predictions. The blessing of Judah is the central point, where the discourse reaches on to the last times, when God would bring His first-begotten into the world, and set up His everlasting kingdom. V. THE PROMISE OF ETERNAL LIFE WHICH IT SUGGESTS. The spirit of these prophecies is the testimony of Jesus. And He came that we may have life. Eternal life is the end of all prophecy. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Jacob's predictions*:—1. The predictions are partly explicable on natural grounds. Jacob's sagacity was sufficient to distinguish the germs of character already shown in his sons, and from thence he could foretell the results. Reuben's instability, for instance, was the result of a sensual character. The nomad, fierce life of the Simeonites and Levites was the natural consequence of a cruel disposition. 2. But there is a part of this remarkable chapter which we cannot so get over—the prediction of Zebulon's future locality by the seaside; of the descent of the Saviour from Judah—events both of which took place after the settlement in Canaan. Here we are plainly out of the region of things cognizable by sagacity, and have got into the sphere of the prophetic faculty. 3. Observe that five of these sons have their fortunes specifically told, and in detail; the rest generally. We divide the chapter, therefore, into these two divisions: I. THE FIVE SPECIFIC PROPHECIES. 1. The first of the specific prophecies is that respecting Reuben, and is in two divisions: (1) An enumeration of his original circumstantial advantages contrasted (2) with the destiny determined for himself by character. Learn, therefore—First, self-rule is the condition of influence and success. Rule thyself, thou rulest all. To subject appetites is not a very high achievement; but for him who has not attained that first, simplest step in Christian life excellence is impossible. 2. Next, learn how sin adheres to character. Years had passed since Reuben sinned. Probably he had forgotten what he had done. It was but a single act. But the act was not fixed to the spot which witnessed its performance. It went inwards, and made him irresolute, feeble,

wretched, unstable. So with every sin, whether one of weakness or of violence. You are the exact result of all your past sins. There they are in your character. 3. The second and third of whom Jacob uttered his predictions were Simeon and Levi. They were charged with immoderate revenge. Observe, not revenge alone. "Cursed be their anger, for it was cruel" (ver. 7). Had they not felt anger, had they not avenged, they had not been men. That responsibility which is now shared between judge, jury, the law, and the executioner, was necessarily in early ages sustained alone by the avenger of blood. That instinct of indignation which is now regularly expressed by law was then of necessity expressed irregularly. I do not think they were to be blamed for doing the avenger's justice. But they slew a whole tribe. Now, the penalty which fell on them was of a very peculiar kind: "I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel." This has a plain meaning in Simeon's case, for his tribe was weak, his territory divided. But in Levi's case the prediction is not so intelligible as a penalty. For Levi, though scattered in Israel, having no territorial allotment, was a peculiarly privileged tribe; they were chosen to be the tribe of priests. We consider this, therefore, as one of the many, many cases in which a penalty is by grace transmuted into a blessing. 4. Predictions respecting Judah. (1) His brethren should praise him. We should have expected him to be envied rather than praised by them. But there is a spirit which can disarm envy. It is that meekness which hides its own superiority, seems unconscious of it, and even shows that it feels more pain in surpassing than others can feel in being surpassed. Such persons may be superior and still praised—a rare and honourable peculiarity. "The meek shall inherit the earth." Earth's inheritance, its praise and its love, belong to such. (2) Next, Judah is put forward as the type of the Hebrew hero. He is represented under the similitude of a lion. "He stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?" (ver. 9.) It has been remarked, perhaps not idly, that the simile is a lion couchant, not rampant. Not the strength of the oppressor, but that of one strong in right, the majesty of defence: "who shall rouse him up?" (3) The third thing said respecting Judah brings us to the most difficult passage in Scripture: "The sceptre shall not depart," &c. (ver. 10). Shiloh, the Pacificator, or Prince of Peace. Much has been written to evade the difficulty which arises from the fact that there was no king in Israel when He came. But surely it is not needed. Ten tribes disappeared. Of the remaining two, both merged themselves in Judah; and the sceptre is only a figurative and poetical name for nationality. Israel's nationality, merged in Judah, lasted until Shiloh came. "Lion"—"Shiloh": the two harmoniously declare a truth. There is a strength of force; and there is another strength, the might and majesty of gentleness which is invincible through suffering, the glory of Him who is the Lion and the slain Lamb, the Lion because the Lamb. (4) The fourth prediction respecting Judah has reference to his temporal prosperity. His was to be a territory rich in vineyards and pastures (vers. 11, 12). 5. We now come to Joseph, the last of those five of whom we have a special prediction. Here the whole tone of Jacob's language changes. Specially observe two things: (1) An illustration in this blessing of the fulfilment and principle of the promise of the fifth commandment. Joseph's peculiarity was filial obedience; and his lot above his brethren was distinguished by worldly success and honour. He was the best governor Egypt had ever had. The two were, however, connected. In childish obedience he learned fitness for rule. He who can obey well is the only one who can well command. Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control—these three alone fit a man to be a ruler. (2) He had been "separate from his brethren" (ver. 26), and doubtless it was better for him, though an apparent disadvantage. Education and admixture with equals are two good things; but sometimes the deprivation of these things is better. II. GENERAL BLESSINGS ON THE SEVEN REMAINING SONS. Observe in all these different characters the true principle of unity. They were not lost in one undistinguished similarity, but each has its own peculiar characteristic: one made up of seamen, another of shepherds; one warlike, another cultivated; and so on. And yet, together, one. III. Finally, we have on all this chapter FOUR REFLECTIONS to make. 1. Jacob's spiritual character, as tested by his ejaculation, "I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord" (ver. 18)—a religious ejaculation from the dying patriarch breathless and exhausted with speech. Our exact character is tested by our spontaneous thoughts. 2. See what is assumed in this personification of the tribes. Judah, Simeon, Levi, are taken as the type of the future career of their several tribes. Every man impresses his character on his descendants. Let us add that to the innumerable motives for abstinence from sin. 3. Think of this father's

feelings as his family gathered round him. Over each of those children a mother's heart had bled and a father's heart rejoiced. Their very names contained the record of such feelings: "Reu-ben"—lo! a son. Yes; and, lo! there he is; and what has he become? Happy is it for Christian fathers now, that in looking round on their assembled children they cannot read the future as Jacob did, that they are not able to fix on each of their sons and say, This for God and that for sin. 4. Lastly, let us see something here that tells of the character of future judgment. Have you ever attended the opening of a will, where the bequests were large and unknown, and seen the bitter disappointment and the suppressed anger? Well, conceive those sons listening to the unerring doom. Conceive Reuben, or Simeon, or Levi listening to their father's words. Yet the day will come when, on principles precisely similar, our doom must be pronounced. Destiny is fixed by character, and character is determined by separate acts. (*F. W. Robertson, M.A.*) *The prophet; or, Jacob blessing his sons*:—I. THE VALUE OF THE TESTIMONY OF EXPERIENCE. It affords encouragement and warning; it reveals the conditions of success, the means to be used, and the errors to be avoided. II. THE STIMULUS OF EXAMPLE (chap. xlviii. 16; cf. also ver. 5). The memory of the efforts and struggles of others nerves to patient endurance. III. THE SOLEMN RESPONSIBILITY OF LIFE. Each one is making his own future. Our daily conduct is proving what we are fit for. IV. THE RECOGNITION THROUGHOUT OF OUR SPIRITUAL DEPENDENCE UPON GOD. This is the only right, sure, and safe way of facing and bearing the solemn responsibility of life. V. THE PROPHECY OF THE MESSIAH. (*A. F. Joscelyne, B.A.*) *The blessings of the tribes*:—Jacob's blessing of his sons marks the close of the patriarchal dispensation. Henceforth the channel of God's blessing to man does not consist of one person only, but of a people or nation. It is still "one seed," as Paul reminds us, a unit that God will bless, but this unit is now no longer a single person—as Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob—but one people, composed of several parts, and yet one whole; equally representative of Christ, as the patriarchs were, and of equal effect every way in receiving God's blessing and handing it down until Christ came. And it is at this point—where Israel distributes among his sons the blessing which heretofore had all lodged in himself—that we see the first multiplication of Christ's representatives, the mediation going on no longer through individuals, but through a nation; and where individuals are still chosen by God, as commonly they are, for the conveyance of God's communications to earth, these individuals, whether priests or prophets, are themselves but the official representatives of the nation. As the patriarchal dispensation ceases, it secures to the tribes all the blessing it has itself contained. The blessing of Israel is now distributed, and each receives what each can take; and while in some of the individual tribes there may seem to be very little of blessing at all, yet, taken together, they form a picture of the common outstanding features of human nature, and of that nature as acted upon by God's blessing, and forming together one body or Church. In these blessings, therefore, we have the history of the Church in its most interesting form. In these sons gathered round him the patriarch sees his own nature reflected piece by piece, and he sees also the general outline of all that must be produced by such natures as these men have. The whole destiny of Israel is here in germ, and the spirit of prophecy in Jacob sees and declares it. Being nearer to eternity, he instinctively measures things by its standard, and thus comes nearer a just valuation of all things before his mind, and can better distinguish reality from appearance. One cannot but admire, too, the faith which enables Jacob to apportion to his sons the blessings of a land which had not been much of a resting-place to himself, and regarding the occupation of which his sons might have put to him some very difficult questions. And we admire this dignified faith the more on reflecting that it has often been very grievously lacking in our own case—that we have felt almost ashamed of having so little of a present tangible kind to offer, and of being obliged to speak only of invisible and future blessings; to set a spiritual consolation over against a worldly grief; to point a man whose fortunes are ruined to an eternal inheritance; or to speak to one who knows himself quite in the power of sin of a remedy which has often seemed illusory to ourselves. And often we are rebuked by finding that when we do offer things spiritual even those who are wrapped in earthly comforts appreciate and accept the better gifts. So it was in Joseph's case. No doubt the highest posts in Egypt were open to his sons; they might have been naturalized, as he himself had been, and, throwing in their lot with the land of their adoption, might have turned to their advantage the rank their father held and the reputation he had earned. But Joseph turns from this attrac-

tive prospect, brings them to his father, and hands them over to the despised shepherd-life of Israel. One need scarcely point out how great a sacrifice this was on Joseph's part. And his faith received its reward; the two tribes that sprang from him received about as large a portion of the promised land as fell to the lot of all the other tribes put together. You will observe that Ephraim and Manasseh were adopted as sons of Jacob. Jacob tells Joseph, "They shall be mine"; not my grandsons, but as Reuben and Simeon. No other sons whom Joseph might have were to be received into this honour, but these two were to take their place on a level with their uncles as heads of tribes, so that Joseph is represented through the whole history by the two populous and powerful tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. Ephraim and Manasseh were not received alongside of Joseph, but each received what Joseph himself might have had, and Joseph's name as a tribe was henceforth only to be found in these two. This idea was fixed in such a way, that for centuries it was stepping into the minds of men, so that they might not be astonished if God should in some other case—say the case of His own Son—adopt men into the rank He held, and let His estimate of the worth of His Son, and the honour He puts upon Him, be seen in the adopted. This being so, we need not be alarmed if men tell us that imputation is a mere legal fiction or human invention. A legal fiction it may be, but in the case before us it was the never-disputed foundation of very substantial blessings to Ephraim and Manasseh; and we plead for nothing more than that God would act with us as here He did act with these two, that He would make us His direct heirs, make us His own sons, and give us what He who presents us to Him to receive His blessing did earn and merits at the Father's hand. We meet with these crossed hands of blessing frequently in Scripture; the younger son blessed above the elder—as was needful, lest grace should become confounded with nature, and the belief gradually grow up in men's minds that natural effects could never be overcome by grace, and that in every respect grace waited upon nature. And these crossed hands we meet still; for how often does God quite reverse our order, and bless most that about which we had less concern, and seem to put a slight on that which has engrossed our best affection. In Reuben, the first-born, conscience must have been sadly at war with hope as he looked at the blind, but expressive, face of his father. He may have hoped that his sin had not been severely thought of by his father, or that the father's pride in his first-born would prompt him to hide, though it could not make him forget, it. Could his father, at the last hour, and after so many thronged years, and before his brethren, recall the old sin? He is relieved and confirmed in his confidence by the first words of Jacob, words ascribing to him his natural position, a certain conspicuous dignity too, and power such as one may often see produced in men by occupying positions of authority, though in their own character there be weakness. But all the excellence that Jacob ascribes to Reuben serves only to embitter the doom pronounced upon him. Men seem often to expect that a future can be given to them irrespective of what they themselves are, that a series of blessings and events might be prepared for them, and made over to them; whereas every man's future must be made by himself, and is already in great part formed by the past. It was a vain expectation of Reuben to expect that he, the impetuous, unstable, superficial son, could have the future of a deep, and earnest, and dutiful nature, or that his children should derive no taint from their parent, but be as the children of Joseph. No man's future need be altogether a doom to him, for God may bless to him the evil fruit his life has borne; but certainly no man need look for a future which has no relation to his own character. His future will always be made up of his deeds, his feeling, and the circumstances which his desires have brought him into. The future of Reuben was of a negative, blank kind—"Thou shalt not excel"; his unstable character must empty it of all great success. And to many a heart since have these words struck a chill, for to many they are as a mirror suddenly held up before them. They see themselves, when they look on the tossing sea, rising and pointing to the heavens with much noise, but only to sink back again to the same everlasting level. Men of brilliant parts and great capacity are continually seen to be lost to society by instability of purpose. The sin of the next oldest sons was also remembered against them, and remembered apparently for the same reason—because the character was expressed in it. The massacre of the Shechemites was not an accidental outrage that any other of the sons of Jacob might equally have perpetrated, but the most glaring of a number of expressions of a fierce and cruel disposition in these two men. In Jacob's prediction of their future he seems to shrink with horror from his own progeny—like her who dreamt she would give birth

to a firebrand. He sees the possibility of the direst results flowing from such a temper, and, under God, provides against these by scattering the tribes, and thus weakening their power for evil. They had been banded together so as the more easily and securely to accomplish their murderous purposes. "Simeon and Levi are brethren"—showing a close affinity, and seeking one another's society and aid, but it is for bad purposes; and therefore they must be divided in Jacob and scattered in Israel. This was accomplished by the tribe of Levi being distributed over all the other tribes as the ministers of religion. The fiery zeal, the bold independence, and the pride of being a distinct people, which had been displayed in the slaughter of the Shechemites, might be toned down and turned to good account when the sword was taken out of their hand. Qualities such as these, which produce the most disastrous results when fit instruments can be found, and when men of like disposition are suffered to band themselves together, may, when found in the individual and kept in check by circumstances and dissimilar dispositions, be highly beneficial. Very humbling must it have been for the Levite who remembered the history of his tribe to be used by God as the hand of His justice on the victims that were brought in substitution for that which was so precious in the sight of God. The blessing of Judah is at once the most important and the most difficult to interpret in the series. There is enough in the history of Judah himself, and there is enough in the subsequent history of the tribe, to justify the ascription to him of all lion-like qualities—a kingly fearlessness, confidence, power, and success; in action a rapidity of movement and might that make him irresistible, and in repose a majestic dignity of bearing. If there were to be kings in Israel, there could be little doubt from which tribe they could best be chosen. A wolf of the tribe of Benjamin, like Saul, not only hung on the rear of retreating Philistines and spoiled them, but made a prey of his own people, and it is in David we find the true king, the man who more than any other satisfies men's ideal of the prince to whom they will pay homage—falling, indeed, into grievous error and sin, like his forefather, but, like him also, right at heart, so generous and self-sacrificing that men served him with the most devoted loyalty, and were willing rather to dwell in caves with him than in palaces with any other. The kingly supremacy of Judah was here spoken of in words which have been the subject of as prolonged and violent contention as any others in the Word of God. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come." These words are very generally understood to mean that Judah's supremacy would continue until it culminated or flowered into the personal reign of Shiloh; in other words, that Judah's sovereignty was to be perpetuated in the person of Jesus Christ. But it comes to be an inquiry of some interest, How much information regarding a personal Messiah did the brethren receive from this prophecy?—a question very difficult indeed to answer. The word Shiloh means "peacemaking," and if they understood this as a proper name, they must have thought of a person such as Isaiah designates as the Prince of Peace—a name it was similar to that wherewith David called his son Solomon, in the expectation that the results of his own lifetime of disorder and battle would be reaped by his successor in a peaceful and prosperous reign. It can scarcely be thought likely, indeed, that this single term "Shiloh," which might be applied to many things besides a person, should give to the sons of Jacob any distinct idea of a personal Deliverer; but it might be sufficient to keep before their eyes, and specially before the tribe of Judah, that the aim and consummation of all lawgiving and ruling was peace. And there was certainly contained in this blessing an assurance that the purpose of Judah would not be accomplished, and therefore that the existence of Judah as a tribe would not terminate, until peace had been through its means brought into the world. Thus was the assurance given that the productive power of Judah should not fail until out of that tribe there had sprung that which should give peace. But to us who have seen the prediction accomplished it plainly enough points to the Lion of the tribe of Judah, who in His own person combined all kingly qualities. In Him we are taught by this prediction to discover once more the single Person who stands out on the page of this world's history as satisfying men's ideal of what their King should be, and of how the race should be represented—the One who, without any rival, stands in the mind's eye as that for which the best hopes of men were waiting, still feeling that the race could do no more than it had done, and never satisfied but in Him. Zebulun, the sixth and last of Leah's sons, was so called because, said Leah, "Now will my husband dwell with me" (such being the meaning of the name), "for I have borne him six sons." All that is predicted

regarding this tribe is that his dwelling should be by the sea, and near the Phœnician city Zidon. This is not to be taken as a strict geographical definition of the tract of country occupied by Zebulun, as we see when we compare it with the lot assigned to it and marked out in the Book of Joshua; but though the border of the tribe did not reach to Zidon, and though it can only have been a mere tongue of land belonging to it that ran down to the Mediterranean shore, yet the situation ascribed to it is true to its character as a tribe that had commercial relations with the Phœnicians, and was of a decidedly mercantile turn. It is still, therefore, character rather than geographical position that is here spoken of, though it is a trait of character that is peculiarly dependent on geographical position. We, for example, because islanders, have become the maritime power and the merchants of the world; not being shut off from other nations by the encompassing sea, but finding paths by it equally in all directions ready provided for every kind of traffic. Zebulun, then, was to represent the commerce of Israel, its outgoing tendency; was to supply a means of communication and bond of connection with the world outside; so that through it might be conveyed to the nations what was saving in Israel, and that what Israel needed from other lands might also find entrance. In the Church also this is a needful quality: for our well-being there must ever exist among us those who are not afraid to launch on the wide and pathless sea of opinion; those in whose ears its waves have from their childhood sounded with a fascinating invitation, and who at last, as if possessed by some spirit of unrest, loose from the firm earth, and go in quest of lands not yet discovered, or are impelled to see for themselves what till now they have believed on the testimony of others. And as the seafaring population of a country might be expected to show less interest in the soil of their native land than others, and yet we know that in point of fact we are dependent on no class of our population so much for real patriotism and for the defence of our country, so one has observed that the Church also must make similar use of her Zebuluns—of men who, by their very habit of restlessly considering all views of truth which are alien to our own ways of thinking, have become familiar with, and better able to defend us against, the error that mingles with these views. Issachar receives from his father a character which few would be proud of or would envy, but which many are very content to bear. As the strong ass that has its stall and its provender provided can afford to let the free beasts of the forest vaunt their liberty, so there is a very numerous class of men who have no care to assert their dignity as human beings, or to agitate regarding their rights as citizens, so long as their obscurity and servitude provide them with physical comforts and leave them free of heavy responsibilities. They prefer a life of easy and plenty to a life of hardship and glory. They, as well as the other parts of society, have amidst their error a truth—the truth that the ideal world in which ambition, and hope, and imagination live is not everything; that the material has also a reality, and that though hope does bless mankind, yet attainment is also something, even though it be a little. Yet this truth is not the whole truth, and is only useful as an ingredient, as a part, not as the whole; and when we fall from any high ideal of human life which we have formed, and begin to find comfort and rest in the mere physical good things of this world, we may well despise ourselves. There is a pleasantness still in the land that appeals to us all; a luxury in observing the risks and struggles of others while ourselves secure and at rest; a desire to make life easy, and to shirk the responsibility and toil that public spiritedness entails. Yet of what tribe has the Church more cause to complain than of those persons who seem to imagine that they have done enough when they have joined the Church and received their own inheritance to enjoy; who are alive to no emergency, nor awake to the need of others; who have no idea at all of their being a part of the community, for which, as well as for themselves, there are duties to discharge; who couch, like the ass of Issachar, in their comfort, without one generous impulse to make common cause against the common evils and foes of the Church, and are unvisited by a single compunction that while they lie there, submitting to whatever fate sends, there are kindred tribes of their own being oppressed and spoiled? Next came the eldest son of Rachel's handmaid, and the eldest son of Leah's handmaid, Dan and Gad. Dan's name, meaning "judge," is the starting-point of the prediction—"Dan shall judge his people." This word "judge" we are perhaps somewhat apt to misapprehend; it means rather to defend than to sit in judgment on; it refers to a judgment passed between one's own people and their foes, and an execution of such judgment in the deliverance of the people and the destruction of the foe. We are familiar with this meaning of the word by

the constant reference in the Old Testament to God's judging His people; this being always a cause of joy as their sure deliverance from their enemies. So also it is used of those men who, when Israel had no king, rose from time to time as the champions of the people, to lend them against the foe, and who are therefore familiarly called "The Judges." From the tribe of Dan the most conspicuous of these arose, Samson, namely; and it is probably mainly with reference to this fact that Jacob so emphatically predicts of this tribe, "Dan shall judge his people." And notice the appended clause (as reflecting shame on the sluggish Issachar), "as one of the tribes of Israel," recognizing always that his strength was not for himself alone, but for his country; that he was not an isolated people who had to concern himself only with his own affairs, but one of the tribes of Israel. The manner, too, in which Dan was to do this was singularly descriptive of the facts subsequently evolved. Dan was a very small and insignificant tribe, whose lot originally lay close to the Philistines on the southern border of the land. It might seem to be no obstacle whatever to the invading Philistines as they passed to the richer portion of Judah, but this little tribe, through Samson, smote these terrors of the Israelites with so sore and alarming a destruction as to cripple them for years and make them harmless. We see, therefore, how aptly Jacob compares them to the venomous snake that lurks in the road and bites the horses' heels; the dust-coloured adder that a man treads on before he is aware, and whose poisonous stroke is more deadly than the foe he is looking for in front. And especially significant did the imagery appear to the Jews, with whom this poisonous adder was indigenous, but to whom the horse was the symbol of foreign armament and invasion. The whole tribe of Dan, too, seems to have partaken of that "grim humour" with which Samson saw his foes walk time after time into the traps he set for them, and give themselves an easy prey to him—a humour which comes out with singular piquancy in the narrative given in the Book of Judges of one of the forays of this tribe, in which they carried off Micah's priest and even his gods. Gad also is a tribe whose history is to be warlike, his very name signifying a marauding guerilla troop; and his history was to illustrate the victories which God's people gain by tenacious, watchful, ever-renewed warfare. And there is something particularly inspiring to the individual Christian in finding this pronounced as part of the blessing of God's people—"A troop shall overcome him, but he shall overcome at the last." It is this that enables us to persevere—that we have God's assurance that present discomfiture does not doom us to final defeat. (*M. Dods, D.D.*)

Jacob's prophetic survey:—What a mind was Jacob's, as shown in the various blessings pronounced upon his children! How discriminating those now closing eyes! How they glitter with criticism! How keen—penetrating, even to the finest lines of distinction! Surely what we see in those eyes is a gleam of the very soul. This is no joint salutation or valediction; this is no greeting and farewell mixed up in one confused utterance. This is criticism. This is the beginning of a career of mental development which is the pride of human education and culture. How affectionate too! In nearly every line there is some accent of affection peculiar to itself. And how prophetic! The ages are all revealed to the calm vision and sacred gaze of this man who is more in heaven than upon earth. But this prophecy is no phantasy. We have accustomed ourselves now to a definition of prophecy which enables us in some degree to understand this way of allotment and benediction. Prophecy is based on character. We have already defined prophecy as moral prescience. Retaining the definition, we see in this instance one of its finest and clearest illustrations. This is no fancy painting. It is the power of the soul in its last efforts to see what crops will come out of this seed and of that; it is a man standing upon fields charged with seed, the quality of which he well knows, forecasting the harvest. Moral prophecy is vindicated by moral law. There was no property to divide. There was something better than property to give. What a will is this! It has about it all the force of a man being his own distributor—not only writing a will like a testator, which is of no force until after the testator's death, but already enriching his sons with an inheritance better than measurable lands. What have you to leave to your children? to your friends? You could leave an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled and that fadeth not away—bright memories of love, recollections of sacred sympathy, prayers that lifted the life into new hope, forgiveness that abolished the distinction between earth and heaven, and made pardoned souls feel as if they had seen their Father in heaven; great will: eternal substance. How Jacob's conscience burned up in that sacred hour! He remembered the evil of his sons. He reminded

Renben of what he had done; he recalled the deed of shame, never to be spoken aloud by human tongue, wrought by Simeon and Levi in the land of Hamor the Hivite: and because their anger was fierce and their wrath was cruel, he divided them in Jacob and scattered them in Israel. "The evil that men do lives after them." Simeon and Levi had forgotten what they did in their sister's case. Jacob had not. In such a malediction there are great meanings, even so far as Jacob is concerned. Jacob knew the cost of sin. Jacob knew that no man can of himself shake off his sin and become a free man in the universe. The sin follows him with swift fate, opens its mouth like a wolf and shows its cruel teeth. No man can forgive sin. Who but God can wrestle with it? We fly from it, try to forget it; but up it leaps again, a foe that pursues unto the death, unless some Mighty One shall come to deal with it when there is no eye to pity and no arm to help. But presently Jacob will come to a name that will change his tone. How some faces brighten us! How the incoming of some men makes us young again! Jacob we have never seen until he comes to pronounce his blessing upon Joseph. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

The destinies of Israel:—I. MORAL DISTINCTIONS. What is it which "exalts" a nation (Prov. xiv. 34.)? In the development of history, the character of individuals is an important element. God's government of the world is moral government, and sin never, eventually, goes unpunished. Sooner or later, our sin "finds us out." II. MESSIANIC HOPE. The hope of a coming king is the central point of Judah's blessing. And Judah's blessing is the central blessing of all that Jacob says concerning his sons. III. MANIFOLD DESTINIES. Apply this to ourselves. How different the conditions, circumstances, capabilities of each one of us! how various the particular destinies in store for us! Yet, God will help, and guide, and bring us on our way, if we trust in Him. We know not exactly where God will lead us, or place us; or what our particular difficulties or temptations may be, but let us trust Him, and seek to do His will always, and everywhere. (*W. S. Smith, B.D.*)

Jacob's prophetic blessings of his sons:—Written it is of the swan, that before his death he singeth most sweetly, and so did this holy patriarch in this place. Never more sweet songs have passed from the godly than toward their latter ends (Moses in Dent. xxxi. and in the two chapters following, Joshua in his last chapter, and even our Saviour Himself in John xiv. 15-17 and at His last supper). The apostle Paul, when the time of his offering was at hand (2 Tim. iv. 7, 8, &c.). The apostle Peter, when he told them he thought it meet, while he was in this tabernacle, to stir them up, knowing that the time was at hand that he must lay down his tabernacle, &c.

The right way to regard prophecy:—I am profoundly affected by the grandeur of prophecy. God unveils the frescoed wall of the future, not so much that we may count the figures, and measure the robes, and analyze the pigments; but that, gazing upon it, our imaginations may be enkindled, and hope be inspired, to bear us through the dismal barrenness of the present. Prophecy was not addressed to the reason, nor to the statistical faculty, but to the imagination; and I should as soon think of measuring love by the scales of commerce, or of admiring flowers by the rule of feet and inches, or of applying arithmetic to taste and enthusiasm, as calculations and figures to these grand evanishing signals which God waves in the future only to tell the world which way it is to march. (*H. W. Beecher.*)

Belief in death-bed prophecies:—A belief prevailed among nearly all ancient nations, that the human mind, at the approaching hour of death, is capable of penetrating into the mysteries of the future, and of distinctly revealing them in prophetic speech. We are on this point not restricted to obscure inferences. We find the idea clearly and explicitly stated by more than one classical author. Cicero observes: "When death is near, the mind assumes a much more Divine character; and at such times easily predicts the future." Socrates, when defending himself in the capital charge preferred against him, and foreseeing a condemnatory verdict, is recorded to have reminded the judges that, with death before his eyes, he was in that state which enables men to utter prophecies. Xenophon relates, in his "Institution of Cyrus," that this prince, when feeling his impending dissolution, summoned his sons and friends to his death-bed; and, in order to impress upon them the doctrine of immortality, used the following argument: "Nothing resembles death more closely than sleep; but it is in sleep that the soul of man appears most Divine, and it is then that it foresees something of the future; for then, as it seems, it is most free." In a perfectly analogous manner, Pythagoras and other philosophers, according to Diodorus Siculus, considered it a natural consequence of the belief in immortality, that the soul, in the moment of death, becomes conscious of future events. In

harmony with these views, Greek and Roman writers not unfrequently introduce persons in the last stage of their existence predicting the destinies of those survivors who at that time particularly absorb their attention. Patroclus, mortally wounded, foretells, in Homer's *Iliad*, the immediate death of Hector, from the hand of Achilles; and when this prophecy was literally verified, Hector, in his last moments, augurs that Apollo and Paris would, at the Scæan gate, soon destroy Achilles, who, convinced of the truth and reality of such forebodings, exclaims: "I shall accept my fate whenever Jupiter and the other immortal gods choose to inflict it." In the *Æneid* of Virgil, the expiring Dido prophesies not only the chief incidents in the future life of Æneas, his laborious and exhausting wars with Turnus, the Rutulians, and the Latins; his separation from his beloved son, Iulus, when imploring assistance in Etruria; and his early death, unhonoured by the sacred rites of sepulture: but she alludes to the inextinguishable hatred and the sanguinary enmity that would rage between the Romans and the Carthaginians, and to Hannibal himself, who would avenge her sufferings, and as a fearful scourge of war desolate the beautiful plains of Italy. In the same epic poem, Orodes, before closing his eyes in death, threatens his victorious antagonist, Mezentius, that he would not long enjoy his triumph, but would soon also be hurled into the lower regions; which menace, indeed, Mezentius haughtily scorns; but recognizing the possibility of its fulfilment, he laughs "with mixed wrath." Posidonius makes mention of a man of Rhodes, who, not long before his demise, stated the exact order in which six of his friends would successively die. When Alexander the Great, at the termination of his days, was asked whom he appointed his successor, he replied "the best; for I foresee that great funeral games will be celebrated for me by my friends"; and this remark is adduced by Diodorus as an example of the astonishing realization of prophecies pronounced shortly before death. And Cicero, extending the same power of presentiment to perfectly uncivilized tribes, mentions the uneducated Indian Calanus, who, when about to burn himself, predicted the almost immediate death of the Macedonian monarch. (*M. M. Kalisch, Ph.D.*)

Ver. 4. *Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.*—*Instability*:—I. The first thing which strikes us in the instability of water is that it has no cohesive shape of its own. It takes the form of the vessel into which you pour it; it changes one form for another without resistance; and water spilt on the ground falls asunder and vanishes. This suggests the first defect of instability—that it prevents a man gaining an independent position in life. There is a true position in the world which we should all aim at, a place where we may stand on our own feet, fill our own sphere, and meet all the just claims which come upon us in the family, in friendship, and in society. This cannot be gained without some measure of stability. If, indeed, there is entire instability in the ground of the character, it is very difficult to deal with, and if men were under fixed laws of nature the case might be incurable. But nature has its emblems of hope even for this indecision; there is a possibility of crystallizing water. II. Another thing in the instability of water is the changefulness of its reflexion. Look at the water in an outspread lake. It takes moon and stars and changing seasons into the depths of its confidence, and its seeming depths are only a surface. This is beautiful in nature, but very unhappy in men; and we may see in it an illustration of how instability unfits us for gaining either true culture or character. III. A third thing we may mention in the instability of water is that it inspires distrust. Its very calm is danger: there are hidden rocks under the smoothness, and treacherous currents which wind like serpents round those who trust them. This reminds us that instability destroys influence. The world is governed not so much by men of talent as by men of will. IV. Water is ready to move any way but upward. It descends, but cannot rise to its source; and it illustrates this most serious defect of instability, that it unfits a man for a successful endeavour after the higher life. In seeking to conquer instability there must (1) be a sincere desire to escape from this defect where it is felt. (2) In arriving at decision, a man should seek to ascertain what he is capable of. (3) There are helps in this struggle against indecision: (a) Method or system; (b) associations; (c) the taking an early and manly stand. (*J. Ker, D.D.*) *Unsteadiness*:—The Holy Spirit is here describing the character of Reuben, the eldest son of Jacob. He is acknowledged, indeed, as the firstborn, but at the same time he is given to understand that he has forfeited his right; he is now to have no pre-eminence or authority over his brethren; he

is not to excel. This passage may well lead us to serious reflection on the great and peculiar danger of unsteadiness. I. This verse was written especially for the learning of those among Christians who have good feelings, who feel something of the beauty of holiness, who admire it, and are shocked at crime in others. All of us are by nature more or less partakers in these feelings; but we may, if we will, neglect to cherish them, and then they will die away and do us no good. II. The true and faithful Christian is marked by nothing more certainly than by his firmness and decision of purpose. He makes good resolutions and keeps them. He sets his face like a flint, and is not ashamed. A Christian without stability is a miserable wonder in the sight of God and His angels. III. PERSEVERANCE—a kind of bold and generous obstinacy—is a necessary part of Christian goodness. There is no excelling without it; nay, so many are the snares and dangers which surround us, that there is no chance, but by it, of keeping even the lowest place in God's kingdom. IV. To all our other good purposes this one must be added—we must resolve, by the grace of God, not to measure things by the judgment of men, but to go strictly by the rule of God's commandments. We must guard against that tendency, so natural to many, to exhaust their repentance and good meaning in feelings and professions and strong words, instead of going on without delay to the calm and sober keeping of the commandments. We must pray that He who holds our hearts in His hand may not suffer our repentance to be as unstable as water, pouring itself out in vain and useless lamentation. (*Plain Sermons by Contributors to the "Tracts for the Times."*) *The blessing of Reuben*:—I. HIS PRIVILEGES. The first-born. Entitled to (1) first rank among his brethren; (2) leadership of the tribes; (3) a double share of the inheritance (chap. xxvii. 29; Deut. xxi. 17). II. HIS FORFEITURE OF HIS PRIVILEGES. 1. By a foul sin. 2. By his instability of character. 3. By a life of sensuality. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Instability a foe to excellence*:—I. THAT ALL ARE UNDER OBLIGATION TO EXCEL. This arises from our duty towards God, others, and ourselves. It is taught in every department of nature, every scriptural command, every instinct of the soul. II. THAT ALL EXCELLENCE HAS A DEADLY FOE IN INSTABILITY. How strikingly does St. James speak of the waverer (James i. 6). Double-minded man, unstable ways. Wrong in religion, wrong in everything. III. THAT THIS DEADLY FOE OF INSTABILITY MAY BE VANQUISHED. In the gospel there is all that is necessary for conquest. It is the wisdom and power of God. 1. It points direct to God Himself. 2. It changes man's very nature (cf. Isa. xi. 6 with 1 Pet. i. 16). (*J. Barber.*) *Excellence*:—I. WHAT OUGHT TO BE THE GRAND AIM OF EVERY REASONABLE BEING—To "excel." 1. An excellence of dignity which all ought to desire; an "honour that cometh of God only"—a distinction, "whose praise is not of men, but of God." 2. An excellence of power which should also be our aim. II. WHAT MAY BE REGARDED AS ONE OF THE MOST FATAL IMPEDIMENTS TO THE ATTAINMENT OF THIS OBJECT. 1. If you are unstable in your principles—ever wavering and changing in your views of Christian truth—how is it likely that you should gain any assurance of ranking high in the favour of God? any growing power against the enemies of your soul? 2. If you are unstable in your purposes, it will be impossible for you to excel. 3. If you are unstable in your practice, the same consequence must needs follow; there can be no excellence. III. BY WHAT MEANS THIS IMPEDIMENT MAY BE SURMOUNTED. 1. Seek to have a more abiding sense of your own insufficiency. 2. Expose your heart more habitually to the influences of the Spirit of God. (*J. Jowett, M.A.*) *Instability in religion*:—I. If we throw a stone into the water, although at first certainly it divides the surface and gives it a new impression, yet, after a few circling eddies, tranquillity is restored, and no mark remains of its recent motion. If you launch a boat upon the stream, instead of its remaining a fixed weight upon it, it rolls and moves with the rolling current. If we cast our eyes upon the ocean, that mighty world of living waters, how changeable is the scene that comes before us! Every breeze that blows varies even its colour, while its waves exhibit to us nothing but tumult and commotion. Now all this is, in reality, what it is intimated to be in the text—an emblem and a picture of several amongst the children of men. 1. Whenever a new object comes before some people, it makes, like the stone cast into the water, an impression upon them at first; it engages their attention; they are, probably, pleased with it and delighted, and fancy that they have discovered the treasure of true satisfaction. But again, like the stone, after a few circling eddies—that is, after a few observations, after a few gratifications and short acquaintances—the novelty is over; something fresh catches the attention, and the former object departs without leaving a single mark or

vestige behind. 2. You shall see other people, like the boat upon the stream, quite at the mercy of the fickle current. They never fix to anything; they are without a rudder, without ballast, without any of the other requisites of good management. The surface upon which they rest is soft and variable; and thereon, without allowing any confidence to be placed in their firmness and stability, they rock about with every momentary agitation of the water. 3. Thirdly, there are others completely like the sea. Such people never continue in the same mind for a month, nay, sometimes not even for a day together—and that too upon subjects of the greatest possible concern and importance. Now they view life and the world under one colour, and now under another: one while they are full of hope, and energy, and self-satisfaction; at another time they are absorbed in gloomy presentiments, and anxieties, and melancholy: one day they represent this life as everything; the next they speak against it as of no kind of importance or value at all: and all this, not from any change of circumstances; nor indeed from any one good cause, as relates to themselves, is this alteration in their opinions, but from an innate principle of unsteadiness, and from the temper and humour they happen to be in at the moment of forming them. Now, look at such men in their pursuits, and in their occupations; and there they are just the same as they were in their opinions; there is a perpetual variation. Observe such persons once more—observe them in their attachments: and what are they in this respect? The very same—inconstant and fickle. II. But I come now to the most useful bearing in this argument: and that is the adaptation of it to higher, and to spiritual designs. If the sentiment in the text be a true one in affairs of this world how much more true is it in things connected with that world which is to come! If a man cannot excel in a trade, a profession, or science without study, application, and perseverance; if a man cannot, and with very just cause cannot, we will say, become either a good scholar or a skilful architect, provided he will not submit to the rules of the art, and if he only attend by fits and starts; how, let me ask, can he reasonably expect to become a good Christian by the same means? What is it that exempts Christianity from that careful attention that belongs to every other pursuit? What is it that induces us to hope that the foundation and superstructure, the knowledge, the experience, the application, the comfort of religious truths, are all to be acquired by a few trifling fanciful attempts, just according to a momentary burst of feeling, or a capricious use of accidental opportunities? Is it that religion is of no importance, and therefore need not take up much of our time? Our work is never done. Amongst the clearest truths in the whole Bible is this: that religion is a progressive state. (*E. Scobell, M.A.*) *The wretchedness of a wavering mind*:—I. Now the condition of a man who is divided between two contrary ways of life, between virtue and vice, godliness and irreligion, is CERTAINLY VERY WRETCHED AND DEPLORABLE. 1. This doubtful, uncertain way of living and thinking proceeds from a mean state of mind, such as is beneath the dignity of human nature. 2. But the dignity of our nature, is a consideration capable of touching but few. Let us go on therefore to more plain and affecting considerations. For such an unsettled temper of mind as we have described creates a great deal of trouble and disturbance to the man who is so unhappy as to be master of it. 3. But further, such a temper, so distracted between contrary inclinations and practices, is mischievous to a man in point of interest as well as ease. For it renders him unfit for all the affairs and business of life; incapable of forming advantageous designs with confidence, or of persecuting them with effect. 4. But these are slight inconveniences, in comparison of what follows; that such a wavering, uncertain temper of mind is utterly inconsistent with the terms of salvation, and the hopes of eternal happiness. For it is not an holiness taken up by fits and starts that can carry a man to heaven. It must be a constant regular principle, influencing us throughout, that must do that. II. Secondly, to persuade the man that is thus bewildered to RETRIEVE HIMSELF BY SERIOUS CONSIDERATION, AS SOON AS IS POSSIBLE; AND TO FIX A SURE PRINCIPLE OF VIRTUE IN HIS MIND, THAT MAY GUIDE AND GOVERN HIM THROUGHOUT, AND MAKE HIM UNIFORMLY WISE AND HOLY. For which purpose I shall take leave to recommend two or three plain but useful considerations. 1. And first, he that sets about this work must be sure that his belief is right and sound at the bottom. For it is generally the uncertainty and waveringness of this that produces all that unevenness and disorder in the life and practice of mankind. 2. In the next place, consider well what that particular weight was, that in the days of his irresolution still hung upon him, and clogged all his virtuous endeavours. 3. When he has thus settled his faith upon good ground, and armed himself well

against that sin which does so easily beset him (Heb. xii. 1), he must take care not to suffer himself to come within reach of anything that may anyways unfasten his resolutions, whilst they are yet young and tender. 4. If to these endeavours he joins fervent and unwearied prayer to Almighty God for the aids and support of His grace, he shall assuredly from thence be made perfect at last, be established, strengthened, settled. He shall have a new heart created in him, that shall enable him to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. xv. 58). (*Ep. Atterbury.*) *Reuben's instability*:—Here there is a reference to the forfeiture of the birthright by Reuben, and the sin of which that was the punishment. Its commission is traced to the geyser-like quality of Reuben's character, which burst forth intermittently, now boiling up in a sudden surge, and now receding out of sight. Of this peculiarity we have instances in his spasmodic and therefore unsuccessful attempt to save the life of Joseph by getting him put into the pit, and then leaving him, and in his altogether extravagant offer to allow his two sons to be slain if he did not bring Benjamin safely back. Now, such a temperament never achieves excellence. It lacks perseverance and steadiness of application, and Jacob affirms that Reuben's posterity, taken after their father in this respect, would never rise to any eminence in the nation. Nor did they; for it is remarkable that not one of the judges belonged to this tribe. It gave no great captain to the armies of Israel, and no name to the goodly fellowship of the prophets in the land. In the song of Deborah it is mentioned with disapprobation among those who came not up to the help of the Lord; and the unreliableness of its members may be referred to in the words, "For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart. Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds to hear the bleatings of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart." So it passes down into the region that is below mediocrity, and becomes the type of superficial and short-lived impulse that dies away into inactivity and inefficiency. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Instability unsuccessful*:—Some years ago, there was an eldest boy in one of our religious schools—it was a school at Marlborough—and he was a Christian boy, and the younger boys loved him, and they said that he did more good than the master; he was such a Christian boy. I will not tell you his name, though I know it—he was always first in every good thing—first in loving and fearing God; and he did such good in Marlborough, that many boys said they owed a great deal indeed to that boy. He was the eldest. Reuben is the eldest, and therefore you will see his father calls him, in the verse before the text, "the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power," and he calls him too "unstable as water." Reuben had one great fault, and that spoiled him. Do you know what it was? He was unstable." What does that mean? "Unstable." I will tell you what that word means exactly; it means that his character did not stand; he was always changing; he was not steady to one thing: he was not a firm character: and because he was not a firm or steady character, it spoiled all. Now it says here, you see, that an "unstable man" is like "water." Shall we think how he can be like "water"? There are several sorts of water—what water shall we think of? There is the sea, that is all water, and you know the sea is very restless—it does not keep still—it is not the same one day as it is another day—it occasionally looks a different colour, it sometimes looks green, sometimes blue, sometimes a kind of purple, sometimes whitey-brown; and then it is always tossing about. You remember it says in Isaiah lvii. 20, "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." I do not think that this is what the word means. Do you know how "water" is made? Water is made up of numbers and numbers of little round things called "globules," little spheres; and they touch one another only at points, just like marbles in a bag; they cannot stick to one another. To speak properly, there is not much attraction or cohesion, because they are little round things; but they may be easily separated. Now a piece of wood is altogether different, because it is close, it is not composed of little round things. We can put our hands into a basin of water and move it about, but we cannot put our hands into a piece of wood, it is too firm; but as water sticks so little together, you can easily move it. If you put some water in a basin on a table, and you walk across the room, the water will move by the shaking; and even if you breathe upon it, the breath will cause it to move. For this reason it is so "unstable." And you cannot, you know, make water stand up by itself. Supposing you get some water, and try to make a pillar of the water, you cannot do so. If you try to make water stand up by itself, it will not stand up. No, not even the most wonderful man that ever lived in the world, could make water stand up like a pillar. So a man that is

"unstable" cannot stand; he is always moving—that is what it means. Think of the sea—think of the water in the basin—how it moves by a little touch. You may try but I am sure you cannot make water stand up. It is said of some people they are just like "water," they cannot stand; they are always moving, always changing—"Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." Will you look at Hosea vi. 4—"O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah what shall I do unto thee? For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away." Are you like that? Does all your religion soon pass away, soon go? It is very often the case with little children. I will tell you how it is. You kneel down to say your prayers, and before you have gone through them your thoughts travel I don't know where; your thoughts all wander. Then you go to other things. You go to your studies; you may be very diligent; you commence well; you open your books and begin to study, but before you get a very little way you have looked at something which sends your thoughts all wandering about; you do not keep steady; you are "unstable." Then I will tell you another thing I think about some of you; that you determine that you will be good, and love God, and do what is right; and yet, after perhaps a very little time, you break your resolution. You are "unstable." I will tell you a sad story. An old man was lying on a sick and dying bed, and he sent for all his children. When they gathered round him he said something like this: "My dear children, never grieve the Holy Spirit. Take warning by me. When I was a little boy I had often religious instructions, but I did not take much account of them till I was about sixteen. Then I had very strong religious feelings—I had great convictions of sin, and I remember what I did. I remember saying to myself, 'I must become a Christian, I must be religious, but I am very young now; there are a great many pleasures, and I will take my pleasure now, but will become religious soon.' And so I put it away, and went on till I was twenty-five—just after I was married—and then came another, when it seemed as if the Holy Spirit was striving with me again, for He was very patient with me, and I had very strong religious feelings, and something seemed to whisper to me 'Now, now.' I remember what I did then. I said, 'Now I am married, and I must attend to my wife, to my home, and my children; I cannot forget them just now.' And so it went on till I was forty. And when I was forty, I remember how the Spirit worked in my heart again, and urged me very strongly to decide for God. And again I said, 'I am a man of business, I can't do it while I have to keep up my business; when I give up my business, then I will give my whole heart to God.' And so it went on for another ten years, till I was fifty, and then it once more came to me and said, 'Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.' I put it away more easily than I did before; I thought that soon I should be a very old man, and then I should be infirm and be obliged to stop in-doors, and then it would be the time to be religious. But now I lie upon my sick-bed, and now it does not seem as if the Holy Spirit is with me; He does not seem to draw me. I listen, I listen; but I quenched the Spirit—I stifled conviction. I have gone through life without Him, and now He seems gone! 'Quench not the Spirit.'" And he died. I am not going to say, my dear children, whether that man was saved or not—God only knows—he may be; Jesus may have saved him. I know he was very unhappy indeed, to look back and think when he was dying that, he had been so "unstable." Now I will tell you one more thing in which I think you are like the "water." Don't you find that you are very different, when you are with different sorts of people? When you are with good people, you feel how pleasant it is to be good! Ah, when you go with another sort of people—wicked people, then you are like the wicked people, and you act like them, and feel like them! You are always like the people you are with—changing your character, and striving to please everybody. There is a very awful instance in the Bible of a man who did that. Do you know who it is? Pontius Pilate—he was like the people he was with. When he was with Christ, he was a Christian; when he was with a Jew, he was like a Jew; and when he was with a Roman, he was always like a Roman; and just see what he did. He at last became so wicked that he crucified Christ! He was a weak character. "Unstable as water thou shalt not excel." Now I think you see how you are like "water." Do you remember whether it is so? I think it is. Sometimes you have very good feelings, and they pass away like "the dew" in the morning. I think you make good resolutions and break them again. I think you act according to the people you are with. And in all these things you are "unstable" like the "water." Now God has said, my dear children, that if you are "unstable" like the "water," you "shall not excel." If you are

restless and changeable—if you are easily moved, like the “water” in the basin, by the breath of what anybody says, or the footsteps of a companion—if you cannot stand up you will never be great. Now I come to the all-important thing. Are you very weak, my dear children? Which is weaker—your bodies or your souls? You have not very strong bodies, but your souls are weaker than your bodies. A good old divine, one of the old Puritans, who lived a long time ago in England, says that he always had a broken wine glass, without the bottom, and around the wine glass he used to have the text written—“Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.” His soul was like the wine glass. To remind him how weak he was, he had this wine glass before him with the text written around it—“Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.” How can we become more firm and strong that we may “excel”—that we may all be useful Christians? That is what I want you to think about. One thing is (and I am going to tell you four things), to keep your promise, to be consistent and decided. That is one thing. Let us look at something which does not change. It helps us very much if we want to do anything steadily, to look steadily at steady things. For instance, when a man is steering a ship, he must not look at the waves, he must look at the compass, or at some star; or when a man is ploughing a furrow, he must not look close to him, but at some object at the end of the field, and then the furrow would be straight; and if you want to walk along a plank, you must not look on the plank, you must look at the end. Do that with your soul. Think how unchangeable Jesus Christ has been to you ever since you were born. This is one thing; now I come to the second. You will find, if you live long enough and think about it, that you cannot stand, and your soul cannot stand by itself. As soon as you get a vine in your garden, and you wish to make that vine a splendid tree, you bind it around something—all the little creepers must be entwined about something for that purpose, else it will not become beautiful; and, oh! my dear children, we are all of us creepers, we cannot live and grow unless we creep. Well, let us look at Psalm lxi. 2—“Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.” What a pretty prayer! “Oh! I am a poor, weak little girl (says one), I cannot keep my good resolutions; oh! ‘lead me to the Rock that is higher than I,’—that is, Jesus Christ: He is the Rock, and He will hold me up. And I shall twine around Christ, and shall get strong, because He is strong.” I will tell you about a man who lived some time ago. When he was a boy, he was very passionate, and often became very angry. This little boy had a very good mother—a kind, pious mother; and this mother used to read the Bible with him every morning, and she did what a great many good mothers do, when she had read a passage she used to say to the boy, “Let us take a verse and think of it during the day—have it for our motto for the day.” And one morning, when this little boy had been in a great passion, and had been a very naughty boy indeed, when he went to read to his mother, she chose the sixty-first Psalm, and they read it together, and she said, “Now, my dear boy, let us choose out of this Psalm a verse that shall be for our text for the day; and I think the best will be, ‘Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.’” And then she explained to him that Jesus Christ was “the Rock,” and that he could not conquer his temper if he did not go to Jesus Christ for help, and if he loved Jesus Christ he would be able to conquer himself; and he said, “I know I shall, I am sure I shall, I will conquer myself; I feel so different, that I am sure I shall never be angry again.” But, before the breakfast was over, the little boy was in a passion; yet when he was in that passion, his text came to his mind, “O lead me to the Rock that is higher than I”; and he was conquered much sooner than was generally the case, because he offered up the prayer, “O lead me to the Rock that is higher than I; He will conquer me.” That boy lived on, and had a great many troubles in life. He was a young man who was very unkindly treated. I will not tell you who it was; but he said he found his text like a talisman—that is, a sort of charm; and whenever he was getting angry, he thought of these words, “Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I; and I shall conquer.” And when that man came to lie upon his dying bed, a minister went to see him, and he said, “What shall I read?” And he said, “Oh, read the sixty-first Psalm—I owe everything to that—read it; oh, read it on!” and when the minister came to the end of the second verse—“Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I,”—the sick man cried out, “Stop, stop; I can’t tell you what I owe to my mother who pointed out to me that verse when I was a little boy! She taught me to say, ‘Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I’; and so I was conquered.” Now I must go on to my third point. If you are a weak character, and know it, you must not expose yourself to temptation. Supposing a doctor came and said to you, “Now you are a person who will very easily take a fever”—would not you take great care

not to go near a place where you knew there was a fever? Would not you be very careful? Supposing the cholera was very bad about, and you were told you must be particularly careful what you ate or drank, for you would easily take the cholera. Would not you be careful about your diet? I tell you, as the physician of your soul, that you are a character that will easily catch sin. Then, for God's sake, don't go near it—to danger; don't go in temptation's way, lest you catch that most contagious disease—sin. Once more. Take good care that you have some good foundation, as you are so “unstable.” We may be easily led—take care to have a good foundation. Some time ago a ship was wrecked on the coast. She was riding at anchor, but she slipped her anchor, and so, drifting, ran on shore. The sea was running very high; only a few were saved on that dreadful night; they were saved by swimming on shore, or by getting on planks. There was one man on board ship, who was as calm as possible on that terrific night. One of the sailors went to him and said, “Do you not know the danger? Don't you know we have lost our anchor, and are drifting on to the shore? Our destruction is certain.” “Oh, I know, I know,” he replied, “I have an anchor for the soul, a castle built upon a rock, sure and steadfast.” And it was that which gave him such stability; because he had the anchor of the soul, he could do anything. (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*)

Reuben.—As the first-born, the full sprout of Jacob's strength, Reuben was entitled according to natural right to the first rank among his brethren, the leadership of the tribes, and a double share of the inheritance. This dignity is expressed by Jacob in a few but simple words: “Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power.” Reuben's standing among his brethren could not have been more exalted, and Jacob seems to set it before him in increased and reiterated language. Dignities such as are implied in these words involve tremendous responsibilities, which Reuben did not realise or fulfil. In equally few but startling words, Jacob sets before him his sin and consequent judgment: “Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it; my couch is gone.” Reuben's sin was sensuality, lust, by which he was carried away; and because of this dominating propensity he would never excel. And what is the first truth taught us in this dignity and utter failure of Reuben? It is the truth running through the entire Scripture in every varied form—man's original dignity and his utter failure. Its bud is seen in Eden at man's creation, and the full-blown fruit in the awful and universal apostacy in the Book of Revelation. But there are other and more startling truths shadowed forth in this sin of Reuben's. It is probable that old Jacob had not resented that sin at the time, or that Reuben had thought little of his father's deep wrong, and of the sorrow that had wrung his heart in secret. In a little while it was passed over, and Reuben thought nothing more of it. How often it is so with many. The crime they have committed in secret has for the moment made the conscience uneasy. The deep wrong inflicted has perhaps left some temporary compunction. But because no hand of retribution has been laid upon them, and no shadow of vengeance has darkened their path, it is soon forgotten. The pressure of business, and the round of amusements, and the ten thousand influences driving the thoughts into new channels, has forced it out of memory, and so the thing is forgotten. Nay, but sin dogs the steps, and brings its consequences to light at unexpected moments, and in most unlikely ways. Here, years after its commission, it starts up to darken the path of the criminal, surefooted though slow of pace to cast a blight over all its prospects, and make a man feel that there is a judgment awaiting him. Observe, again, how few trace their not excelling to some past act which has tainted their whole moral and intellectual nature. Some secretly gratified lust has given a downward impetus to the character, which has been again and again repeated. These undisclosed chapters in the man's history are the explanation of his “instability” of character, just as the hectic flush on the countenance betrays the deadly disease preying upon the vitals. There is no remedy for such a state of things but a change of heart, a great and mighty transformation, of soul by the Spirit of God. And even then, the taint of the original sin will colour the natural life to the end, and can only be met by constant watchfulness, struggle, and prayer. (*F. Whitfield, M.A.*)

Instability.—Perfect stability has ceased from the world since the day when Adam fell. He was stable enough when in the garden he was obedient to his Master's will; but when he ate of the forbidden fruit he did not only slide himself, but he shook the standing places of all his posterity. Perfect stability belongs alone to God; He alone, of all beings, is without variableness or shadow of a turning. He is immutable; He will not change. He is

all-wise; He need not change. He is perfect; He cannot change. But men, the best of them, are mutable, and therefore to a degree they are unstable, and do not excel. Yet it is remarkable that, although man has lost perfect stability, he has not lost the admiration of it. Perhaps there is no virtue, or, rather, no compound of virtues, which the world more esteems than stability of mind. You will find that, although men have often misplaced their praise, and have called those great who were not great, morally, but were far below the level of morality, yet they have scarcely ever called a man great who has not been consistent, who has not had strength of mind enough to be stable in his principles. Now my brethren, if it be so in earthly things, it is so also in spiritual. Instability in religion is a thing which every man despises, although every man has, to a degree, the evil in himself; but stability in the firm possession and practice of godliness will always win respect, even from the worldly, and certainly will not be forgotten by Him whose smile is honour and whose praise is glory, even the great Lord and Master, before whom we stand or fall. I have many characters here to-day whom I desire to address in the words of my text. "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." I. First, then, to all Christians permit me to address myself. We are none of us stable as we should be. We had a notion when we were first converted, that we should never know a change; our soul was so full of love that we could not imagine it possible we should ever flag in our devotion; our faith was so strong in our Incarnate Master, that we smiled at older Christians who talked of doubts and fears; our faces were so steadfastly set Zionward that we never imagined By-path Meadow would ever be trodden by our feet. We felt sure that our course would certainly be "like the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." But, my brethren, have we found it so? Have we not this day to lament that we have been very changeable and inconstant, even unstable as water? How unstable have we been in our frames? We have had more changes than even this variable climate of ours. It is a great mercy for us that frames and feelings are not always the index of our security; for we are as safe when we are mourning as we are when we are singing; but, verily, if our true state before God had changed as often as our experience of his presence, we must have been cast into the bottomless pit years ago. And how variable have we been in our faith! In the midst of one trouble we have declared, "though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," we have courted the jeer, we have laughed at the scorn of the world, and have stood like rocks in the midst of foaming billows, when all men were against us; another week has seen us flying away, after denying our Master, because like Peter, we were afraid of some little maid, or of our own shadow. And have you not also, at times, my friends, felt variable in your love? How unstable we are! At one time we are quite certain we are the Lord's; though an angel from heaven should deny our election, or our adoption, we would reply that we have the witness of the Spirit that we are born of God, but perhaps within two minutes we shall not be able to say that we ever had one spiritual feeling. We shall perhaps think we never repented aright, never fled to Christ aright, and did never believe to the saving of soul. Oh! it is no wonder that we do not excel, when we are such unstable creatures. II. And now leaving these general remarks I have to single out a certain class of persons. I believe them to be TRUE CHRISTIANS, but they are Christians of a singular sort. How many Christians have we in our churches that are unstable as water? I suppose they were born so. They are just as unstable in business as they are in religion; they open a grocer's shop, and shut it in three months, and turn drapers, and when they have been drapers long enough to become almost bankrupts, they leave that and try something else. When they were boys they could never play a game through; they must always be having something fresh; and now they are just as childish as when they were children. Look at them in doctrine, you never know where to find them. Oh ye unstable Christians, hear ye the word of the Lord! "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." Your life shall have little of the cream of happiness upon it: you shall not walk in the midst of the King's highway, in which no lion shall be found, but you shall walk on the edge of the way, where you shall encounter every danger, feel every hardship and endure every ill. You shall have enough of God's comfort to keep you alive, but not enough to give you joy in your spirit and consolation in your heart. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Reuben the unstable*:—1. Reuben seems to have been a man who exercised no control over himself. He schooled himself to no particular line of thought or work, but was carried hither and thither by every momentary desire or passion. 2. Jacob's prophecy concerning Reuben was a true one. His weakness and character and its baneful influence would have seem to have affected all his pos-

terity. There is no record of any great action, and no mention of any judge or prophet or leader of any kind belonging to the tribe of Reuben. 3. The character of this man is by no means a rarity. There are those who have had every advantage of birth, education, and social position to start with in life; but from the first they were so shifting in purpose, so volatile in character, and so apt to be carried away by impulse and passion, that they have not benefited by their superior advantages, and have utterly failed to make progress in the race of life. 4. It is the curse of sin, that it unnerves man, destroying the nobility of his character and bringing him down to be the slave of his lower nature. 5. The great secret of excellence lies in steadiness and perseverance. (*J. Menzies.*) *Example of indecision:*—Pilate exhibited a sad degree of vacillation, inconsistency, indecision. Now he throws all blame upon the priests: "I am innocent of His blood; see ye to it." Again he takes the entire responsibility upon himself. "Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and power to release?" Now he pronounces Jesus innocent, yet with the same breath proposes to have Him punished as guilty; now he gives Him up, and then he has recourse to every kind of expedient to rescue. Unstable as water, he does not, he cannot succeed. He allowed others to dictate to him. Carelessly and inconsiderately, he submits that to their judgment which he should have kept wholly within his own hold. He becomes thus as a wave of the sea, as a feather in the air, which every breeze of heaven bloweth about as it listeth. (*Dr. Hanna.*) *Vacillation of indecision:*—A man without decision can never be said to belong to himself; since, if he dared to assert that he did, the puny force of some cause about as powerful you would have supposed as a spider, may make a seizure of the hapless boaster the very next moment, and contemptuously exhibit the futility of the determinations by which he was to have proved the independence of his understanding and his will. He belongs to whatever can make capture of him, and one thing after another vindicates its right to him, by arresting him while he is trying to go on; as twigs and chips floating near the edge of a river, are intercepted by every weed and whirled in every little eddy. Having concluded on a design, he may pledge himself to accomplish it—if the hundred diversities of feeling which may come within the week will let him. His character precluding all foresight of his conduct, he may sit and wonder what form and direction his views and actions are destined to take to-morrow; as a farmer has often to acknowledge that next day's proceedings are at the disposal of its winds and clouds. (*J. Foster.*) *Weakness of indecision:*—Incapable of setting up a firm purpose on the basis of things as they are, he is often employed in vain speculations on some different supposable state of things which would have saved him from all this perplexity and irresolution. He thinks what a determined course he could have pursued if his talents, his health, his age had been different; if he had been acquainted with some one person sooner; if his friends were on this or the other point different from what they are; or if fortune had showered her favours on him. And he gives himself as much license to complain as if all these advantages had been among the rights of his nativity, but refused by a malignant or capricious fate to his life. Thus he is occupied, instead of marking with a vigilant eye, and seizing with a strong hand all the possibilities of his actual situation. (*Ibid.*) *Example of indecision:*—He was—i.e. Balaam—as an old writer remarks, one of those unstable men whom the apostle calls "double-minded," an ambi-dexter in religion, like Redwald king of the East Saxons, the first that was baptised, who (as Camden relates) had in the same church one altar for the Christian religion, and another for sacrificing to devils; and a loaf of the same leaven was our resolute Rufus, that painted God on one side of his shield and the devil on the other, with this desperate inscription, *In utrumque paratus*—"ready for either." *Not wavering:*—It is related of Alexander the Great, that, being asked how it was that he had conquered the world, he replied, "By not wavering." *The decided man:*—Behold the decided man! He may be a most evil man; he may be grasping, avaricious, covetous, unprincipled, still, look how the difficulties of life know the strong man, and give up the contest with him. A universal homage is paid to the decided man as soon as he appears among men. He walks by the light of his own judgment; he has made up his mind; and having done so, henceforth action is before him. He cannot bear to sit amidst unrealised speculations; to him speculation is only valuable that it may be resolved into living and doing. There is no indifference, no delay. The spirit is in arms; all is in earnest. Thus Pompey, when hazarding his life on a tempestuous sea in order to be at Rome on an important occasion, said, "It is necessary for me to go; it is not necessary for me to live." Thus Cæsar, when he crossed the Rubicon, burned the

ships upon the shore which brought his soldiers to land, that there might be no return. (*E. P. Hood.*) *Evils of inconstancy*:—An inconstant and wavering mind, as it makes a man unfit for society (for that there can be no assurance of his words or purposes, neither can we build on them without deceit), so, besides that, it makes a man ridiculous, it hinders him from ever attaining any perfection in himself (for a rolling stone gathers no moss, and the mind, while it would be everything, proves nothing. Oft changes cannot be without loss); yea, it keeps him from enjoying that which he hath attained. For it keeps him ever in work, building, pulling down, selling, changing, buying, commanding, forbidding. So, while he can be no other man's friend, he is the least his own. It is the safest course for a man's profit, credit and ease, to deliberate long, to resolve surely, hardly to alter, not to enter upon that whose end he sees not unanswerable, and when he is once entered not to surcease till he have attained the end he foresaw. So may he, to good purpose, begin a new work when he hath well finished the old. (*Bp. Hall.*) *Difficulty of decision*:—"I have often made stern resolutions not to overwork myself, and to take more relaxation; but 'no' is not learnt in a day." (*George Moore.*) *A contrast of decision*:—When general Suwaroff commanded, under the Prince of Coburg, on the frontiers of Turkey, he had an army of twenty-five thousand men. Coburg himself had thirty-seven thousand, and the Turks only twenty-eight thousand. Prince Coburg's army, which had taken a good position on a rising ground, about nine miles distant from Suwaroff, was attacked and obliged to fall back. Coburg then wrote to Suwaroff, "I was attacked this morning by the Turks. I have lost my position and artillery. I send you no instructions what to do. Use your own judgment, only let me know what you have done as soon after as you can." Suwaroff immediately sent the following answer, "I shall attack the Turks to-morrow morning, drive them from your position, and retake your cannon." Before three o'clock in the afternoon Suwaroff kept his word; and Coburg's army had the cannon and their old position before night. *The prophecy respecting Reuben*:—That the tribe of Reuben did not excel is evident at the first glance of Hebrew history. At the time of the Exodus it was but the seventh in population, and, before entering Canaan, its numbers had so far diminished that it was then the ninth (*Numb. i. 21; xxvi. 5*). On the division of the Promised Land, the Reubenites received an inheritance on the east side of the Jordan, where they were exposed to the incursions of surrounding nations (*Numb. xxxii. 1; Josh. i. 14, &c.*), and it is observable that they were among the first of the tribes of Israel who were carried away by the kings of Assyria (see *1 Chron. v. 26*). (*Thornley Smith.*) *Strong resolution*:—It is a miserable thing to see men and women driven before the wind like thistledown. You can make your choice whether, if I may so say, you shall be like balloons that are at the mercy of the gale, and can only shape their course according as it comes upon them and blows them along; or like steamers that have an inward power that enables them to keep their course from whatever point the wind blows; or like some sharply-built sailing ship, that, with a strong hand at the helm, and canvas rightly set, can sail almost in the teeth of the wind and compel it to bear it along in all but the opposite direction to that in which it would carry her if she lay like a log on the water. (*A. MacLaren, D.D.*) *An irresolute man*:—Surely there is nothing walks the earth more contemptible, as well as more certainly evil, than a man who lets himself be made by whatever force may happen to be strongest near him, and fastening up his helm, and unshipping his oars, is content to be blown about by every vagrant wind, and rolled in the trough of each curling wave. (*Ibid.*) *Man united to the strong*:—We must be made fast to something that is fast, if we are not to be swept like thistledown before the wind. (*Ibid.*) *A strong purpose in life*:—What a noble thing any life becomes, that has driven through it the strength of a uniting single purpose, like a strong shaft of iron bolting together the two tottering walls of some old building. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 5-7. *Simeon and Levi are brethren*.—*The blessing of Simeon and Levi*:—I. THEIR SIN. 1. Immoderate revenge. 2. Cruelty to unoffending beasts. 3. Their cruelty was deliberate. II. THEIR PENALTY. 1. To be disavowed by the good. 2. Their deed is branded with a curse. 3. They are condemned to moral and political weakness. (*T. H. Leale.*) *Simeon and Levi*:—The passage begins by declaring "Simeon and Levi are brethren." "Brethren" not merely as having the same parents, but in thought, feeling, action. "Instruments of cruelty are in their habitations." Such wickedness had these two brothers committed (see chap. xxxiv.

25th and following verses) that Jacob could have no sympathy with it. As they had joined together to commit it, so righteous retribution was to follow. They were to be "divided" and "scattered." Thus the murderous propensity of their nature would bring untold trouble upon Israel, and only by breaking this union and scattering them throughout Israel could their power for evil be weakened. They should form no independent or compact tribes. This sentence was so strikingly fulfilled when Canaan was conquered, that on the second numbering under Moses, Simeon had become the weakest of all the tribes (see Numb. xxvi. 14). 1. Among the many lessons taught by the conduct of this tribe let us notice first, that though men may be "brethren," there may be underneath this hallowed term principles utterly at variance with it. How sacred may be the outward sign, how suggestive of all that is commendable and holy, how hideous the principles it covers! The whited sepulchre may indeed cover the revolting sight of dead men's bones. Such terms are the outward memorials of what should be, but too often they serve to represent their very opposite. One bearing the holiest of all names, Christian, may have a devil at heart. 2. Mark another truth. "Their swords are weapons of violence," the patriarch says—the "anger was fierce," the "wrath was cruel." The sword is a lawful weapon. Anger may be right and wrath too. It is when they degenerate into "violence," "fierceness," and "cruelty" that they become sin. From being instruments of righteousness it is an easy transition to become instruments of Satan. And let not our inveterate self-righteousness take refuge under the covering that because no such crime as "houghing the oxen" is ours, therefore we are all right before God. Is it possible for such an easy self-deception? Yes, possible, and the thought of many, yea of most. What! is there not adultery in a "look"? Is there not murder in a feeling? 3. And observe, it is the sin that is cursed and not the sinner: "Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel." It is the same all through the Bible. The sinner is never cursed apart from the sin that is in him. And for this sin which draws down that curse God has made a rich provision in Christ's precious blood. If the sinner is cursed it is because he loves his sin, and clings to it, and will not have it removed. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." Sin must be cursed. And if the sinner will not avail himself of the remedy, but still cleave to his sin, then he may be cursed with it—"the wrath of God abideth on him." 4. Observe another truth in the history of these tribes in conjunction with that of Reuben in the last chapter. It is this, that the result of all sin, all living to the flesh, is diminution. Reuben's sin led to it, for Moses had to pray that he might have a "few men" left, and not become altogether extinct. Simeon and Levi were to be "divided" and "scattered"; and both traceable to one cause—giving way to the flesh, to sensuality and selfwill. Yes, living to self, to sin, to anything lower than Christ, does diminish. It makes us little—increasingly little. It banishes every vestige of largeness and greatness and grandness from our character, and from everything about us. We become little hearted, little souled, little in our ways of looking at things. 5. Lastly, let Jacob's word of warning go forth to every Christian: "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united." The patriarch, as he thinks of their sin, traces its source to a "secret" spring, and its manifestation in an "assembly." He warns us to have nothing to do with one or the other. The outward association and the secret spring are both alike dangerous to the soul. Like the Psalmist in his first Psalm, he would, as a faithful sentinel, warn us against coming in the way of either. And it is well, when evil is around us, to talk to one's own soul about it all. "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; mine honour, be not thou united." To make a clamour is easy. But let us watch our own souls, and all such meditation should have one effect—one of solemnity, separation, holiness: "Come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united." If there is anything of God in you, then, "be not thou united." No union with the flesh, or with aught that is contrary to God. (F. Whitfield, M.A.) *The tutor's prediction respecting Tiberius*:—Theodorus Gaddaræus, who was tutor to Tiberius the Roman Emperor, observing in him, while a boy, a very sanguinary nature and disposition, which lay lurking under a show of levity, was wont to call him "a lump of clay steeped and soaked in blood." His predictions of him did not fail in the event. Tiberius thought death was too light a punishment for any one that displeased him. Hearing that one Carnulius who had displeased him had cut his own throat, "Carnulius," said he, "has escaped me." To another, who begged of him that he might die quickly, "No," said he, "you are not so much in favour as that yet." (*Moral and*

Religious Anecdotes.) A curse or a blessing:—I would remind you of the different histories of the tribes of Simeon and Levi, as being alike fulfilments of one and the same prophecy. That was not because the prediction itself was, like some of the heathen oracles, so vague or so ambiguous that it could not be falsified by any event, for the phrases, "I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel," are both definite and clear. But the explanation is to be found in the subsequent conduct of the men of Levi, as contrasted with that of the men of Simeon, whereby in the one case the prophecy took the ultimate character of a blessing, and in the other it kept that of a curse. Now this was in the lifetime of a tribe which extended over hundreds of years, but something not dissimilar may occur in the lifetime of an individual. Let us suppose that two men have been guilty of the same sin, and that as the penal consequence they have both had to bear the same thing, namely, separation from their native land and virtual transportation to a new and strange country. But the one, unwarned thereby, continues in his wicked ways, and goes down and down in iniquity, until he ceases to be recognizable even by those who look for him; while the other, moved to penitence, begins a new career, earns an honourable independence, gives himself to public affairs, and becomes a benefactor to the colony or the state, so that at length his name is everywhere mentioned with gratitude and respect. Here the proximate results in both cases were the same, but the ultimate how different! and all owing to the different dispositions of the two men. Nor is this an improbable supposition; you may have come on many cases like it, and they are all full of warning to some and encouragement to others, not only for the present life, but also for that which is to come. Up to a certain point we have power, by our penitence, to make blessing for ourselves for the life that now is and for that which is to come; nay, even after we have lost the first opportunity, there may come another on a lower plane; but at length there is a limit, beyond which all such opportunities cease, and we must "dree our weird" eternally. (W. M. Taylor, D.D.)

Vers. 8-12. **JUDAH, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise.**—*The blessing of Judah*:—I. THAT HE SHOULD WIN THE PRAISE OF HIS BRETHREN. II. THAT HE SHOULD BE THE TYPE OF THE VICTORIOUS HERO. 1. A growing power. 2. A righteous power. 3. A power to be dreaded. III. THAT HE SHOULD BE THE TYPE OF THE MESSIAH. 1. In his sovereignty. For—(1) He had regal power. (2) He had power combined with gentleness. (3) He had a power which sweetly wins obedience. 2. In his prosperity. (T. H. Leale.) *Judah's praise*:—I. JUDAH'S PRAISE. 1. He is first in intercession. 2. He is first in wisdom. 3. He takes precedence in offering (see Numb. vii. 12). 4. He takes precedence in march (see Numb. x. 14; Judg. i. 2). In all things he has the pre-eminence (Psa. lxxviii. 67, 68). II. JUDAH'S TRIUMPHS ABROAD. "Thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies." Illustrate by life of David—He passed through severe conflicts (read 1 Sam. xvii. 34-36). He gained great victories (2 Chron. xiii. 14). He founded a peaceful empire. He utterly crushed the forces of his foes, and broke the neck of all opposition. So has our Lord done by His life, death, resurrection, reigning power, and second coming. III. JUDAH'S HONOURS AT HOME. "Thy father's children shall bow down before thee." 1. He became the head of the family. 2. He was clothed with lion-like power. "He couched as a lion, and as an old lion" (see ver. 9). "The lion of the tribe of Judah hath prevailed" (Rev. v. 5). 3. He is the centre of our assembling. "To him shall the gathering of the people be" (ver. 10). 4. His glory is His meekness. "Binding his foal," &c. (ver. 11). "Thy King cometh, meek and sitting upon a colt the foal of an ass" (Matt. xxi. 5). 5. The wine bath at His first and second advent makes Him lovely in our eyes (vers. 11, 12); also "I have trodden the wine-press alone" (Isa. lxxiii. 1-3). 6. He is king to us for ever. Hallelujah (see Hos. xi. 12). "Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit: but Judah yet ruleth with God." Are we among the foes against whom He fights as a lion? Let us beware how we rouse Him up (ver. 9). Are we among His friends for whom He fights? Let us praise Him with all our hearts, and now bow down before Him. Are we not His Father's children? Do we hunger and thirst after heavenly food? See in the 12th verse how abundant are wine and milk with Him. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The blessing of Judah*:—The first verse of Jacob's blessing on Judah begins with the final triumph of the tribe and victory over all its foes. It then descends to details as to how this victory will be accomplished. As we look at it let us read in it the history of the Lion of the tribe of Judah. There are consecutive stages in the verses,

beginning with the highest in the first line of the first verse of the text: "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise." The order of these verses is one of constant occurrence in the Bible. The issue, great, grand, and glorious, is first stated, then we descend to the details by which it is brought about. "Thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise." Praise is the final note and the never ending one to the Lord Jesus Christ. It begins when the soul is first brought to know experimentally the Lord Jesus Christ, in His Person and in His work, as the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Praise for the pardon of all guilt and the forgiveness of all sin through the precious blood of Jesus. Praise for that wondrous love that has stooped down to our lowest condition and lifted us up out of the pit of corruption to His throne of glory. And whence is the source of all this joy and praise now and hereafter? We have it in the next clause: "Thy hand shall be in the neck of Thine enemies." It is that hand of which we read so much in God's Word. "He laid His right hand upon me." "And Jesus stretched forth His hand." These and such passages tell us what it means. It is Christ putting forth His power over every foe. He conquered death and hell. He conquers still every foe thou hast. Therefore it is that "Thy Father's children bow down to Thee." For whom have we in heaven or on earth like Him! There is none like Thee! Lord, to whom shall we go? Let every tongue be vocal with Thy praise, every heart bow down at Thy feet. Let all our powers, all that is nearest and dearest, be laid there. Yes, "the father's children shall bow down before Him." The whole of Israel and Judah shall bow down before Jesus. He is their Messiah and their King. But observe further how this is brought about. "Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion and as an old lion: who shall rouse him up?" The words point to something far greater and deeper in spiritual import. In this graphic picture we behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Lord Jesus Christ. In the young lion ripening into full strength as a growing lion, and becoming the ancestor of the lion tribe, we see the growth of this Lion from infancy to manhood. "He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant and as a root out of a dry ground." "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old from everlasting. And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep: who, if he go through, both treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver" (Mic. v. 2-8). "He couched; he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion; who shall stir him up?" (Numb. xxiv. 9). In all these passages we see the Lion of the tribe of Judah going forth at the head, and as the Leader of His people Israel. And what is the meaning of the lion seizing its prey and then ascending to its lair in the mountains? What but that same Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Son of God from heaven, seizing its prey and conquering it, when He laid down His life on the cross. There He met every foe, and gained His great victory over the devil, over sin and death and the grave. There He seized the prey, and from that great fight and victory "He went up"—up to His Father's throne as man's great Representative. And so we have Him brought before us (Rev. v. 5, 6) in the double character as the Lamb of God, the Sin-bearer of the human race, and in the royal dignity of the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Yes, our Jesus went up from the prey, and as He went up, ten thousand times ten thousands of angels uttered their voices, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord, strong and mighty; the Lord, mighty in battle. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of Glory" (Psa. xxiv. 7, 8, 10). But there is another figure in the picture drawn by Jacob. The figure of a lion is followed by that of a lioness, peculiarly fierce in defending its young. Have we not here the Lion of the tribe of Judah as the Avenger of His people, coming forth to execute judgment upon the nations? At present we see this Lion "stooping down," "couching," waiting for that moment when He shall come forth to seize upon the prey. "From the prey" He has indeed "gone up"; but He is to return again as the Lion of the tribe of Judah to "take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. i. 7-10; Rom. xi. 26; John xiv. 2, 3; Acts i. 11; Rev. xix. 11-15; Matt. xxiii. 39; Amos iii. 11; Rev. i. 7; Heb. ix. 28; Isa. xi. 10, 11; Phil. iii. 20, 21; 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17; Zech. xiv. 4, 5). But to pass on to the remaining portion of the text: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, till Shiloh come, and unto

Him shall the gathering of the people be." A sceptre is the symbol of regal command, and, in its earliest form, it was a long staff which the king held in his hand when speaking in public assemblies; when he sat upon his throne he, rested it "between his feet" inclining towards himself. The idea is that Judah was to have the rule, the chieftainship, till Shiloh came. We must also bear in mind that the coming of Shiloh was not to terminate the rule of Judah. It would then only attain to full dominion in the Person of the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Judah was to bear the sceptre with victorious lion-courage until, in the future Shiloh, the obedience of the nations came to Him, and through Him eventually widening into the peaceful government of the world. The term "Shiloh" is strikingly confirmatory of this view in relation to Christ and His work. Critically it means "rest," "peace," "quietness." So Christ is called the Prince of Peace (Isa. ix. 6). "In His time," it is said, "there shall be abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth" (Psa. lxxii. 7). Again, "This Man shall be our peace" (Mic. v. 5). Of Christ, it is said, "peace on earth" was sung by angels at His birth. His own words were, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you": "Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest": and again, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me: and ye shall find rest unto your souls": again, "These things have I spoken unto you that in Me ye might have peace." Peace, rest, and quietness, these are the meaning of "Shiloh," and they are all fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. But let us mark another expression of Jacob's with reference to this Shiloh: "unto Him shall the gathering of the people be." Two meanings are wrapped up in these words. First, Shiloh is the Gatherer; and secondly, He gathers to Himself. Mark how our blessed Lord confirms this Himself: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." This the Lord Jesus is doing now in grace; but the full accomplishment has not yet taken place. The time is drawing near when "all kings shall bow down before Him, all nations shall serve Him." "As I live, saith the Lord, to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall confess." And the time is at hand. We can even now hear the sound of His chariot wheels in the distance. The Church's journey is nearly done. All things tell us that the morning is at hand, and with that morning the joyous greeting and the eternal gladness, the sun that shall no more go down, and the hallelujahs of a multitude that no man can number meeting in the house of their Father to go no more out. Blessed morning, long expected! Hasten thy dawning upon our troubled world! Yea, "come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!" But to revert once more to Jacob's blessing on Judah. Observe the superabundance of Judah's blessings, and their deep spiritual import: "binding his foal unto the vine; and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes." "His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk." Judah is here depicted as having attained, even before the coming of Shiloh, to a rest acquired by victory over surrounding foes, and enjoying in peaceful repose the abundance of his inheritance. But such a view is far from exhausting the words here brought before us. Indeed, in no full sense were they ever realized in the tribe of Judah. It is to the many and great spiritual blessings of the Lion of the tribe of Judah these words refer. We read of "the love of Christ that passeth knowledge"; of "joy unspeakable and full of glory"; that if all the things about Jesus were to be written "the world itself could not contain the books that should be written"; that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him." And let us notice, every one of these blessings are directly connected with Christ Himself. The word "His," which runs through these verses, shows us this. "His eyes red"; "His teeth white"; "His garments washed in wine"; "His clothes in the blood of grapes." Such expressions remind us of the Song of Solomon, in which the Beloved is described in similar language. They all show us the preciousness of the Person of the Lord Jesus; just as the beloved apostle loved to dwell upon it in his description in Rev. i. 13-16. (*F. Whitfield, M.A.*)

Ver. 10. The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be.—*A revelation of Christ*:—I. Using the word prophecy in its predictive sense, this is THE LANGUAGE OF UNQUESTIONABLE PROPHECY. II. This prophecy contains A REVELATION OF CHRIST. III. This revelation of Christ was connected with the announcement of the PARTICULAR TIME WHEN HE WAS TO APPEAR. IV. This announce-

ment is connected with a statement showing in what way His people will come to Him. It is at once predictive and descriptive. V. This statement suggests an inquiry into the design of Christ in gathering the people to Himself. In harmony with His title as "the Peaceful One," His grand design is to give them rest.

1. Rest, by reconciling them to God.
2. Rest, by effecting the spiritual union of man with man.
3. Rest, by leading us to perfect rest in another world. (*C. Stanford, D.D.*)

*The Shiloh; or, the world's tranquilizer:—*I. THE FULFILLED PART OF THIS PROPHECY CONCERNING CHRIST. 1. That Judah should have regal power. 2. The continuation of this authority up to a certain time. 3. The fulfilled part of this prophecy shows two things—(1) Man's power, through God, of foreseeing the future. (2) God's character as the Governor of the world. (a) His faithfulness, strictly adhering to His word through the sweep of ages. (b) His almightiness, so over-ruling the affairs of nations and of generations as to bring about to the very hour the facts He foretold. II. THE FULFILLING PART OF THIS PROPHECY. "Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be." 1. Self-sacrificing kindness attracts men. 2. Marvellousness attracts men. 3. Promise of good attracts men. 4. Sublime grandeur attracts men. (*Homilist.*)

*The promised Shiloh:—*I. THE TITLE OF THE SAVIOUR. 1. A messenger, or one who is sent (*John vi. 29, 38, 57; vii. 16; xxviii. 9-33*). 2. Peace-maker (*Eph. ii. 13; Col. i. 20*). 3. Prosperous Saviour. II. THE APPEARING OF THE MESSIAH. 1. He was to be of the tribe of Judah. 2. He was to come before the rule and authority of the tribe of Judah should cease. III. THE WORK OF THE MESSIAH. "Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be." They are gathered—1. To His cross as the source of salvation. 2. To His cause as His devoted followers. 3. To His Church as the visible friends of His kingdom. 4. To His royal standard as His loyal and obedient subjects. 5. To His glorious kingdom as the trophies of His grace, to shine forth in the lustre of purity and blessedness for ever and ever. Learn: 1. The true character of the Lord Jesus. He is the promised Shiloh. 2. Have we been brought to a saving experimental knowledge of His grace? 3. The full accomplishment of the text is yet to come. (*J. Burns, D.D.*)

*The prophecy of Jacob respecting Shiloh:—*I. It will be proper, first, to consider the prophecy and its fulfilment. Until the period at which it was delivered the nation of Israel was not divided into tribes; but from this period it was always so divided. The prophecy asserts that the sceptre should not depart from the tribe of Judah until a personage here denominated Shiloh should appear. 1. What we are to understand by the term "sceptre," as here employed, is the whole question: whether it relates to regal authority, as some suppose. This appears improbable; for, in the first place, the regal sceptre was not specially placed in the tribe of Judah, and could not be said to depart from that tribe more than another; secondly, Saul was of the tribe of Benjamin, not of Judah; neither were the Maccabeans of Judah's tribe. "Sceptre" here denotes a staff of office; each tribe had its rod of power, and the meaning is that the authority of a tribe should remain in Judah until the period specified should arrive. After the three captivities the ten tribes, which had been separated from those of Judah and Benjamin in the reign of Rehoboam, were lost and blended among the nations. But Judah and Benjamin, thenceforward regarded as one tribe, still possessed its rod of authority, and hence the name of Jew, derived from Judah, was used to mark the whole nation. Judah remained as a separate people during the captivity at Babylon. 2. The term "lawgiver" must be limited in its interpretation by the term "sceptre." 3. Concerning the meaning of the term "Shiloh," which occurs only in the text, various opinions have been proposed; the most probable is that it denotes the Peace-maker, Jesus Christ, who came (as the angels celebrated His nativity) to give "peace on earth"; or, as others think, it may mark Him as "sent," and thus be taken as the same word with "Siloam," which the evangelist interprets as "sent"; He continually spoke of Himself as one whom God had "sent." 4. The prophecy proceeds to state that "to Him shall the gathering of the people be"; words which express the dependence of faith, the allegiance of hope, which would centre in the promised Lord of all. Jesus Christ is the bond of a new society on earth! II. BY WAY OF BRIEF IMPROVEMENT OBSERVE—1. The force of prophecy as an evidence of inspiration. The sign and test of prophecy is its fulfilment, according to the rule laid down by Moses, "if the word does not take place the Lord has not spoken." 2. The dignity of our Lord. He appears as the chief, the central object of prophecy; the light that illuminates its obscurity. 3. The consolation which believers may derive from the character which our Saviour sustains. 4. Our assembling on this and similar occasions

proves the truth of the prediction; it is a comment on the words, "To Him shall the gathering of the people be." Why are we not Gentile idolaters? it is because "Shiloh" has appeared among us. 5. Observe, as the last thing, the vanity of Jewish hope. The people to whom He came are still "looking for another": contradicting all prophecy, all history! But when the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in, when the times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled, the children of Judah shall yet be visited with the Spirit of grace and supplications; "they shall look on Him whom they have pierced; and shall mourn for Him as one that mourneth for his first-born." Let us pray for their national conversion. (*R. Hall, M.A.*)

The prophecy respecting Shiloh.—I. WE SHALL ENDEAVOUR TO ASCERTAIN THE GENERAL PURPORT OF THE TERMS, SCEPTRE, LAWGIVER, AND SHILOH. If these words are satisfactorily defined, and correctly applied, there will be no difficulty whatever in the discussion of our second proposition. In our language the sceptre is a kind of royal staff or baton, which is borne on solemn occasions by kings as a token of their command and royal authority. In the Word of God it has evidently the same meaning, and was similarly used in ancient times. With regard to the word lawgiver it seems to signify legislative, or rather judicial, authority, and is intended to express the continuance of both civil and ecclesiastical power until the coming of Shiloh. But the remaining term appears the most important, and demands particular attention. It is the keystone of the prophetic edifice by which we must observe the symmetry, the magnificence, and the perfection of the whole. Shiloh evidently relates to some person, and the question is, "Of whom speaketh the prophet this?" (*Acts viii. 34.*) We hesitate not to reply, he speaks of the Messiah, even Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. II. TO CONSIDER OR PROVE THE EXACT ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE PROPHECY. The passage intimates—1. The departure of the sceptre from the other tribes of Israel. 2. That on Messiah's appearance Judah should also give up his pre-eminence. 3. Men are to be gathered to Christ. It is of little consequence what name they bear in the professing world, what talents they possess, or with what external privileges they are favoured unless they are brought to Christ. He is the end of prophecy, the substance of ancient shadows. (1) They shall be gathered for purposes of mercy by the ministration of the gospel. (2) The people are to be gathered to Jesus by the agency of His own Spirit. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth" (*John vi. 63.*) (3) The people shall be gathered to Christ in His Church. (4) The people shall be gathered to Christ at the last day for judgment. (*T. Wood.*)

The Shiloh prophecy.—There are, you perceive, three parts of the blessing, each taking up and repeating the happy name of Judah: "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise," &c.; "Judah is a lion's whelp," &c.; and, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah," &c. Let us take these three parts in their order. I. "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies: thy father's children shall bow down before thee." There are here two things—the relation of Judah to his brethren in Israel and his relation to the enemies of Israel. His relation to his brethren in Israel is expressed in the first and last clauses, "Thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise"—"thy father's children shall bow down before thee." Now that there is a general reference here to the supremacy of Judah among the tribes is beyond doubt; but I cannot avoid the conclusion, a conclusion which has been strengthened by a very close examination of the principal words in this verse, that a greater than Judah is here, even Jesus, whose praise is sung by all the true Israel of God, before whom all the children of Abraham according to the spirit bow down and worship. This is supported by several considerations. The name "Judah" means "Praise of God," or "Glory to God." And there is, I cannot help thinking, something more than curiosity in the fact that if Hebrew equivalents were given for the Greek words in the hymn which was sung by angels over Bethlehem's plains, when the great Son of Judah was born there, a Prince and a Saviour, it might read thus, "Judah in the highest, on earth Shiloh"; "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace." This view is still further strengthened by the fact that the word here rendered "praise"—"thy brethren shall praise"—is used almost exclusively of praise to God. And if we are right in our view as to the clauses which refer to the relation of Judah to his brethren in Israel, it follows that in that clause which refers to his relation to the enemies of Israel we see not only the victories of Judah over the nations around him, but the victories of the great Son of Judah over His enemies all over the world. We have in fact here the germ of those numerous prophecies of which the second Psalm may be taken as a specimen. II. "Judah is a lion's whelp:

from the prey, my son, thou art gone up; he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion: who shall rouse him up?" We have here Judah's supremacy and strength set before us in a lively figure, the figure of a lion. You observe of course the gradation in the prophecy: first the young lion rejoicing in his growing strength; then the adult lion in the full development of his power; and lastly, the old lion reposing in quiet majesty, satisfied with former triumphs, enjoying the fruit of them, but retaining his terrible strength, so that even the boldest dare not rouse him up. Here again we have the basis and explanation of not a little of subsequent prophecy. We find the Lion of Judah again in Balaam's prophecy (Num. xxiv. 9; also xxiii. 24). We find it in prophecies where perhaps we little expect it, e.g., Isa. xxix. 1, 2, where Ariel, you must remember, is the Hebrew for "Lion of God." So, too, the lamentation of Ezekiel xix. is all founded on this prophecy. The reference throughout all these is obvious, to the lion strength and prowess of the royal tribe of Judah. But is this all? Perhaps some of you may be ready to say, "Yes, it is all." Surely it cannot be said that there is any of the testimony of Jesus in a passage like that. It certainly seems as unlikely as any other prophetic passage in the whole Bible. Yet even here, if we take the Scripture for our guide, comparing Scripture with Scripture, the testimony of Jesus is not absent. And if you wish proof, follow me to two passages far apart from each other and from this, and yet evidently related to each other and to this. First, let us turn to that chapter about Ariel, "the Lion of God" (Isa. xxix.). Read especially verses 11 and 12, and compare them with Rev. v. 1-5. The Ariel of the Old Testament here appears as the "Lion of the tribe of Judah" in the New. Who is the "Lion of the tribe of Judah"? No one reading that chapter in Revelation can hesitate about the answer. After all it is Jesus, the meek and lowly, and yet the great and terrible Jesus, the Lamb slain, and also the Lion slaying. He is the "Lion of the tribe of Judah!" We may not forget that there is such a thing as "the wrath of the Lamb." III. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh come," &c. Who is Shiloh? Most clearly He is "the Seed of the woman." I set aside the translation, "until Judah come to Shiloh," i.e., the place where the tabernacle was set up after the conquest of Canaan; I set it aside, because though grammatically possible, it is contrary to the scope of the prophecy, Judah having no more relation to the place long afterwards called Shiloh than any of the other tribes, and less than Joseph, in whose territory the place was; because it exhausts the prophecies in the early history of the tribes of Israel, whereas the patriarch says at the beginning that he is about to speak of that which shall happen "in the last days"; and because the supremacy of Judah over the other tribes, and her lion-like conquests, are to be found after, and not before, the children of Israel came to Shiloh. Besides, there is no evidence that any place of the name of Shiloh was known at this time, and there was certainly no gathering of the nations (the word in the Hebrew is not the singular, "people," but the plural, "peoples" or "nations") to Shiloh. Without any hesitation, then, we adhere to our own translation. And then the question comes: if Shiloh be the Messiah, as He evidently is, what is the meaning of the name? The vast majority of interpreters have always, and do still connect the word "Shiloh" with that well-known family of Hebrew words signifying "peace," "rest," so that "Shiloh" will signify "the One who brings peace," "the One who gives rest." There is almost everything in favour of this interpretation. It connects beautifully with the image of peace set forth in verses 11 and 12 which follow, and is strongly contrasted with the war-like metaphor of that which precedes (ver. 9). It agrees with the circumstances under which the name "Shiloh" was given to the place where the Tabernacle of God was set up by the children of Israel after God had given them rest from their enemies. Then in 1 Chron. v. 2, we find, in explanation of the elder tribes being set aside, these words, "For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and from him the chief ruler (or the prince) was to come," which you may compare with that beautiful passage in Isaiah ix. 6, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." Then, too, the name which David gave to his son Solomon (a name closely connected with the name "Shiloh"—it does not appear in English so distinctly as in the original); in that name we can scarcely fail to recognize the expectation of David, that in his just and peaceful reign there would be a type of the reign of the Prince of Peace—a position which is fully borne out by those Psalms of the kingdom, of which the well-known 72nd Psalm may be taken as a

specimen. We have already referred to the angel doxology, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace," where the words "Judah" and "Shiloh" come into a connection with each other very similar to what we find in this prophecy. Then we cannot help thinking of such precious words as these of our Shiloh, "Come unto Me, ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." And not to multiply passages, for many more might be given, do we not find at the close of the Word of God, in the Book of Revelation, "the Lion of the tribe of Judah," and "the Lamb," the one the emblem of strength, and the other the emblem of gentleness and peace, close beside each other, and referring to the same glorious Saviour? We have already spoken of the "Lion of the tribe of Judah"—well, the Lamb is the Shiloh of our text. It is, then, the "Prince of Peace" whose coming is spoken of here. "And unto Him shall the gathering of the peoples be." The meaning of this is surely very obvious now. The Shiloh is the Seed in whom all nations of the earth are to be blessed. Here is the culmination of the royalty of Judah. The true idea is that the royalty is never to pass away from Judah, but is to culminate in the everlasting kingdom of the "Lion of the tribe of Judah," "the Root of David," "King of kings and Lord of lords." The sceptre is not to depart at all. The kingdom is to be an everlasting kingdom. The royalty of the tribe of Judah will last through all eternity, because the "Lion of the tribe of Judah," the "Prince of Peace," the Shiloh of God, in whom that royalty culminates, is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever," "King of kings and Lord of lords" for evermore! And then began the "gathering of the peoples." It may be interesting to take a passing glance at this prophetic gathering, as actually realized already in history. To begin with, we have an earnest of it in the long journey of the wise men of the East to worship the child Jesus. There we have the first-fruits of the great ingathering of the long excluded Shemites. Then again you remember the Syro-Phœnician woman, who, when Jesus came into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, fell down at His feet and worshipped Him, and besought Him for a blessing for her child. There we see the first-fruits of the great ingathering of the Hamites. Yet again, you remember how, when Jesus was at one of the feasts in Jerusalem, there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast, who came to Philip of Bethsaida in Galilee, earnestly asking, "Sir, we would see Jesus." There we see the first fruits of the great ingathering of the sons of Japheth. So much for the first fruits; now for the harvest. And here we find that saying true, "The last shall be first, and the first last;" for when Shiloh came the very Jews refused to gather to Him; that very tribe of Judah from which, according to the prophecy, He sprung, despised and rejected Him; and accordingly, in the just displeasure of God, they were set aside "until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (Rom. xi. 25). Thus it is that the very Jews themselves are the last of all the peoples to gather unto their own Shiloh. (*J. M. Gibson, D.D.*)

Shiloh:—The dying patriarch was speaking of his own son Judah; but while speaking of Judah he had a special eye to our Lord, who sprang from the tribe of Judah. Everything therefore which he says of Judah, the type, he means with regard to our greater Judah, the antitype, our Lord Jesus Christ. First, let the title "Shiloh," and secondly the testimony, "To Him shall the gathering of the people be," engage our attention. I. The title "Shiloh." What an old word it is! What an old world word! I should not wonder if it was one of Jacob's own coining. A pet name is often the product of peculiar love. Tender affection takes this kindly turn. Jacob's name for Jesus was "Shiloh"; and it is so long ago since he called Him Shiloh that I do not wonder that we have almost forgotten the meaning of it. He knew it had a wealth of meaning as it came from his lips, and the meaning is there still; but the well is deep; and those that have studied the learned languages have found this to be a word of such rare and singular occurrence, that it is difficult, with any positive certainty, to define it. Not that they cannot find a meaning, but that it is possible to find so many meanings of it. Not that it is not rich enough, but that there is an embarrassment of riches. It may be interpreted in so many different ways. Some maintain that the word "Shiloh" signifies "sent." Like that word you have in the New Testament, "He said to them, go to the pool of Siloam, which is, by interpretation, 'Sent,'" you observe the likeness between the words Siloam and Shiloh. They think that the words have the same meaning; in which case Shiloh here would mean the same as Messiah—the sent one—and would indicate that Jesus Christ was the messenger, the

sent one of God, and came to us, not at His own instance, and at His own will, but commissioned by the Most High, authorized and anointed to that end. Here let us stop a minute. We rejoice to know that, whatever this title means, it is quite certain Jesus was sent. It is a very precious thing to know that we have a Saviour; but often and often it has cheered my heart to think that this dear Saviour who came to save me did not come as an amateur, unauthorized from the courts of heaven, but He came with the credentials of the Eternal Father, so that, whatever He has done, we may be sure He has done it in the name of God. Jehovah will never repudiate that which Jesus has accomplished. Him hath God sent forth to be a propitiation; He is a mediator of God's own sending. Dwell, sweetly dwell, upon this meaning of the word Shiloh. If it means "sent," there is great sweetness in it. Others have referred it to a word, the root of which signifies the Son. Upon such a hypothesis the name would be strictly appropriate to our Lord. He is the "Son of God"; He is the "Son of Man"; He was the "Son of Judah"; He was the "Son of David": "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given." Let us linger for a while upon this gloss—"Until Shiloh," "Until the Son shall come." Be the annotation right or wrong, Jesus is the Son of God. He that hath come to save us is Divine. Let us bless Him as the Son—the Son of God, the Son of man. A third meaning has been given to the word "Shiloh" which rather paraphrases than translates it. The passage, according to certain critics, would run something like this: "Until He come to whom it belongs, to whom it is, for whom it is reserved"; or, as Ezekiel puts it, "Overturn, until He shall come whose right it is, and Thou wilt give it Him." It may mean, then, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah until He shall come whose that sceptre is." This meaning is supported by many learned authorities, and has its intrinsic value. The sceptre belongs to Christ. All sceptres belong to Him. He will come by and by and verify His title to them. Have you not seen the picture that represents Nelson on board a French man-of-war, receiving the swords of the various captains he has conquered, while there stands an old tar at his side putting all these swords underneath his arm as they are brought up. I have often pictured to myself our great Commander, the only King by Divine right, coming back to this our earth, and gathering up the sceptres of the kings in sheaves, and putting them on one side, and collecting their crowns; for He alone shall reign King of kings and Lord of lords. When the last and greatest of all monarchs shall come a second time, "without a sin-offering unto salvation"—oh, the glory of His triumph! He has a right to reign. If ever there was a king by nature, and by birth, it is the Son of David: if ever there was one who would be elected to the monarchy by the suffrages of His subjects, it is Jesus Christ. Let Him be crowned with majesty for ever and ever. To Him the royalty belongs, for Him it is reserved. The interpretation, however, which has the most support, and which I think has the fairest claim to be accorded correct, is that which derives the word "Shiloh" from the same root as the word "Salem." This makes it signify peace. "Until the peace, or the peace-bearer, or the peace-giver," or, if you like it better, "the rest, or the rest-maker—shall come." Select the word you prefer, it will sufficiently represent the sense. "Until the peace-bringer come, until the rest-maker come." His advent bounds the patriarch's expectation and his desire. Oh, beloved, what a vein of soul-charming reflection this opens! Do you know what rest means? Such "peace, peace," such perfect peace as he hath whose soul is stayed; because he trusteth, as the prophet Isaiah hath it. Here is rest! Man may well take his rest when he has nothing to do, when it is all done for him. And that is the gospel. The world's way of salvation is "Do," God's way of salvation is, "It is all done for you; accept and believe." II. Trusting, then, dear friends, that your faith has identified the Shiloh of Jacob's vision, let us occupy the few minutes that remain to us in considering the testimony which the patriarch here bears. "Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be." "Unto Him," as the Hebrew runs, "shall the gatherings of the peoples be." So wide the circumference that converges in this glorious centre. It comprehends all the peoples of the Gentiles as well as Jews. Of course it includes the favoured nation, but it also takes in the isles afar off; yea, all of us, my brethren. "Unto Him shall the gatherings of the peoples be." What joy this announcement should give us! Do you realize it, that around Jesus Christ, around His cross, which is the great uplifted standard, the people shall gather? Be assured of this: Christ is the only centre of true unity to His people. The true Christendom consists in all that worship God in the spirit, not having confidence in the flesh. The true Church consists of all that believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and are quickened

by the Holy Ghost. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The gathering of the people to Shiloh:*—It seems to me the old man was sad. One, and another, and another of his sons passed before him, and from their posterity there came no Saviour, no Messiah. Judah came, and as his eyes rested upon him, and the visions of the future opened up, he beheld the tribe growing, becoming conspicuous, becoming the leader of the other tribes, and enduring; kings sat upon his throne, and princes were among his posterity; and then he saw Judah, becoming feeble, carried away; the tribeship crumbling; desolation is about to come, and just then he saw the star appear—a light shining on Judah—and he said: “Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise”; and then cried out, as if his soul were enraptured with a vision: “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be.” He saw the day of Christ. It was just as Judah was crumbling to decay; it was just as prince and lawgiver were for ever passing from among his posterity; but he had not quite gone until the light and joy of Israel appeared, and the Prince of Peace, whose right it was to take the kingdom, took possession, and then, instead of Israel being carried captive into strange lands—instead of his hosts being wasted on the plains of Babylon and Persia, instead of being fugitives and strangers among all nations—he saw a new Israel, a new nation, under a new covenant of promise; and he cried out: “And unto Him shall the gathering”—not of Judah, nor of Ephraim, nor of Manasseh, nor of Benjamin, merely, but, “unto Him shall the gathering of the people be”—all tribes, all nations, all kindreds. The sons of humanity everywhere shall gather around Him; for He takes in both Jew and Gentile, Greek and barbarian, bond and free. All shall receive the blessings of peace. Such was the vision that came to Jacob’s peaceful departing hours. That we may the better understand this subject, we may refer to the expressions here used: “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah.” But there is another part of this prophecy. When that Shiloh should come, to Him should the gathering of the people be. Now, how beautifully was this contrasted with what Jacob saw in his vision! He had seen the scattering of the ten tribes—their being lost, merged into other nationalities, and he said: “Are these gone for ever?” He saw Jacob about to pass away, and that he was to be scattered, but as the compensation for all this, around the Shiloh, the promised Seed, the One who was to be sent, the Prince of Peace, should the gathering of the people be. In some particulars, this seemed to be an enlargement of the promises given to the Jews, and we may trace an apparent connection between their power and that under the reign of Shiloh. For instance, the gathering of the people was at Jerusalem. They came up three times in the year to worship before God on Mount Zion. Scattered, there is no longer the worship. The temple services have been long since closed. The people no longer come gathering around Mount Moriah. There is no temple standing, around which humanity gathers; but there was a cross erected. Shiloh hung on that cross, and He said: “And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me.” And now, as the result, do we not see the gathering of humanity around the Lord Jesus Christ? But while men, here and there, may remember the name of a Homer, or an Alexander, or a Plato—while their prowess and intellect may be admired in the schools—how few of the human race know anything of them! But the name of Jesus! At that name every knee shall bow; to it every tongue shall confess. It is being sung east and west, north and south. Men divide on everything else, but they are rallying around Jesus. He is reigning, King of kings, and Lord of lords. He has established a kingdom which is growing wider and wider every day. Civilization attends the preaching of the gospel; inventions and arts, and refinement and culture, go hand in hand with the proclamation of the name of Jesus; and in this respect humanity is gathering around Him. But the word here interpreted “gathering” means not merely assembling. Some translate it obedience. “To Him shall the obedience of the people be.” The idea, as I take it, embraces both. The people assemble for instruction and to obey. It is like the gathering of scholars in a school. They assemble, but it is for instruction, and it is to obey. (*M. Simpson, D.D.*) *Shiloh:*—I. THE COMING ONE PREDICTED. II. THE CHARACTER OF THE KING AND HIS KINGDOM. The name “Shiloh” means “Peaceable,” or “Peace-giver,” or “rest,” and is akin to the name of David’s son “Solomon.” This name intimates that the King, who is to come, will give tranquility to His people. III. THE COMPLETENESS OF HIS RULE. The Christian religion is but the unfolding and the fulfilment of the hope of Israel. Do we rejoice in our knowledge of Jesus as King? Are we trying our best to serve and obey Him? and to do what we can to bring others under His

peace-giving rule? (*W. S. Smith, B.D.*) *Shiloh's sceptre spiritual, not political*:—How constantly do we find this blessed assurance interpreted as if it were a shred of political news, a piece of political prognostication! "The sceptre" is interpreted as an earthly sceptre, the "lawgiver" suggests no other or higher conception than the head of an earthly government, and the gist of the whole promise is made to be that a certain earthly state, of very small account among the great kingdoms of the world, shall continue to exist till the coming of a certain person, and then shall pass away. It might be suggested, by the way, that on this principle of interpretation we should rather call it a threatening than a promise. If the coming of the promised Shiloh was to be the signal for the passing away of the very kingdom which was the subject of the prophecy, then Judah and all true lovers of Christ's kingdom might well pray that Shiloh should be very long in coming. But let this pass, and look at the subsequent difficulties in which the political interpretation involves us. We have first a long period during which there was no political kingdom at all. Then, shortly after the setting up of the political kingdom, we have it rent in twain. Later on we find, first, the one part of it, and then the other, utterly subverted. Then we have hundreds of years, during the greater part of which it can not be said with honesty that there was a political kingdom at all. And when Shiloh did come, there was no political kingdom in Judah to pass away. These difficulties have been felt to be of such magnitude, that endless ingenuity have been expended in the attempt to evade or surmount them. Some have tried to twist history to make it agree with the passage, and others have tried to twist the passage to make it agree with the history, and neither of the methods has been found satisfactory; whereas all becomes simple, natural, beautiful, and most true, when interpreted, not according to the letter which killeth, but according to the spirit; when it is freed from those carnal, Jewish notions which have obscured it, when it is lifted out of the region of politics into the region of truth, where our Lord's conversation with Pilate, as recorded by John, might well lead us to look for the kingdom of the prophetic word. Then we find a beautiful consistency both with the history of truth, and with the truth of history; with the former, as regards the inner reality, with the latter, as regards the outer form of the kingdom. First, in regard to the inner reality. Did not the kingdom in the truth, the kingdom in its essential, spiritual reality, continue in Judah all the while? Was not the kingdom of God among the chosen people before either Saul or David was anointed, while as yet Jehovah was their only King? Was not the kingdom of God in Judah still, when her sons and daughters sat "by Babel's streams," and hung their harps upon the willows, and wept as they remembered Zion? There, in their remembrance of Zion, have we the evidence that, though the form of the kingdom had passed away for a time, the great reality remained in the weeping heart of Judah still. Truth to tell, the kingdom had much more nearly passed away, while yet the political "sceptre" and "lawgiver" remained both in Judah and in Israel, in those dark days of infidelity and idolatry, when poor Elijah thought God's kingdom the true theocracy, was reduced to one solitary individual, till he was assured by Him, who "seeth not as man seeth," that He still had left remaining seven thousand loyal men. And was there not in Judah, through all her captivities and all her sufferings from foreign oppressors, a true kingdom of God? A very little one indeed at times, and especially in the times which immediately preceded the advent of Shiloh; but small as it was, was it not there all the while? And when we seek for the fulfilment of the old promise as to the continuance of the kingdom till the coming in human form of the King, we are to seek it, not where so many interpreters of prophecy have sought it, in the political administration of that infidel and villain, belonging to Idumea, and not to Judah, who happened to sway a little sceptre, and give out his little laws under the great sceptre and mighty law of a foreign tyrant, but in the lowly loyal lives of the Simeons and Annas of the time, who had the sceptre and law in their hearts, and who were waiting for the fulfilment of the kingdom in the coming of Shiloh. The fulfilment of the kingdom—for there is no evidence that these faithful ones imagined that the coming of Shiloh was to be the subversion of that kingdom, which, as true Israelites, they dearly loved, but every evidence that they regarded it as the firm establishment of Judah's throne, and the beginning of a triumphal progress which should not cease till every knee should bow before the sceptre, and every tongue confess that Judah's King was Lord. So much for the fulfilment of the promise in regard to its inner reality. And now a moment's glance at the consistency of the prophecy with history, so far as form is concerned. Here we must bear in mind

what Principal Fairbairn has so clearly shown in his work on "Prophecy," that the great object of prophecy was to support the faith of God's people—a support which would be especially needed in times of darkness. Now, if the outward earthly form, in which the kingdom was for a time embodied, had been predestined to be abiding; had nothing been anticipated in the process of history which would look like the passing away of the kingdom, there would have been no need of such a special promise as that in Gen. xlix. 10. On the other hand, the very fact that there is such a promise would lead us, *a priori*, to anticipate that there would be times, probably long times, when it would seem that the sceptre had departed from Judah—times during which it would be necessary for those who were waiting for the salvation of God, to have some assurance to rest upon, that, though the form had passed away, the reality was with them still. Thus we find that, when once we get rid of these carnal Jewish ideas of the kingdom, we discover not only an agreement between the prophecy and the true spiritual history of the kingdom, but also a correspondence between the expectations it suggests concerning the outward and formal history of the kingdom and the actual facts of the case, as seen in the external history of the political kingdom of Israel. (*J. M. Gibson, D.D.*)

Vers. 13-21 and 27. **Zebulun . . . Issachar . . . Dan . . . Gad . . . Asher . . . Naphtali . . . Benjamin.**—*The blessings of Zebulun, &c.*:—Consider these blessings—I. IN THEIR VARIETY. 1. Maritime power. 2. Husbandry. 3. Political sagacity. 4. The power to conquer by perseverance. 5. Plenty. 6. Eloquence. 7. The warlike character. II. IN THEIR UNITY. Unity in variety. This diversity in the distribution of gifts and endowments contributes to human happiness and to human prosperity. (*T. H. Leale.*) **Zebulun and Issachar**:—The tribes of the last two sons of Leah Moses unites together, and, like Jacob, places Zebulun, the younger, first. It has been represented by many, that from the words Jacob used with regard to Issachar, the patriarch was reproving this tribe for its indolence and for preferring ease at the sacrifice of liberty, that, "like an idle beast of burden, he would rather submit to the yoke and be forced to do the work of a slave than risk his possessions and his peace in the struggle for liberty." It is impossible, however, to be satisfied with such a view after reading the words of Moses with reference to this tribe. When we read of Issachar "calling the people unto the mountain, and there offering the sacrifices of righteousness," such a view would be utterly inconsistent with these words. If we trace the further history of this tribe, recorded in Judges v. 15, we find that, so far from shrinking from difficulty and danger, they were among the foremost in coming to the help of the Lord against Israel's enemies. Jacob's language is clearly not that of reproof, but of praise, prophetically applied to them for their patience under what was heavy to be borne. With such a view the passage becomes clear, and contains many points of beautiful instruction. And let us mark first how God apportioned to each one his own appointed place. Jacob allotted to each tribe the place it was afterwards to occupy, just as if he had had a map before him of the country they were to inhabit, while as yet they had not one foot of land in their possession. The tribes were not settled in their various positions according to Joshua's plan. God appointed that their places should be given them by lot, and He made the lot to fall exactly as Jacob and Moses uttered their predictions. And God placed each one exactly in the place suited to its capacities and the best adapted for developing all that was in them, and thus for His own glory. One He placed at the haven of the sea, another inland. One where it would have to endure oppression and hardship, another where it would have great prosperity, and be less subject to such pressure. We may be sure it is the same with every one of us. We may sometimes be tempted to say, "If I were only in another place or in other circumstances, how differently I could act." But it is not so. We may be quite sure we are each one of us in the very place God would have us to be—the very best place both for our own temporal and eternal welfare, and for His highest glory. And such a spirit, it appears to me, is manifested in the character of Issachar here. Issachar is brought before us as finding the position in which God had placed him to be the best. "He saw that rest was good and the land that it was pleasant." Thus the Christian finds the rest into which Christ has brought him to be indeed good, and that his place in Christ is a good land. When this has been learned by experience through the teaching of God's Holy Spirit, the soul becomes ready for all else. And then it is that, like Issachar, the soul is ready to "bow the shoulder to bear, and become a servant to tribute." It can stoop, yea, joyfully stoop, to the meanest

service for Christ. It asks no questions, makes no bargains, but with a spirit ever sitting at the feet of the Master, exclaims, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" It "bows the shoulder to bear" whatever the Lord may be pleased to lay upon it. (F. Whitfield, M.A.) *Issachar*; or, *couching between the borders*:—If we consider nothing more than Issachar after the flesh, we shall have done with the text almost immediately upon noticing it as a prediction that Issachar should become a tribe of laborious husbandmen. But there is a spiritual Issachar, a borderer between good and evil; and would to God that his tents were nowhere to be found in our church. With this Issachar, or in other words, the wavering and undecided, for the description of whose character we find appropriate words in the text, let us now endeavour to become better acquainted. We shall notice—I. WHERE HE COUCHES DOWN. Issachar has a strange and unprepossessing appellation, that of a "bony ass." But who shall say how many amongst ourselves may not be thus unflatteringly designated in various parts of the book of God? We shall see why to the spiritual Issachar this name may be given, when we have learnt the characteristics which belong to him. Where do we find him? It is between the borders. He is couched down between the borders. Now, if we give a spiritual application to these words, we may take them as describing an evil and unhappy condition. How awfully does the Lord rebuke those whose hearts are halting in indecision—who are neither cold nor hot! To each of such lukewarm ones He declares, "I will spew thee out of My mouth." He would that they were either one thing or the other: either cold or hot. Indecision is to Him an abomination. Where, then, is it that the spiritual borderer couches down, and between what borders has he pitched his tent? Strictly speaking, he is not one of those who are neither for nor against religion, neither Christian nor heathen. He is professedly for that which is right. He appears, indeed, to many, to have pitched his tent within the kingdom of God, and yet he is in a very deplorable situation. He has settled down, as it were, between Canaan and Egypt. He cannot exactly be classed with the people of the world; but still less can he be numbered with the children of God. He cannot properly be placed in the same rank with the crooked and perverse generation; but still less can he be accounted one of the chosen generation and royal priesthood. He is couched down between the borders of the kingdom of grace and the kingdom of Belial. In this unhappy middle situation he can never sit down with the subjects of the former; but he will perish and be consumed with the subjects of the latter. He is a nominal Christian without a birth into a new life; he acknowledges the corruption of human nature without feeling his own; he is conversant with spiritual things, but not truly enlightened in them; he professes to believe in Jesus, but is insensible of his need of Him; he numbers himself among the saints, without being one; he knows how to talk of a life of grace, without having entered upon it; he imagines his life and conversation to be quite Christian, and yet is in thought and disposition no better than a natural man. His heart and mind are unchanged. II. HOW DID HE COME INTO THIS CONDITION? "He saw rest, that it was good; and the land, that it was pleasant." "He saw rest," or repose, "that it was good." What rest or repose? Was it rest for his soul in Christ? Was it peace with God? Was it repose in the great Redeemer's merits? Was it a release from the burden and curse of sin? Was it deliverance from the servile drudgery of legal bondage? Oh no! quite another repose attracted him, and provoked his longing desire. "He saw the land that it was pleasant." What land? Was it that better country, namely, the heavenly? Was it that blissful and glorious region of light and love, in a superior state of being, unto which Jesus Himself is the Way and the Door? Or, was it even that region of grace here on earth, wherein His people live by His dew and sunshine? Did his soul really desire this? Did he long after it? Nothing of the kind can be said of him. Very different inducements was he conscious of. It is sometimes one thing, and sometimes another, which leads persons of this character into their dubious situation between the borders. Some are attracted by the harmony and mutual love which they find among those who are quiet in the land. Another has naturally a soft and yielding disposition. He is easily affected and influenced. Another has a natural inclination to thought and inquiry. This leads him to search the Scriptures, where he finds abundance for his mind to feed upon, and to exercise his quickness of understanding. Another, from being naturally gifted with a keen perception of what is intellectually beautiful, is charmed with the sublimity of the inspired writings. The moving descriptions, the luminous imagery, the parabolic language, the lovely and touching scenes with which Scripture abounds, beget in

him a kind of enthusiasm. In such various ways men may be spiritually couching down between the borders. "He saw rest, that it was good; and the land, that it was pleasant." Thus it may be no real longing for reconciliation with God, no hunger for Christ's righteousness, no thirst for the graces of the Holy Spirit, which induces them to renounce the world, and to join the people of the Lord. III. In the last place, briefly notice THE SPIRITUAL TOILS AND PAINS THAT NECESSARILY ATTEND THIS STATE, AS ALSO THE FEARFUL PERILS WHICH SURROUND IT. This toilsome and harassing condition is depicted in the words, "He bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute." Having bowed his shoulder to bear, he has a burden laid upon him, under which he sighs and groans; and this burden is—not the burden of sin! Would that he felt this, for his state would then soon begin to amend. But this burden is, alas! his Christianity itself: that notional Christianity, to the drudgery of which his own wisdom has allied him. (*F. W. Krummacher, D.D.*) *Issachar an example of the evil that results from too easy circumstances*:—Looking at the characterization of Issachar, we may see the enervating influence of too comfortable circumstances on a man or on a people. The inheritance of Issachar was pleasant, fertile, easily cultivated, and exceedingly remunerative. So his descendants came at length, for the most part, to take things easy, and submitted to outrages which those in poorer circumstances must have resisted even to the death. They grew indolent and luxurious, caring for little or nothing but their own ease, and sinking at last into mere tribute-payers. Now all this reminds us of the truth that conflict is absolutely necessary to strength of character. He who has no difficulties to contend with has therein the great misfortune of his life; for he has little or no motive for exertion, and without exertion he will be nothing in particular. It is a serious affliction to a man to be too well off, and many a son has been ruined because he inherited a fortune from his father. Unvarying prosperity is not by any means an unmingled blessing, and may be often a great evil. In the struggle for existence which adversity causes many may sink, but the "survival" is always "of the fittest," for it is of those who have been made by the struggle into manly, earnest, strong, heroic souls. Do not plume yourself, therefore, on your easy circumstances, for they may make you only selfish, indolent, and lacking in public spirit, like that son of Jacob who had his fitting symbol in the contented, because well-fed and not overloaded, ass. But, on the other hand, do not whimper over your poverty, for, bravely wrestled with and nobly overcome, that may be the very making of you. Too much money has undone many a youth; too little has been the spur that has urged on many another to put forth all his strength, and so has developed and increased that strength. When you are getting comfortable and easy, therefore, suspect yourself, and watch lest your patriotism should grow languid, your activity disappear, and self-sacrifice drop entirely out of your life. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Dan*:—We come now to consider the character of Dan, the eldest son of Rachel's handmaid. The meaning of the name—"judge," is here expanded by Jacob into the character of the tribe: "Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel," or in other words, Dan would procure justice to his people—to the people of Israel as truly as any other of the tribes of Israel. He would be behind none of them in that respect. The word "judge" is sometimes misapprehended. Its meaning is rather to defend than to sit in judgment upon. It is used of those who, when Israel had no king, God raised up from time to time as "judges" or "defenders" of the people, and who led them against their foes. The most conspicuous of these was Samson, who arose out of the tribe of Dan, and was himself an apt illustration of the character of the tribe. By his serpent-like arts he laid traps for his foes, and with great delight saw them fall into them one after another. This word "judge," out of which Dan's future history is evolved, is constantly used throughout the Bible with reference to God as judging His people; this judging being always a cause of thankfulness, as it meant a sure deliverance from all their foes. So much for the critical meaning of the word itself. The wisdom which is implied in the word "serpent" may be, however, of a two-fold character. It may be that wisdom which is commended by our Lord, or it may be that low cunning and craftiness which is of the very opposite character, and which stoops to the meanest arts to accomplish its ends. The expression "Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel" clearly means that Dan would use his wisdom for the good of Israel generally, not for his own selfish ends but as one of the tribes of Israel. At the same time it is held by many that this form of serpent-like craft will be developed in a very special way as the end of the present dispensation draws

near. The first germ of idolatry that showed itself in Israel, after their settlement in Canaan, was in the tribe of Dan. In the eighteenth chapter of Judges we are told the children of Dan found an image in the house of Micah, and that this image became an object of idolatrous worship all the time the house of God was in Shiloh. Here was a continuous system of idolatry, carried on in direct opposition to God and the worship of God, "until the day of the captivity of the land." Later on again we read that Jeroboam made two calves of gold for Israel to worship in opposition to the worship of God, and he put them, one in Bethel and the other in Dan; and it is said, "this thing became a sin; for the people went to worship before the one even unto Dan." There is also an allusion to this tribe in Jeremiah viii. 16, 17; and again in Amos viii. 11, 14, both of which are striking, and go far to confirm the view thus taken. In addition to this I may add the very singular fact that, in the enumeration of the tribes of Israel (Rev. vii.) as "the servants of God that were sealed in their forehead," the tribe of Dan is omitted, and the only one so omitted. And now, the patriarch, having given utterance to his prediction with reference to the future history of this tribe, suddenly exclaims, "I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord." There are two aspects in which those words must be viewed. In the first place, the previous declaration of Jacob that "Dan should be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward," intimated, clearly enough, that warlike times were in store for Israel, in which this tribe should take a prominent part. It would seem as if for a moment he was carried in spirit into the midst of these times, and the dangers which would on every side surround Israel, and realizing the utter insufficiency of all human help from every quarter, he gave utterance to the earnest longing of soul for God's help on their behalf in this prayer, "I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord." "Dan's is insufficient, Israel's tribes united are insufficient, every human arm is insufficient: O Lord, we wait for Thy salvation." But more than even this. As a true Israelite he yearns for the time when the Messiah, God's salvation, should appear for the help of His people. Accordingly the Jewish Targums have given the true view of Jacob's words. They represent Jacob as passing over all the victories which Israel might gain in these battles, and saying, "Not for the deliverance of Gideon the son of Joash does my soul wait, for that is temporary, not for the redemption of Israel by Samson, for that is transitory, but for the redemption of the Messiah, the Son of David, which Thou through Thy Word has promised to bring to Thy people Israel; for this Thy redemption my soul waits." But there is a second aspect of these words of Jacob. He may have been carried in spirit to that time when out of this very tribe Antichrist has arisen, and as he views for a moment his own people passing through its greatest tribulations, and beholds that darkest of all dark nights through which they have yet to pass, he breathes the earnest prayer for the salvation which shall be theirs at the close of it. (*F. Whitfield, M.A.*)

Ver. 18. I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord.—*Times of waiting*:—A parenthesis in Jacob's long blessing of his sons. Exhausted with the thoughts and visions which passed over his mind in such quick succession, he paused to take a spiritual inspiration: "I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord." 1. Such chapters of life, such seasons of suspense, such exercises of the quiet confidences of the soul, are to be found in every Christian's experience. They may come in different ways to different men, but they are in some form or other a necessity to every man—an essential part of the discipline of the school of salvation. 2. These intervals of waiting must be filled up with four things: prayer, praise, fellowship, and work. 3. It will be a helpful thought to you as you wait, that if you wait, Christ waits. Whatever your longing is that the time be over, His longing is greater. There are many things that you have had that have turned to a curse, which would have been blessings if only there had been more "waiting." (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*) *Waiting for salvation*:—1. From these words we may learn what was the nature of that inheritance which the patriarchs regarded as bequeathed to them by the Divine promises. The patriarchs looked for salvation. 2. We learn from the text what had been the great characteristic of Jacob's life from the time that he was first brought under the power of Divine grace. His affections had been set on things above. His chief interest had lain in eternity. 3. The language of Jacob in the text proves most fully the truth elsewhere stated, that "the righteous hath hope in his death." Practical questions: (1) Do you know what is meant by the salvation of the Lord? (2) Do you know what is meant by waiting for salvation—i.e., ardently but patiently looking forward to it? (3) Do

you know what is meant by preparing while you wait for the salvation of the Lord? (*A. D. Davidson.*) *Jacob's dying confidence*:—I. THE IMPORTANT OBJECT FOR WHICH THE PATRIARCH WAITED. 1. Salvation is present in its commencement. 2. Salvation is future in its consummation. II. THE GLORIOUS BEING IN WHOM THE PATRIARCH CONFIDED. 1. Salvation is Divinely devised and provided. 2. Salvation is Divinely revealed and promised. 3. Salvation is Divinely imparted and realized. III. THE SACRED EXERCISE IN WHICH THE PATRIARCH WAS OCCUPIED. 1. We must wait for salvation patiently. 2. We must wait for salvation believingly. 3. We must wait for salvation importunately. 4. We must wait for salvation perseveringly. (*Sketches of Sermons.*) *Jacob's dying words*:—I. The believer can use this language of the text, because he will be PUT, AT DEATH, IN POSSESSION OF A GLORIOUS INHERITANCE—"I have waited," said Jacob, "for Thy salvation"; language implying that there was a future good not yet attained, long as he had been a subject of the Divine government, seeking humbly and holily to "walk with God." II. The words imply Jacob's WILLINGNESS TO LEAVE HIS CHOICEST EARTHLY COMFORTS. He looked for a better heritage, not exposed to vicissitude and change; not amidst a dark and idolatrous land, but in the region of glory where cherubim and seraphim abide; not accorded by the bounty of Pharaoh, but prepared by God for His people. He looked to a house, the "builder and maker of which is God." He lived under a darker dispensation than ours; but he had heard the invitation, "Come up hither": "Enter, thou blessed of the Lord." If then, like Jacob, we have been reconciled and brought near through the "blood of the everlasting covenant," are we not warranted in thinking that God will not leave His people comfortless at the last? III. Jacob had EXPERIENCED MANY TRIALS AND BEEN SUBJECT TO MANY SORROWS. The words, accordingly, seem to have been spoken in assured belief that these would soon be past. IV. The Christian may feel the force of Jacob's words, inasmuch as he expects to be favoured with the nearer vision of, and to hold CONGENIAL INTER-COURSE WITH, THE SAVIOUR. (*A. R. Bonar, D.D.*) *Salvation*:—Salvation! Blessed be God, that our fallen earth has heard the joyful sound! It is unheard in hell. Blessed be the grace which brought it to your ears! To multitudes it is a tuneless cymbal. Salvation! It peoples the many mansions of the heavenly kingdom. Salvation! It is a roll written by Jehovah's pen. It is the decree of Divine councils: the fruit of omniscient mind: the first-born of unmeasured love: the perfection of eternal thought: the strength of omnipotence. Salvation! It is the work for which Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and lived on earth, and died at Calvary, and descended into the grave, and burst the bonds of death, and mounted to heaven, and sits on the right hand of God. For this He reigns and prays on high. It is the work for which the Spirit seeks our earth, and knocks at the barred entrance of the sinner's heart. For this He assails the fortress of self-love, and reveals the perils of sin, and wrestles with ignorance and vain excuses. Salvation! It is the first message which mercy uttered to a ruined world. It is the end of every prophecy—the purport of every precept—the beauty of every promise—the truth of every sacrifice—the substance of every rite—the song of every inspired lip—the longing desire of every renewed heart—the beacon which guides through the voyage of life—the haven to which the tides of grace convey—the end of faith, the full light of hope, the home of love. Salvation! It is the absence of this blessing which builds the prison-house of hell, which kindles the never-quenched fires—which forges the eternal chains—which wraps the dreary regions in one mantle of blackness—which gives keenness to the undying worm—which blows up the smoke of torment—which gives the bitterness of despair to the hopeless wail. Does any eager soul exclaim, Tell me, further, wherein Salvation's blessedness consists? It is a blessed rescue, to change ceaseless wailings into endless praise: the blackness of darkness into the glories of brightness beyond the sun in his strength. Does any add, Let me clearly understand how this is all accomplished! Come, see the excellent things which Jesus works. He saves by rescuing from hell. He saves by giving title to heaven. He saves by meeting for heaven. He by His Spirit dethrones the love of sin: implants delight in God. It is great, because willed, provided, accepted by a great God, even the Father: because wrought out and finished by a great God, even Jesus: because applied by a great God, even the Spirit. It is great, because it averts great woe: bestows great grace: and blesses a great multitude. O my soul! see to it that you are saved. (*Dean Law.*) *The death-bed*:—I. WHAT IS THIS SALVATION OF WHICH JACOB SPEAKS? As a dying man, he speaks of a salvation towards which he had looked, and for which he had waited until that hour. What that salvation really is, we now know by clear

and unequivocal revelation ; but the question before us is, what it was in Jacob's estimation, what it was in its actual results upon the dying believer of his day? The full knowledge of the salvation of the gospel gives victory over sin, and death, and the grave. 1. Salvation with him would be deliverance from the burden of the flesh. A mind so spiritual as his, and so habituated to intercourse with the great Father of spirits, could not but discriminate between the immortal spirit and the perishable tenement in which it was confined. He had long experienced the sorrows incident to this imperfect state. The infirmities of age had long been stealing upon him. 2. The salvation for which he looked would be deliverance from sin. Sin was a permanent evil, with which, in some form or other, he had to contend in every period of his life. In youth, maturity, and age, it had still been, in one way or other, the cause of his anxiety. He had, however, attained by faith to the hope of the remission of sin. He leaned upon "the Angel that redeemed him from all evil." The system of grace, however fully or scantily revealed, was to him a sufficient ground of hope and practical comfort in the house of his pilgrimage. 3. Jacob would include also in this salvation the high and permanent felicity of an eternal existence. I have waited all the days of my appointed time until my change come. And now, O Lord, fulfil all that I have been led to hope for, and crown this faint and failing spirit with immortal strength, and blessedness, and perfection. 4. Jacob evidently implied, in this strong expression of reliance upon God, the expectation of deliverance from the evils of death itself. The act of dissolution is an event from which human nature shrinks. It is unnatural. It is the consequence of sin. But, Lord, I have waited for Thy salvation. I have looked for complete deliverance. Let my Shepherd and my Guide be with me in the shadowy valley. O God most holy, O Lord most mighty, O merciful Saviour, Thou most worthy Judge Eternal, suffer me not, at my last hour, for any pains of death, to fall from Thee. *Herc.* then, we have a view of the salvation for which Jacob waited. II. WHAT ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND BY JACOB HAVING WAITED FOR THIS SALVATION? He refers to the habit of his previous life, to the whole tenor of his course. "This has been the grand object of my existence. This is the thing for which I have sought." 1. The expression implies that he had believed the truth of this salvation; but of this we need say nothing, for every step of his life exhibits his willing acceptance of the promise of deliverance, and his perfect satisfaction with the covenant of mercy. 2. He had sought for this salvation in the zealous use of the means of grace, in the way of holy and prayerful obedience. 3. He had expected this salvation with increasing affection. It became more and more the object of endeared attachment. To wait, implies the intense occupation of the soul. 4. That Jacob waited implies that he was patient. A waiting spirit is a patient and submissive one. His is not a petulant wish, in a moment of dissatisfaction, to depart; but a calm and even energy of soul bearing towards immortality. Lessons: 1. Be thankful that, in a rebellious and lost world, the benevolence and the wisdom of God provided, even in the earlier stages of our history, a means of redemption so ample and effective, and left on an infallible record such bright examples for our encouragement and comfort. Let us thank God, and take courage. 2. Again, be humbled when you compare the faith of earlier days with ours in days so rich in evangelical privilege. 3. Lastly, be diligent, then, that you may be found of God in peace, without spot and blameless. (*E. Craig.*) *The believer waiting for God's salvation:—*I. THE LIVING SAINT'S CHARACTER. He is one who is "waiting for the salvation of God." By the term "salvation" here, we are probably to understand the Saviour Himself—the Messiah who had been promised. By the words he uses in the text, Jacob evidently expressed his faith in the testimony of God as to the coming of the Messiah, to whom he looked, as every guilty sinner must do, and in whose name he trusted for salvation and eternal life. Salvation, taken in its fullest sense, expresses all that the soul can require for time and eternity. And well might this good old saint, Jacob, say here, in addressing God, "Thy salvation." The glorious design of saving sinners of the human race by a Mediator was conceived in the infinite Mind, and determined upon in the counsels of God, before the foundations of the world were laid, or even time had begun its course. For this salvation Jacob had waited. Numerous had been the incidents of his past life, but amidst them all he had kept his eye fixed on the salvation of God, and had consequently passed through things temporal so as not to lose those things which were eternal. II. THE DYING SAINT'S COMFORT. Brethren, there is no real comfort in dying moments, but that which comes from having waited for God, and being in immediate prospect of entering on a full and uninterrupted enjoyment of the salvation of God; a lively and well-grounded confidence that we are in Christ, and

shall be saved in Him, with an everlasting salvation; a hope that maketh not ashamed, that we are heirs of, and are about to be admitted to, glory, honour, and immortality. Sorrow is banished, and desire fully satisfied. A well-grounded hope of thus receiving the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul, and of being admitted to the felicities, full and perfect and enduring, of the heavenly world, affords strong and abundant consolation to a dying saint. To enjoy this salvation at death and in eternity, it must now be sought by you. (*W. Snell.*) *Waiting for salvation*.—I. How BELIEVERS LIVE. They live waiting for the salvation of the Lord. This comprehends many important particulars both in doctrine and experience. 1. A conviction of the need of salvation. The sick man only needs healing; the man in danger only needs rescuing: to offer to one that is not sick a remedy, and to one that is not lost, salvation, would only be mockery. And this teaches us the reason of a fact which is awful: the whole, in their own estimation, refuse a physician; those who are unconscious that they are lost, ruined, and undone, neglect the great salvation. 2. A knowledge of the method by which salvation is to be obtained. Waiting for a thing implies a sense of its value and importance. 3. Diligence in the use of those means with which the salvation of the soul is connected. Faith and hope do not lie dormant in the heart; they are active principles, always in exercise. The more diligent and devout your attendance on the means which God has appointed in dependence on the influences of the Spirit, the more clear will be your vision, the more fervent your desires, the more full your foretastes of salvation. Waiting on the Lord, you shall renew your strength, and go on in the beauty of holiness, till you appear perfect before God in Zion. 4. That the hope of salvation is the grand support of the believer, and the only source of his consolations under all the sufferings to which he is exposed. He “endures, as seeing Him that is invisible,” and “in hope rejoices against hope.” II. How BELIEVERS DIE. The reigning temper of his heart is still the same. He lived, and now he dies, “waiting for the salvation of the Lord.” “The ruling passion” is “strong in death.” The last emotion, when nature sinks, and all is feebleness and decay, is a desire for the salvation of God. And this implies that the believer considers death—1. As an entrance on immortality. Surely when he says, “I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord!” it does not imply that he wishes his being to become extinct. David knew that he should live in the presence of God. Jacob knew that when “the earthly house of his tabernacle was dissolved,” he had “a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” 2. As the termination of his sufferings. His temptations and sorrows can follow him no further. At the gate of death he lays down his burden: he is to sigh and suffer no more for ever. His warfare is accomplished. His long, tedious, painful struggles are at an end. Death, which is to some the beginning of sorrows and of sufferings, is to him the end of both. 3. As the harvest, when all the graces of the spirit would be ripened, and matured, and gathered, it is said that the good man shall come to his grave, “like as a shock of corn cometh in his season.” Observe this figure: The fallow ground is first broke up, the seed is sown, and it remains unseen. But the process of vegetation is going forward; the germ is expanding; ere long the green blade appears. The frosts pass over it, and it withers; but the sun shines, and it recovers. At length, after it has experienced a few storms, and been impeded in its growth by noxious weeds, in consequence of fruitful showers and genial sunshine, it is fully ripe and fit for the harvest. So the fallow ground of the heart is broken up; the good seed of the kingdom, the incipient principles of grace are implanted. They are hidden for a season, but they proceed; there is the principle of vitality; and we see “first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear.” All the graces of the Spirit are then ripened and perfected; faith into vision, hope into fruition, and love is made perfect so as to cast out all fear. Then the believer shall see God without an interposing cloud, love Him with a perfect heart, and serve Him without weariness. 4. An assurance of a glorious resurrection. When Jacob was dying, he took an oath of his son that he would bury him in the land of Canaan. And Joseph also “gave commandment concerning his bones.” What should make these holy men so anxious about the place of their interment? The world is lost to a dead man; and what matters it whether he lies in Egypt or in Canaan? What could it be for, but to express their faith in the promise of God; their belief that death would not cut them off from His favour. The place of their burial, therefore, will remain as a monument of their faith to the latest period of time: and when the angels gather up their fragments, where are they to look for them but in that land where they are laid, and where Christ appeared, and will appear again? From the whole

let us—1. Learn the vast importance of that salvation which has been an object of desire to the saints of God in all ages. The word signifies deliverance—deliverance from all evil, and introduction to all good. 2. Behold the perfect man, and mark the upright; for the end of that man is peace. If his life is honourable to religion, his death is a confirmation of all that he professed. (*W. Thorpe.*)

Ver. 19. He shall overcome at the last.—*Faith's triumph*:—Consider—I. **FAITH TRIUMPHANT IN DOUBT.** The gospel is a revelation. It is the telling of a secret. There is not one mystery either about man or about God which has been either caused or aggravated by the gospel. Doubtless there are matters not yet revealed. There are unexplained, perhaps inexplicable, difficulties, as regards God's will and man's future, which the gospel leaves where it found them. Faith triumphs in and over doubting (John vi. 67, 68). II. **FAITH TRIUMPHS IN DISAPPOINTMENT.** To be willing to wait, even for encouragement, much more for victory, is an essential part of his character who has seen the promise afar off, and been persuaded of it, and embraced it, and who now lives day by day in the calm, humble looking-for of a light that shall arise and a rest reserved in heaven. III. **FAITH CONQUERS SIN.** That is our most urgent want, and that is faith's most solemn office. Faith conquering is, above all things, faith conquering sin, faith looking upwards to a loving Saviour, and drawing down from Him the desire and the effort and the grace to be holy. IV. **FAITH CONQUERS DEATH.** Death is not dreadful to the Christian, because he has in the other world a Father, a Saviour, a Comforter. (*Dean Vaughan.*) *Stock-taking*:—The text is a prophecy respecting one of the tribes of Israel, declaring that Gad, whose name signifies a troop, should be overcome again and again; but that at the last they should overcome all their foes. It also is a prophecy concerning every Christian, and it is a picture of the life of every child of God. We often have been overcome, but the Spirit of God has enabled us to beat back the enemies of our soul; and we to-day can cry Victory! through the blood of the Lamb. Though we stand on slippery ground, and have need every moment to watch and pray lest we fall into sin, and though, alas! we do fall continually, yet the prophecy declares that we shall not utterly be cast down, but at the last we shall stand in our lot in the city of the heavenly Jerusalem. I. **REVIEW THE PAST.** The memory should be like a tradesman's storehouse, filled with valuable commodities, such as shall be useful in the future, rather than lumber places for that which does more harm than good. But, alas! when we turn over the leaves of the past, what heaps of lumber we find we have gathered! 1. During the past year many have gone through severe trials. We are not like the great rock at Llandudno, on which the angry waves cast their fury time after time, but which hurls them back. We are rather like the trembling ship lifted up and cast down by the force of the wind and waves. We have felt every wind of sorrow that blows; and the cutting wave of trouble has dashed over us and filled our souls with vexation of spirit. But, in the midst of all, our God has kept us from despair. There is no ease but what might have been worse; and according to our day our strength has been given. "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." 2. Some have had bereavement by death. There was once, when we arrived at home, a face generally looking for us from the window, and a kindly hand to open to us the door; but that gentle one has departed from us, and we are alone. 3. Many, yea, all of us, this last year have passed through fierce temptations. I do not know whether any of you have been like a heavily laden ship; perhaps your particular temptation has been too much cargo of gold. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter the kingdom of heaven." Like some of those ships that Mr. Plimsoll has told us about, weighted with cargo until their water-line is under the wave, and the sea washes over the decks. Oh, how wearily the over-weighted ship wends its way across the ocean! The most weary of men is he who is weighted with gold. It is not riches alone that give to us happiness, peace, and contentment. The world thinks so; but the Word of God is a better guide, and we are told that it is hard for the rich man to be happy. Many of us this last year have been like unseaworthy ships; we have not had strength to weather the storm; every wind of temptation has made the seams in our ship wider, and floods of sin have entered into our hearts and swamped our piety, and many are hopeless wrecks. You entered this last year holy; you are now wicked. You entered this last year with a character on which there was not a single stain; it is now black with sin. Everybody trusted you at the beginning of this year; alas! nobody believes you now. You have not had a good captain of your ship. Your pilot has wrecked many souls, yet you trusted him. The devil

carries every ship he steers to the awful rocks of perdition. Thank God that a new Captain, the Lord Jesus, is willing to gather you in His arms and to lead you to the harbour of salvation, and there create within you a new heart and a new spirit. But, brethren, let us rejoice for the many who have weathered the storms of the year's temptation. Some of us come to this period with furled sails and bare poles; but, thank God, we are still guided by our good Captain, the Lord Jesus; the rudder of our will obeys His wish, and our only compass is the Bible. Brethren, we shall reach the harbour at the last. Rejoice, for your names are written in heaven. 4. We have had many blessings. 5. We all have had mercy. The mercy-seat covered the law. Have not we broken the commandments during the last year? But mercy has covered our transgressions; and God has declared to us, "I will not remember thy sin." In the great plague of 1666, every house door in London had painted on it these words, "Lord have mercy on us." Well, dear friends, every hour of every day, we, alas! need to say, "God be merciful unto us"; and blessed be His name, He has poured mercy upon us. "Goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our life." 6. What progress have we made in the past? During snowy weather, if you go to a field and try to walk in a straight line, you must not look down at the snow, but up at some mark at the end of the field. Our footsteps are in the snow, and what a zigzag line to be sure! Why? Because we did not fix our eye upon the tree in the distance. Now, dear friends, look back upon the past year. Is your pathway a straight one or not? II. TAKE STOCK OF THE PRESENT. What are we worth? Is God our Banker? Have we any treasure in heaven? Have we drawn out anything from Him by the cheque of prayer? Have we trusted Him with all our life and all that we have? How much do we owe unto our Lord? And let us reckon the debt of love to our fellow-men. As Christians, are we able to pay twenty shillings to the pound? Do we pay our pew-rent at the church, and yet forget to pay the debt of love to our poorer brethren? Brethren, are your hearts any bigger than they were twelve months ago? Have you any increase of faith? At the time of one of the terrible inundations which frequently take place in St. Petersburg, the Empress Catherine stood at one of the windows of the palace watching the fearful sight. The river had stolen into the city during the night, and hundreds of people were drowned. As her majesty was intently looking upon the flood and the havoc it was causing, she saw something above the surface of the water which was rapidly filling the courtyard; and, observing it more attentively, she found it to be the head of a soldier nearly up to his chin in water; but apparently taking no notice of his danger, as he still shouldered his musket as if on duty among the fishes. The Empress at once sent a servant in a boat to ask why the man remained there at the peril of his life. The soldier replied that he had been placed there to guard the palace, and that he could not quit his post until his sergeant sent another sentry to relieve him. He would not stir; and he had to be dragged into the boat by main force in order to save his life. Brethren, in all duties let us be faithful unto death. It is he that endures to the end who shall be saved. Have you any increase of hope? Lord Bacon said that hope made a good breakfast, but an idle supper. Brethren, has your hope in God been an idle one? Has He disappointed you? What is the depth of peace in the reservoir of your heart? The Word declares that the peace of God shall be an inward garrison to your soul. Have you let the devil enter within the fortress of your honour? The peace of God shall keep the gates of all who trust Him. Have you thus trusted Him? And, then, examine your character. Your signboard may be all right, but what is the hidden state of the business of your soul? Going down the street the other day I saw in a stone-mason's yard a beautiful pillar, but it was broken. Does it not represent the character of some? But, thank God, though it is broken, it may be repaired. How about the policy with which you conduct your business? In the days of Alexander, it was fashionable for his captains and soldiers to walk with their heads leaned to one side; because Alexander had somewhat of a crooked neck, and they thought it to be an honour to imitate him. How sad it is that in our rich land men have made money with a wry policy; it has not been straight in the straightness of honour and truth. Their policy has been a crooked one. It has been, "Get money, honestly if you can, but get it." Do not imitate such men. Their success is no proof of their wisdom. But what is your policy? Do you consider it to be expedient to cheat? And, if so, are you not a secret thief? In taking stock let the question, "Am I honest?" be fairly answered! III. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE FUTURE. (W. Birch.) *Lines of circumvallation*:—My text speaks of a

tribe who were often discomfited in battle, yet were at last victorious. But the words may be used as graphically descriptive of the defeat of Christ, to be followed by His successes. When Christ's chin dropped upon His breast in death, the world shouted in triumph. Driven as He has been from the heart, from the social circle, from literature, from places of influence, the world gazes now upon what seems to be a vanquished Redeemer. But He shall yet rally His forces, and though now overcome by other troops, He shall overcome at the last. When a city is about to be besieged, lines of circumvallation are run out; in half circles the fortifications sweep around; the first line fifteen miles out; the second, ten miles; the next, five; the next, one mile out. The attacking host first takes the outworks, then a line nearer, coming on up until the embankment nearest the city is captured. Now, the human heart is defending itself against Christ, and it has run out four or five lines of circumvallation, and they must one by one be taken, so that Christ may overcome at the last and the heart surrender. 1. Forward, ye troops of God, and take the line of fortification farthest out, which is prejudice against ministers and churches. There are men who, for various reasons, do not believe in these things, and from that outward entrenchment contend against Christ. My reply to this is, seek out a Church and a minister that you do like. Amid all the denominations there must be one place where your soul will be blessed. This very church, to some of you, shall be the way to heaven, and through this one break in the long fortification of your prejudice I pass through with the battle-cry of the Cross, feeling that, though these prejudices have been the troop that overcame Christ, He shall overcome at the last. 2. Forward, ye troops of God, to the next entrenchment! It is a circumvallation of social influences. There are hundreds of people here to-night whose surroundings in the world are adverse to the Christian religion. Evil companionship has destroyed innumerable men. Through this high battlement no human force can break, but, oh! that the Lord Jesus might storm it to-night. 3. Forward, ye troops of God, to the third line of entrenchment, namely, the intellectual difficulties about religion. A hundred perplexities about the parables; a hundred questions about the ninth chapter of Romans; passage set against passage in seeming contradiction. You pile up a battlement of Colenso on the "Pentateuch," and Tom Paine's "Age of Reason," and Renan's "Life of Christ"; and some parts of the wall are so high that it would be folly to attempt to take them. But there is a hole in the wall of fortification, and through that hole in the wall I put my right hand, and take your own, and say, "My brother, do you want to be saved?" And you say "Yes." "Well; Jesus Christ came to seek and to save that which is lost." Scepticism seems to do quite well in prosperity, but it fails in adversity. A celebrated infidel, on shipboard, in the sunshine caricatured the Christian religion, and scoffed at its professors. But the sea arose, and the waves dashed across the hurricane-deck, and the man cried out, "O my God, what shall I do? what shall I do?" A father went down to see his dying son in a Southern hospital during the war. Finding that the boy was dying, he went to the chaplain and said, "I wish you would go and see my boy, and get him prepared for the future." "Why," said the chaplain, "I thought you did not believe in religion!" "Well," said he, "I don't, but his mother does; and I would a great deal rather the boy would follow his mother. Go and get him prepared." Scepticism does tolerably well to live by, but it is a poor thing to die by. The fortification of your soul this hour gives way; and the Christ, who seemed to have been overcome by argument, and by profound questions, and elaborate analysis, now, by the force of love, overcomes at the last! 4. Forward, ye troops of light, to the next circumvallation of the heart, namely, pernicious habit. I do not believe that it is necessary to be a teetotaler in order to be a Christian (although I wish all were teetotalers), but I do say that a man who is excessive in the use of strong drink cannot love Christ. He will not dispute with you the supremacy of the bottle. Some years ago, when the cholera was raging in New Orleans, a steamer near nightfall, put out from the city, laden with passengers escaping from the pestilence. The steamer had been but a little while out when the engineer fell at his post with cholera. The captain, in despair, went up and down among the passengers, asking if there were any one there who could act as engineer. A man stepped out, and said that he was an engineer, and could take the position. In the night the captain was awakened by a violent motion of the steamer, and he knew that there was great peril ahead. He went up, and found that the engineer was a maniac; that he had fastened down the safety-valves; and he told the captain that he was the emissary of Satan, commissioned to drive the steamer to hell. By some

strategy, the man was got down in time to save the steamer. There are men engineered by maniac passions, sworn to drive them to temporal and everlasting destruction. Every part of their nature trembles under the high pressure. Nothing but the grace of Almighty God can bring down those passions, and chain them. A little while longer in this course, and all is lost. Whatever be the form of evil habit, Christ is able fully and finally to deliver that man. Where sin abounded, grace does much more abound. Victory over thy sin! Victory through the Lord Jesus Christ! Through many a long year thy appetites overcame Him, but He has overcome at the last! 5. Forward, ye troops of light, to the last and the mightiest line of fortification—the pride and the rebellion of the natural heart. This entrenchment must be taken, or all the rest of the contest is lost. This is the crisis of the battle. (*Dr. Talmage.*) *Intermediate failures and final triumphs*:—1. Do not judge until “the last.” 2. Men who are overcome should be encouraged. 3. Apply this to beginners in business—in Christian life—in the reformation of bad habits. 4. Apply this to spiritual doubt. Do not too readily describe men as infidels. Even unbelievers may at last believe. 5. Hope for your children. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) It may seem, as we look at it spiritually, strange that the fact of being “overcome” by foes should be part of the blessing of God’s people. And yet through the darkness to the light is the order everywhere in God’s kingdom of nature, providence, and grace; and to be “overcome” is as truly a needed discipline for the soul as to be a triumphant conqueror. The type of nature’s strength is not the hot-house plant needing constant care and watchfulness to keep it alive. It is the pine-tree rocked by Norwegian winds which threaten every moment to imperil its existence by uprooting it. Thus, too, it is in the Christian life; and without such dealing the very best of us would be but dwarfs, stunted and crippled, and incapacitated for that warfare with the world, the flesh, and the devil by which we win our way to the kingdom. Nor does the Holy Spirit leave us in any doubt as to this. “A troop shall overcome him” are the words. Not a solitary foe, but many. Sometimes wave upon wave of trial rolls over the soul until we know not what it means. But the cup is measured out. Not one drop is in it beyond what is absolutely needful for the soul’s welfare. And the end is the same in every case—to lead us up out of self wholly into God. Nor let us suppose for a moment that it is because of some sin in us that this bitter cup is put into our hands. It may be this indeed, for God will be quit of sin in us at any and every cost. The gravitation of every believer is earthward, and the quick pruning-knife of the Husbandman can never be unused long without the soul suffering damage. The process of restoration may lie in a constant succession of small trials pressing upon the spirit to draw it nearer to God, or in some sharp quick operation of the knife that makes itself felt for years, turning the hair grey, and making the body stoop. But it is not always to get rid of sin in us that these strokes are sent. It may be to mould us more into the likeness of Christ. Every follower of the Lamb must be a cross-bearer. It is the branch that bears fruit which is pierced and purged, and not the unfruitful one. It may be because you are so like Christ you are made to feel the pruning-knife—in order that you may become more like Him. And how blessed the assurance of our God that we “shall overcome at last!” It is not that we shall overcome at the end of life. It is that the issue of every conflict shall be victory. This Divine assurance of the certainty of victory receives its explanation from Romans viii. 35-39. (*F. Whitfield, M.A.*)

Ver. 20. Asher.—*The blessing of Asher*:—Let us look at some of the spiritual points of instruction contained in this blessing of Jacob upon Asher. And first as to their “bread,” which is described as “fat.” Christ is the “bread of life” to all His people, and this bread may indeed be said to be “fat.” The Psalmist uses a similar figure when he says, “My soul shall be satisfied with marrow and fatness”; and again, “They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house.” And again, in speaking of those who dwell in God’s presence, he says, “Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God: they shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing” (*Psa. xcii. 13, 14*). What a rich and blessed portion for the soul is hid in Christ! How our highest thoughts of it are infinitely surpassed! “I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting-house, and His banner over me was love” (*Cant. ii. 3, 4*). And observe another deeply important truth: “He shall yield royal dainties.” The possession and enjoyment of Christ, and all the treasures of His grace, involves a

great responsibility. Asher is to "yield royal dainties"—to give out what it possesses to others. If Christ be indeed ours, and we are living upon Him continually, we shall do the same. And to give out, we must live upon Him. It is this we need—living, abiding communion with a precious Christ. O reader! let not Satan deceive us by allowing us to have everything but this! This is his grand device, and how wonderfully he has succeeded let the lives of most Christians tell! And what is Asher said to give out in this passage? "Royal dainties." Yes, indeed, as we live upon Christ, that which the soul gives out is no ordinary food. It is dainties—precious food—and with the stamp of the King upon them. There is a royal pardon, a royal love, a royal Saviour, from whom they all flow freely down. (*F. Whitfield, M.A.*)

Ver. 21. Naphtali.—*The blessing of Naphtali*:—In Gad we have the Christian soldier fighting the good fight of faith, and more than conqueror over all foes. In Asher we have the Christian living upon Christ, and giving out Christ to others. In Naphtali we have the Christian enjoying his liberty and freedom and happiness in Christ, and testifying of Christ to others. In Joseph we have the Christian bringing forth much fruit from abiding in Christ, the well of living waters, and also showing forth that fruit to all around. As we look at these passages, we find they are a chain. Each one is a link depending upon the other. You must fight the good fight of faith if you would enjoy Christ as the "fatness" of the Living Bread; and the enjoyment of Christ brings with it true liberty and freedom; and there must be all these, with the addition that you must abide in Christ, the roots of your life ever drawing from the "well of living waters," if you are to "bring forth much fruit." It is surely not without design that the Holy Spirit has placed these passages thus in this consecutive order. May we dwell upon them continually in this light, and test our souls by this Divine standard. Our subject now is the third of these four passages—the tribe of Naphtali. He is brought before us under a most striking symbol—that of a hart or gazelle "let loose." It brings before us the liberty and exultation of the soul in its new sphere of existence. It has been "let loose" from its prison-house of sin, and darkness, and misery. Its prison-doors have been flung wide open by the great Emancipator, Christ Jesus the Lord. Its debt has been fully paid. All its guilt, and sin, and transgression has been cancelled by the blood of Christ. "Let loose!" No other word in the English language could so fitly express the effect of the grand redemption-work of Christ (see Isa. lxi. 1; 2 Cor. v. 17; Gal. vi. 1; John xi. 44). Turning again to Jacob's blessing on this tribe, we see another truth: "He giveth goodly words." It is so always. St. Paul says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom: teaching and admonishing one another: in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Asher lived upon the fatness of the Bread of Life, and as a result gave out "royal dainties." Naphtali is "satisfied with favour and full of the blessing of the Lord, and so gives out goodly words." Joseph is a "bough," whose roots go down into the Well of Living Waters, and so brings forth "much fruit." "Royal dainties," "goodly words," "much fruit." "Out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh." Let us only be living upon and abiding in Christ, and such will ever be our testimony. It is not dainties, but "royal dainties"; not words, but "goodly words"; not fruit, but "much fruit." Oh, reader! this is the kind of life God asks for! This is the Christianity we need. Not your just Christians and no more. No; God wants a high order of Christianity. "Royal dainties," "goodly words," "much fruit"—mark it well! Not only to be engaged in the work of the Lord, but abounding in it; nay, more, "always abounding" in it. (*F. Whitfield, M.A.*)

Vers. 22-26. Joseph is a fruitful bough.—*The blessing of Joseph*:—I. PREDICTION OF HIS FUTURE GREATNESS. 1. His extraordinary increase. 2. His great prosperity. (1) All kinds of blessings were promised. (2) His blessings were to surpass all former instances. (3) His blessings are traced to their source. II. PRAISE OF HIS CHARACTER. 1. He had been a much-tried man (ver 23). (1) The archers of envy and hatred. (2) The archers of temptation. (3) The archers of persecution. (4) The archers of neglect and ingratitude. 2. He had gained the victory over his trials (ver 24). III. HIS DESTINY THE NATURAL RESULT OF HIS CHARACTER. 1. His filial obedience. 2. His desire for God's glory. 3. The operation of that principle by which God rewards in kind. 4. The principle that God's dealings in the past constitute a ground of hope and trust for the future. 5. The principle by which a

firm and well-established godliness tends to continue. (T. H. Leale.) *The fruitful bough*:—I. IN HIS UNION WITH CHRIST, THE CHRISTIAN IS AS A "BOUGH." 1. Union with Christ. 2. Dependence upon Christ. 3. Sustentation from Christ. II. IN THE RESULTS OF HIS UNION WITH CHRIST, THE CHRISTIAN IS AS A "FRUITFUL BOUGH." 1. Some united, but dead. 2. Some living, but fruitless. III. IN THE SOURCE OF HIS FERTILITY, THE CHRISTIAN IS AS A "FRUITFUL BOUGH BY A WELL." As the bough drinks of the spring through the tree, so the Christian drinks of spiritual blessings through Christ. 1. Secretly. 2. Constantly. IV. IN THE HIGHER ATTAINMENTS OF SPIRITUAL LIFE, THE CHRISTIAN IS AS A "FRUITFUL BOUGH BY A WELL WHOSE BRANCHES RUN OVER THE WALL." 1. Over the wall of sectarian prejudices. 2. Over the wall of unbelieving doubt. 3. Over the wall that separates the world from the Church, and blesses the dying with fruit. 4. Over the wall that separates earth from heaven, and looks "within the veil." (W. H. Burton.) *The blessing of Joseph*:—"Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well." In these words we are reminded of our Lord's own statement (John xv. 5), "I am the vine, ye are the branches." The Christian is only a bough of the Tree of Life. But he is to be a fruitful bough. "Herein is My Father glorified," said our blessed Lord, "that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples." And how is this fruitfulness produced? The passage shows us: "a fruitful bough by a well." The believer is to live near to Christ, the well of living waters, and to be drawing forth all his nourishment from Christ by the Holy Spirit. The roots of the tree draw forth the waters from the well, and send them up into all its branches. Thus the "bough" becomes beautiful and fruitful. And the well is hidden. The process goes on in secret, but, notwithstanding, it is an unceasing process. Mark, also, that the branches of this fruitful bough are said to "run over the wall." The believer's fruit must be seen—seen by all who pass by. Alas! only the foliage is too often seen! But the world looks beneath all. But now observe how the patriarch passes rapidly from the figure of a fruitful branch to that of a military warrior: "But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob." True faithfulness is ever linked with the cross, and also with warfare. "Fight the good fight of faith"; "put on the whole armour of God"; "quit you like men; be strong"—such are the expressions used to show us our true position in this world. There is an inseparable connection between life and faithfulness, between the cross and the warfare. But the "bow abiding in strength" points also to Christ. It tells us of the strong, unyielding position in which He would carry on His government (see Rev. vi. 1, 2). And we see the "arms of the hands" of the true Joseph "made strong"—in the power of His exalted position at the right hand of the Father—"by the mighty God of Jacob." In beautiful keeping with this we see the "white horse"—always the emblem of victory—victory in holiness, purity, and truth. Let us now return to the rest of the passage: "from thence"—i.e., the mighty God—"is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel." We must read the passage correctly: "The arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob, even from the Shepherd and Stone of Israel." Thus we find here that Joseph's hands were made strong for his work by the mighty God of Jacob, the Shepherd and Stone of Israel. He who is the mighty God is the great Shepherd of His sheep, and the great Foundation Stone of Israel. And now the blessings promised and to be prayed for are described: "blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under." They begin with heaven, and they take in the earth. This is ever God's order. The patriarch continues: "blessings of the breast and the womb." Jacob prays that his son may be blessed from heaven with rain and dew, and with fountains and brooks which spring from the great deep or abyss of the earth, so that everything that had womb and breast in the natural world should become pregnant, bring forth, and suckle. He then continues: "The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors, unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills." The blessings which Jacob implored for his son Joseph were to surpass the blessings which his parents had transmitted to him, as far as the great mountains towered above the earth. These blessings were to descend upon "the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of the separated one from among his brethren." As we read these promises and prayers for blessing on Joseph, our thoughts are carried forward to the Lord Jesus Christ. Language seems to fail the old patriarch in his longings for blessings on his son; but as we see Jesus, "the separated One," we behold these desires fulfilled. (F. Whitfield, M.A.) *Over-the-wall fruitfulness*:—"Joseph is a fruitful bough, whose branches run over

the wall" (chap. xlix. 22). These words remind us of our Lord saying, "I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit." And they take our thoughts to an eastern vineyard, where the trellis bends with clusters, and a few strong shoots are left by the kindly husbandman to overhang the enclosure for the passer-by. I. In the first place, consider **THE BRANCH THAT BEARS FRUIT OVER THE WALL**. It is one thing to bear fruit in the vineyard, and another to have such vigour that we also bear fruit beyond; and we speak now of the latter. 1. Fruitfulness to more than have claim upon us. Some have such claim; their relationship, their desert, their needs, appeal to us so forcibly and reasonably, that we wrong them if we refuse our sympathy and help; these are they who have right to the vintage—the children of the husbandmen, as it were, for whom the vine exists, and who are somewhat free to the grapes. But others have no such right, or have forfeited the right they had, the unloving and unlovable, those who abuse your kindness, those who bring their troubles on themselves, those who again fall when they have many times been raised, those who seem hopelessly bad and to have no redeeming trait. And there are those, of whom all this cannot be said, who are deserving, and yet have no claim on us—whose rights extend to some other vineyard, but not to ours. Now we take our text as symbolically speaking of usefulness to all these, the branch breaking away from its support, and reaching, with its grateful fruit, to those outside. And do we not need, my friends, to consider that? The good Samaritan in his kindness to the Jew that had fallen among thieves, was a branch that ran over the wall. Our Lord's deed of mercy to the Syro-Phœnician woman was a branch that ran over the wall. And whilst it is right to give the harvest of our life to those who have claim on the vine, it must be right to let some shoots trail to the larger world outside, and to the very grating of the prisoner's cell. 2. Ministry to those outside our particular vineyard. Into every department of life Christianity casts some healing influence. There is much, indeed, for it to do yet; but it has been the originator or beneficent ally of all onward movements in the history of the race. See how its branches run over the wall; how contrary it is to the spirit of exclusiveness! Its blessings are for the Church, but, in a less degree, it blesses the world as well. And that warns us Christian people against exclusiveness in religious sympathy; exclusiveness is not Christianity. It were a bad day for any church when its thought, and effort, and means are spent only on its own work and wants, and it ceases to care with brotherly interest for other churches, God's vast world-wide work. Let the main clusters, if you will, be for those for whom God planted the vine, but see to it that strong fruitful branches run over the wall. 3. Refreshment to the casual passer-by. The text was suggested in passing a vineyard on the south side of the Alps, as outside the enclosure some unpruned shoots, with their just-formed grapes, were waving in the wind, to be perhaps a refreshment to some traveller in the summer's heat. It is the picture of a Christian whose abundant inner life comes out unawares, as it were, for the benediction of any who may pass that way. Tired pilgrims pass us every hour, some oppressed with their burden, some parched with the world's dust, some who have lost their strength in conflict, and some who thirst but for a tender look, a friendly utterance, a sympathetic grasp, and with these would go their way revived. Think of such finding this reviving in us! II. Consider, secondly, **THAT THIS IS THE MARK OF THE BRANCH OF THE TRUE VINE**. 1. Christianity tends to the enlarging of our sympathies. It brings us into contact with Christ, and makes us partakers in His Spirit. Nothing is more striking or blessed in Scripture than the absence of exclusiveness in our Lord's love and readiness to bless. Christianity is the being joined to Him, "and he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." In His people, then, this spirit of unexclusive sympathy exists in germ; and as they commune with Him it grows, and they spontaneously care for those He cares for. 2. Beside this, Christianity claims a deliberate consideration of others' wants. "We, then, that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves"; "let every one of us please his neighbour for his good, for even Christ pleased not Himself"; "bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." 3. And Christianity results in unconscious, unchecked fruitfulness. Christianity is not so much a doing as a being. We are not Christians because we do this or that. "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name have cast out devils, and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them: I never knew you; depart from Me ye that work iniquity." Christianity is a new nature taking

the place of ours, by which heart and mind, and character and life become Divine. Now our nature cannot appoint set times in which to express itself, nor fence off a few to whom alone it shall make itself known. Every branch of the Vine which Jesus is, necessarily runs over the wall somewhere, bearing unconscious fruit not only for the vineyard it is expected to enrich, but also for the passer-by outside to pluck. III. Then CONSIDER HOW THIS OVER-THE-WALL FRUITFULNESS MAY BE SECURED. The very word "fruit" teaches us. Distinguish between "works" and "fruit." "Works," says one, "may be the actings of a legal spirit; they are done in obedience to laws; they may be performed perfunctorily, and are no part of one's nature." But fruit is the sign of life; it is not due to commands, nor even to effort; it is life spontaneously, naturally, sweetly giving itself forth. Now it is fruit of which we speak, fruit that Christ wants. "Herein is My Father glorified that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be My disciples." Then what is needed for this over-the-wall fruitfulness is the earnest culture of our spirituality. Culture the life, and the fruit comes of its own accord; branches running over the wall are but the exuberance of life. Let me give these three brief rules: 1. It depends on the measure in which we receive the life of Christ. "Joseph is a fruitful bough." Only a bough. We are "boughs," that is all; therefore we have no life in ourselves, and God does not require us to have any; the life is in the Vine—"our life is hid with Christ"; "as a branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in Me . . . severed from Me, ye can do nothing." 2. And it depends on our fruitfulness to those nearest to us. For the strong shoots that trail outside will spring from the strong wood in the vineyard itself, and the dresser of the vines, we may be sure, will only permit the branch that does its duty first within to carry strength elsewhere. To bear fruit over the wall only, or chiefly, is to rob the Husbandman, for where He has planted us He means our richest grapes to grow. We must love our own best—our own family, our own church; our deepest sympathies and best energies are for those to whom God has given most claim upon them; and only when we have done that, He would have us not forget them that are without. "Learn first to show piety at home"; "do good unto all men, but specially to them that are of the household of faith." And that is the successful order. It is by putting strength into our nearest duties, and fulfilling Christian love to those nearest to us, that we get the power for the ministry beyond. Bear ripe good fruit within the wall, then—for then it will be possible, and the Husbandman will permit it—let some branches run over. 3. And it depends on our submission to the Divine culture of our piety. For Joseph was the fruitful bough—Joseph, of whom it was said "God made him fruitful in the land of his affliction." "Every branch in Me that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." The fruitful branch is pruned closest, and if the shoots that stray over the enclosure are to bear grapes, some others must be nipped. Is not that blessed compensation (even were it all) for Christian suffering—more fruit to God and man? That is a price that must be paid for fruitfulness. "The vine that bears much fruit is proud to stoop with it; the palm stands upright in a realm of sand." (*C. New.*) The archers shot at him, but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.—*Man helped by God*:—I. STRENGTH FOR CONFLICT by contact with the strength of God. The word here rendered "made strong" might be translated "made pliable," or "flexible," conveying the notion of deftness and dexterity rather than of simple strength. It is practised strength that He will give, the educated hand and arm, master of all the manipulation of the weapon. II. The text not only gives the fact of Divine strength being bestowed, but also THE MANNER OF THE GIFT. What boldness of reverent familiarity there is in that symbol of the hands of God laid on the hand of the man. A true touch, as of hand to hand, conveys the grace. Nothing but contact will give us strength for conflict and for conquest. And the plain lesson, therefore, is—See to it that the contact is not broken by you. "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." (*A. MacLaren, D.D.*) *Joseph attacked by the archers*:—I. THE CRUEL ATTACK. "The archers have sorely grieved him." Joseph's enemies were archers. The original has it, "masters of the arrows," that is, men who were well skilled in the use of the arrow. Though all weapons are alike approved by the warrior in his thirst for blood, there seems something more cowardly in the attack of the archer, than in that of the swordsman. The swordsman plants himself near you, foot to foot, and let you defend yourself and deal your blows against him; but the archer stands at a distance, hides himself in ambuscade, and without you knowing it, the arrow comes whizzing

through the air, and perhaps penetrates your heart. Just so are the enemies of God's people. 1. First, Joseph had to endure the archers of envy. When he was a boy, his father loved him. Therefore, his brethren hated him. Full often did they jeer at the youthful Joseph, when he retired to his prayers; when he was with them at a distance from his father's house, he was their drudge, their slave; the taunt, the jeer, did often wound his heart, and the young child endured much secret sorrow. Truly the archers sorely shot at him. And, my brethren, do you hope, if you are the Lord's Josephs, that you shall escape envy? I tell you, nay; that green-eyed monster envy lives in London as well as elsewhere, and he creeps into God's church, moreover. Oh! it is hardest of all to be envied by one's brethren. 2. But a worse trial than this was to overtake him. The archers of temptation shot at him. You know it is opportunity that makes a man criminal, and he had abundant opportunity; but importunity will drive most men astray. To be haunted day by day by solicitations of the softest kind—to be tempted hour by hour—oh! it needs a strength superangelic, a might more than human, a strength which only God can grant, for a young man thus to cleanse his way, and take heed thereto according to God's word. Truly the archers sorely grieved him and shot at him; but his bow abode in strength. 3. Then another host of archers assailed him: these were the archers of malicious calumny. Seeing that he would not yield to temptation, his mistress falsely accused him to her husband, and his lord, believing the voice of his wife, cast him into prison. There was poor Joseph. His character ruined in the eyes of man, and very likely looked upon with scorn even in the prison-house; base criminals went away from him as if they thought him viler than themselves, as if they were angels in comparison with him. Oh! it is no easy thing to feel your character gone, to think that you are slandered, that things are said of you that are untrue. Many a man's heart has been broken by this, when nothing else could make him yield. The archers sorely grieved him when he was so maligned, so slandered. Oh child of God, dost thou expect to escape these archers? Wilt thou never be slandered? Shalt thou never be calumniated? It is the lot of God's servants, in proportion to their zeal, to be evil spoken of. II. We have seen these archers shoot their flights of arrows; we will now go up the hill a little, behind a rock, to look at the SHIELDED WARRIOR and see how his courage is while the archers have sorely grieved him. What is he doing? "His bow abideth in strength." Let us picture God's favourite. The archers are down below. There is a parapet of rock before him; now and then he looks over it to see what the archers are about, but generally he keeps behind. In heavenly security he is set upon a rock, careless of all below. Let us follow the track of the wild goat, and behold the warrior in his fastness. 1. First, we notice that he has a bow himself, for we read that "his bow abode in strength." He could have retaliated if he pleased, but he was very quiet and would not combat with them. 2. Mark well his quietness. His bow "abideth." It is not rattling, it is not always moving, but it abides, it is quite still; he takes no notice of the attack. The archers sorely grieved Joseph, but his bow was not turned against them, it abode in strength. He turned not his bow on them. He rested while they raged. Doth the moon stay herself to lecture every dog that bayeth her? Doth the lion turn aside to rend each cur that barketh at him? Do the stars cease to shine because the nightingales reprove them for their dimness? Doth the sun stop in its course because of the officious cloud which veils it? Or doth the river stay because the willow dippeth its leaves into its waters? Ah! no; God's universe moves on, and if men will oppose it, it heeds them not. 3. But we must not forget the next word: "His bow abode in strength." Though his bow was quiet, it was not because it was broken. Joseph's bow was like that of William the Conqueror, no man could bend it but Joseph himself; it abode "in strength." I see the warrior bending his bow, how with his mighty arms he pulls it down and draws the string to make it ready. His bow abode in strength; it did not snap, it did not start aside. His chastity was his bow, and he did not lose that; his faith was his bow, and that did not yield, it did not break; his courage was his bow, and that did not fail him; his character, his honesty was his bow; nor did he cast it away. III. The third thing in our text is the SECRET STRENGTH. "The arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob." 1. First, notice concerning his strength, that it was real strength. It says, "the arms of his hands," not his hands only. You know some people can do a great deal with their hands, but then it is often fictitious power; there is no might in the arm, there is no muscles, but of Joseph it is said, "the arms of his hands were made strong." It was real potency, true

muscle, real sinew, real nerve. Oh ye foes of God, ye think God's people are despicable and powerless; but know that they have true strength from the omnipotence of their Father, a might substantial and divine. Your own shall melt away, and droop and die, like the snow upon the low mountain's top, when the sun shines upon it, it melteth into water; but our vigour shall abide like the snow on the summit of the Alps, undiminished for ages. It is real strength. 2. Then observe that the strength of God's Joseph is divine strength. His arms were made strong by God. Why does one of God's ministers preach the Gospel powerfully? Because God gives him assistance. Why does Joseph stand against temptation? Because God gives him aid. The strength of a Christian is divine strength. 3. Again: I would have you notice in the text in what a blessedly familiar way God gives this strength to Joseph. It says, "the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob." Thus it represents God as putting his hands on Joseph's hands, placing his arms on Joseph's arms. In old times, when every boy had to be trained up to archery, if his father were worth so many pounds a year, you might see the father putting his hands on his boy's hands and pulling the bow for him, saying, "There, my son, in this manner draw the bow." So the text represents God as putting His hand on the hand of Joseph, and laying His broad arm along the arm of His chosen child, that he might be made strong. Like as a father teaches his children, so the Lord teaches them that fear Him. He puts His arms upon them. 4. This strength was covenant strength, for it is said, "The arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob." Now, wherever you read of God of Jacob in the Bible, you may know that that respects God's covenant with Jacob. Covenant mercies, covenant grace, covenant promises, covenant blessings, covenant help, covenant everything—the Christian must receive if he would enter into heaven. Now, Christian, the archers have sorely grieved you, and shot at you, and wounded you; but your bow abides in strength, and the arms of your hands are made strong. But do you know, O believer, that you are like your Master in this? IV. That is our fourth point—A GLORIOUS PARALLEL. "From thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel," Jesus Christ was served just the same; the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel, passed through similar trials; He was shot at by the archers, He was grieved and wounded, but His bow abode in strength; His arms were made strong by the God of Jacob, and now every blessing rests "upon the crown of the head of Him who was separated from His brethren." (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 24. The mighty God of Jacob. From thence is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel.—*Three names*:—These three names which we find here are striking and beautiful in themselves; in their juxtaposition; in their use on Jacob's lips. Look at them as they stand. I. **THE MIGHTY GOD OF JACOB.** The meaning of such a name is clear enough. It is He who has shown Himself mighty and mine by His deeds for me all through my life. The very vital centre of a man's religion is his conviction that God is his. The dying patriarch left to his descendants the legacy of this great Name. II. **THE SHEPHERD.** That name sums up the lessons that Jacob had learned from the work of himself and of his sons. His own sleepless vigilance and patient endurance were but shadows of the loving care, the watchful protection, the strong defence, which "the God who has been my Shepherd all my life long" had extended to him and his. III. **THE STONE OF ISRAEL.** Here, again, we have a name that after-ages have caught up and cherished, used for the first time. The Stone of Israel means much the same thing as the Rock. The general idea of this symbol is firmness, solidity. God is a Rock—1. for a foundation; 2. for a fortress; 3. for shade and refreshment. None that ever built on that Rock have been confounded. We clasp hands with all that have gone before us. At one end of the long chain this dim figure of the dying Jacob stretches out his withered hands to God, the Stone of Israel; at the other end we lift up ours to Jesus and cry—

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee." (A. Maclaren, D.D.)

Ver. 27. He shall divide the spoil.—*The division of spoils*:—There is nothing more fascinating than the life of a hunter. On a certain day in all England you can hear the crack of the sportsman's gun, because grouse hunting has begun; and every man who can afford the time and ammunition, and can draw a bead, starts for the fields. On the 20th of October our woods and forests will resound

with the shock of fire-arms, and will be tracked of pointers and setters, because the quail will then be a lawful prize for the sportsman. Xenophon grew eloquent in regard to the art of hunting. In the far East people, elephant-mounted, chase the tiger. The American Indian darts his arrow at the buffalo until the frightened herd tumble over the rocks. European nobles are often found in the fox-chase and at the stag-hunt. Francis I. was called the father of hunting. Moses declares of Nimrod: "He was a mighty hunter before the Lord." Therefore, in all ages of the world, the imagery of my text ought to be suggestive, whether it means a wolf after a fox, or a man after a lion. "In the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoils." I take my text, in the first place, as descriptive of those people who, in the morning of their life, give themselves up to hunting the world; but afterwards, by the grace of God, in the evening of their life divide among themselves the spoils of Christian character. There are aged Christian men and women in this house who, if they gave testimony, would tell you that in the morning of their life they were after the world as intent as a hound after a hare, or as a falcon swoops upon a gazelle. They wanted the world's plaudits and the world's gains. They felt that if they could get this world they would have everything. Some of them started out for the pleasures of the world. They thought that the man who laughed loudest was happiest. They tried repartee, and conundrum, and burlesque, and madrigal. After awhile misfortune struck them hard on the back. They found there was something they could not laugh at. Under their late hours their health gave way, or there was a death in the house. They awoke to their sinfulness and their immortality, and here they sit to-night, at sixty or seventy years of age, as appreciative of all innocent mirth as they ever were, but they are bent on a style of satisfaction which in early life they never hunted: the evening of their days brighter than the morning. In the morning they devoured the prey, but at night they are dividing the spoils. Then there are others who started out for financial success. Wherever a dollar was expected to be, they were. They chased it across the ocean. They chased it across the land. They stopped not for the night. Hearing that dollar, even in the darkness, thrilled them as an Adirondack sportsman is thrilled at midnight by a loon's laugh. They chased that dollar to the money-vault. All the hounds were out—all the pointers and the setters. They leaped the hedges for that dollar, and they cried: "Hark away! a dollar! a dollar!" And when at last they came upon it and had actually captured it, their excitement was like that of a falconer who has successfully flung his first hawk. In the morning of their life, oh, how they devoured the prey! But there came a better time to their soul. From that time they did not care whether they walked or rode, if Christ walked with them; nor whether they lived in a mansion or in a hut, if they dwelt under the shadow of the Almighty; nor whether they were robed in French broadcloth or in homespun, if they had the robe of the Saviour's righteousness; nor whether they were sandalled with morocco or calf skin, if they were shod with the preparation of the gospel. Now you see peace on their countenance. Now that man says: "What a fool I was to be enchanted with this world." This world is a poor thing to hunt. It is healthful to go out in the woods and hunt. It rekindles the lustre of the eye. It strikes the brown of the autumnal leaf into the cheek. It gives to the rheumatic limbs a strength to leap like the roe. Christopher North's pet gun, the muckle-mounted-Meg, going off in the summer in the forests, had its echo in the winter-time in the eloquence that rang through the university halls of Edinburgh. It is healthy to go hunting in the fields; but I tell you that it is belittling and bedwarfing and belaming for a man to hunt this world. So it was with Lord Byron. So it was with Coleridge. So it was with Catherine of Russia. Henry II. went out hunting for this world, and its lances struck through his heart. Francis I. aimed at the world, but the assassin's dagger put an end to his ambition and his life with one stroke. Mary Queen of Scots wrote on the window of her castle:—

"From the top of all my trust
Mishap hath laid me in the dust."

The Queen Dowager of Navarre was offered for her wedding-day a costly and beautiful pair of gloves, and she put them on; but they were poisoned gloves, and they took her life. Better a bare hand of cold privation than a warm and poisoned glove of ruinous success. Again, my subject is descriptive of those who come to a sudden and a radical change. You have noticed how short a time it is from morning to night—only

seven or eight hours. You know that the day has a very brief life. Its heart beats twenty-four times, and then it is dead. How quick this transition in the character of these Benjamites! "In the morning they shall devour the prey, and at night they shall divide the spoils." Is it possible that there shall be such a transformation in any of our characters? (*Dr. Talmage.*) *The blessing of Benjamin*:—In Benjamin, the youngest and last of the sons of Jacob, there is expressed the culmination of all blessing for all the tribes of Israel. In this tribe is summed up, in a climax, all spiritual blessing for every child of God. Morning and evening together suggests the idea of incessant and victorious capture of booty. The war-like character manifested by this tribe was shown on many occasions in their history, and exhibited marked features of a fierce and wolfish character. Israel, as represented in Benjamin, shall devour the prey, and at night divide the spoil. The prophecies of Balaam, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, as well as the minor prophets, are full of announcements that the Lord will again take in hand His ancient people, and they shall go forth, in mighty power, under the leadership of Christ as their Messiah, and shall destroy their foes on the right hand and on the left, and shall carry off "the spoil." This is the emphatic declaration in the blessing on Benjamin. "At night," at the close of this dispensation of darkness and sin and sorrow, it will receive its decisive fulfilment, and a morning shall be ushered in such as the world has never yet seen—the morning of resurrection, when the Church of the living God shall exchange her weeds of widowhood for her garments of glory and beauty, and shall rise to meet her Lord in the air, and for ever reign with Him over a regenerated world. Blessed morning, long expected! Well may every true and loyal-hearted servant of Christ exclaim with the beloved disciple in his closing word of prophecy, "Even so; come, Lord Jesus." (*F. Whitfield, M.A.*)

Ver. 29. Bury me with my fathers.—*Love in death*:—The patriarch Jacob, in his last request, says, "Bury me with my fathers"; and this feeling has illustration all along the ages in different races and climes. What is it but the outward symbol of that which is deepest in the heart? What is it but an expression of the preciousness of these earthly relationships? Bury me with my fathers. Of course in the grave, with silence and darkness, there is no device or knowledge. So far as the perishing bodies are concerned, it cannot matter essentially where they repose when the spirit has fled. And yet they are the tenements of thought and will. They are associated with all that is most expressive in our being. With them are grouped the activities, the endearments, the acquisitions, the possessions, that make up our estimate of life. When the patriarch said, "Bury me with my fathers," he thought of those whom he revered and loved, whose remains were lying in the sepulchre of Machpelah; he thought of the holy friendships that had consecrated and sweetened his years; and those forms of parent and wife and kindred seemed endued with life and feeling in the strong ardour of his soul. He wished to continue the relationship, and would sleep with those from whom he descended and loved. How natural is this sentiment, and how largely is the custom observed throughout the world! When we think of death and our place of burial, it is with thoughts of others who have gone before us. A lonely grave, a burial away from friends and kindred—remote, unvisited, neglected—brings sad thoughts. We cannot help shrinking from the picture that we make of it. To die alone, to be buried by strangers, to lie afar from any dust that once was dear, is not what we would prefer. But there where our ancestors repose, where parents are entombed, where sleeps the companion of our journey, or child, or sister, or brother, or beloved friend—there, too, we would be borne by tender hands, when we can tell none how kind they are. It is the same feeling that prefers those who love us to minister to us in our last hours, and perform the last offices that friendship can render. The human cries out of the darkness of death for the beloved presence, the heart that was true and kind. And if we can feel that when we are gone there will be any to follow us with sorrow to the grave, and there to plant some symbol of affection, and, as the days and years pass, to go aside sometimes and think of us as we were, with our friendship and faith, there comes a grateful emotion. There is something sweetly tranquilizing in the thought that we shall lie down with the family around us, the revered and good who closed their eyes long ago, and those who follow us out of the doors where we followed others who have gone; and that they shall bring the children one by one to sleep by our side. All this is grateful to our thought, I say; and why? What could it mean if the heart did not reach onward to everlasting attachments,

to life with the beloved beyond the grave! And oh! how dark would it be, when we come to face the dread necessity of death, were it not for the light that comes from the broken sepulchre of Christ! What would be our hope without this victorious and mighty Saviour, who has put death under His feet? Dear friends, here is an assurance, glorious and indubitable, that is given for everlasting comfort and strength. He who consecrated home while on earth, with all that could sanctify and sweeten it, prepares the heavenly home. (*H. N. Powers.*) *Jacob's dying charge*.—I. AN EXPRESSION OF NATURAL FEELING. A natural feeling it is, a strong instinctive impulse of our humanity, this concern about the body, this concern about it to the last, this desire that, when the spirit has fled, it should not be neglected—should not be thrown carelessly into the ground anywhere, but should receive a respectful interment where its mouldering remains may mingle with the dust of our nearest relatives. How instinctive the thought that the dust in the family sepulchre has still some relationship to our material frame! How instinctive the desire that our bodies and those of our beloved friends should take the long, still sleep together! Not less natural is the wish to be remembered—to be remembered in connection with those who have been so near to us in kindred and kindly fellowship. Such feelings, my friends, are not unlawful; but neither are they unprofitable. If they be kept in their own place, if they be cherished in subordination to higher principles, if they be not permitted to overgrow and stifle the desires and expectations of that which is spiritual, they are neither unbecoming nor useless. We are the better of feeling that the body is a part of man, an integral part of our personal identity, and not lost, or unworthy of care, even in its dissolution. We are the better of feeling that beyond death there is still some tie of kindred between our dust and the dust of our beloved relatives, as well as between our souls and their souls. We are the better of feeling the wish to be remembered after we are no more seen in the world—to be remembered in association with those whom we esteem and reverence. II. In their holier import, the words before us expressed THE PEACE AND FAITH OF THE DYING PATRIARCH. "I am to be gathered unto my people"—"I am being gathered unto my people" seems to be the proper force of the expression, pointing rather to a present than to a future event. It was the language of one who felt that the last short journey was already commenced, that his feet were already dipping into the swellings of Jordan. But there was no appearance of alarm, no token of anxiety, no struggling search as if he wanted something to rest upon, or as if the anchor of the soul were not holding firmly. All is quiet, untroubled, and peaceful. Thus he passed down—down into the dark valley—down into the rushing river—as you might speak of going home from your day's work at evening. A similar inference may be drawn from the manner in which he conveyed to his sons the charge concerning his burial. Observe his careful, leisurely description of the place to which he referred, and its purchase by his grandfather: "Bury me in the cave which is in the field of Ephron the Hittite," &c. That was no hurried glance at a secondary matter, amid the agony of an arduous and uncertain conflict—no snatching of a moment out of engrossing anxieties and apprehensions about his spiritual interests, to indicate his desire regarding the body which was about to be resolved into the dust from which it had been taken. If he had not been at rest in reference to his undying soul, if he had not felt a quiet, holy confidence that it was safe, would he have been so deliberately careful in describing the situation and the purchase of the sepulchre? Let us not marvel, my friends, that saints about to depart can dwell upon the thought of some earthly and temporal matter; neither should we grieve to hear them then speaking with interest about other things besides the spiritual and heavenly. It may be the very strength and quiet assurance of their hope of immortality that permit them to give some special attention still to the body, or the household, or the world which they are leaving. Whence that peace, that terrorless tranquility of Jacob in the death-hour? Here he made no particular reference to the source of it. This was not necessary. He had indicated, by his religious profession, and by the consistent piety which adorned his life, especially the latter portion of it, that his trust was in the covenant mercy of Jehovah. In the prophetic blessing also, the sound of which had scarcely left the ears of his assembled children, he had spoken of the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel; he had named the Shiloh, to whom the gathering of the nations would be; and had concluded his prediction respecting one of the tribes with these words, "I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord." There was no need of further explanation—there was no need for his declaring now that his peace was the fruit

of faith, faith in the saving grace of that God who had given him the covenant with its blessings and promises, ratified by sacrifice and predictive of the Messiah. (*W. Bruce, D.D.*)

Ver. 33. When Jacob had made an end . . . he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost.—Jacob's death-bed:—I. HIS AFFECTION FOR THE LIVING. 1. His affection was impartial. 2. His affection was religious. II. SYMPATHY WITH THE DEAD. III. HIS MAGNANIMITY IN ALL. No perturbation. Two things alone can explain his calmness. 1. Faith in his future existence. 2. Faith in the happiness of his future existence. (*Homilist.*) *Jacob's death and funeral:—*I. THE PATRIARCH'S DEPARTURE. 1. A hint of immortality. Amid the shadows of the past there were beams of light that spoke of a future state (life and immortality brought to life by the gospel). Jacob "was gathered to his people" (chap. xlix. 33). Jehovah was known as "the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob." He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. The patriarchs were therefore living. To them Jacob was "gathered." 2. An illustration of natural sorrow. Joseph "fell on his father's face, and wept upon him, and kissed him." Picture this affecting sight. Wealth and power had not hardened Joseph's heart. We sorrow not, as they that have no hope. 3. An illustration of filial obedience. Joseph remembering his promise to his father (chap. xlvii. 29-31), had him embalmed, &c. Do we remember dying parent's wishes, not to carry him to the promised land, but to meet him there? II. THE MAGNIFICENT FUNERAL. 1. There was the usual ceremonious mourning of many days. 2. Joseph seeks permission of the king to bury his father. 3. At the head of a great retinue he passes up once more to Canaan. How great the difference between his leaving and entering Canaan. Thirty-nine years have elapsed. The youth of seventeen has become a man of fifty-six. The slave has become a prince. Both were occasions of grief. Then he was leaving his father through the treachery of his brothers; now he is burying his father with his brethren around him. 4. Such a funeral never before seen in Canaan. The Canaanites find that the old shepherd who went away seventeen years before is a great man. So sometimes men are brought back to be buried among the people who thought little of them while they lived. (*Ill. the funeral of Cobden in the Sussex village, &c.*) (*J. C. Gray.*) *Sermons from saintly death-beds:—*Jacob did not yield up the ghost until he had delivered the last sentence of admonition and benediction to his twelve sons. He was immortal till his work was done. So long as God had another sentence to speak by him, death could not paralyse his tongue. Yet, after all, the strong man was bowed down, and he who had journeyed with unwearied foot full many a mile, was now obliged to gather up his feet into the bed to die. From the wording of the text, it appears very clearly that Israel did not dispute the irrevocable decree, nor did his soul murmur against it. He had long before learned that few and evil were his days, and now that they came to an end, he joyfully accepted their conclusion. It is remarkable that the Holy Spirit has given us very few death-bed scenes in the Book of God. We have very few in the Old Testament, fewer still in the New, and I take it that the reason may be because the Holy Ghost would have us take more account of how we live than how we die, for life is the main business. He who learns to die daily while he lives, will find it no difficulty to breathe out his soul for the last time into the hands of his faithful Creator. If we fight well the battle, we may rest assured of the victory. I. First, THE DEPARTURES OF GOD'S SAINTS, AND ESPECIALLY OF HIS MINISTERS—WHAT ARE THEIR LESSONS? 1. The first that lies upon the surface, is this, "Be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh." When in the forest there is heard the crash of a falling oak, it is a sign that the woodman is abroad, and every tree in the whole company may tremble lest soon the sharp edge of the axe should find it out. 2. Secondly, the deaths of righteous men should teach us their value. According to the old saying, we never know the value of things till we lose them. I am sure it is so with holy men. Let me urge young people here to prize their aged godly parents, to treat them kindly, to make their last days happy, because they cannot expect to have them long on earth to receive their tokens of affectionate gratitude. 3. Furthermore, I think the departures of great saints and those who have been eminent, teach us to pray earnestly to God to send us more of such—a lesson which, I am quite certain, needs to be inculcated often. There is sadly little prayer in the church for the rising ministry. 4. Yet there is a valuable truth on the other side. We desire always to look at both sides of a question. The taking away of eminent saints from among us should teach us to depend more upon God, and less

upon human instrumentality. I was reading, yesterday, the dying prayer of Oliver Cromwell, and one sentence in that man of God's last breathings pleased me exceedingly. It was to this effect, "Teach those who look too much upon Thy instruments to depend more upon Thyself." The Lord would have all the glory given unto His own name. 5. Coming back, however, to the old thought, do you not think that the departure of eminent saints should teach each one of us to work with more earnestness and perseverance while we are spared? One soldier the less in the battle, my brethren; then you must fill up the vacancy; you who stand next in the ranks must close up, shoulder to shoulder, that there be no gap. Here is one servant the less in the house: the other servants must do the more work. It is but natural for us so to argue, because we wish the Master's work to be done, and it will not be done without hands. II. Come with me to the second part of my discourse. Much may be learned from the MODE OF DEPARTURE of God's servants. 1. To some of God's own children the dying bed is a *Bochim*, a place of weeping. It is melancholy when such is the case, and yet it is often so with those who have been negligent servants: they are saved, but so as by fire; they struggle into the port of peace, but their entrance is like that of a weather-beaten vessel which has barely escaped the storm, and enters into harbour so terribly leaking as to be ready to founder, without her cargo, for she has thrown that overboard to escape the waves, sails rent to ribands, masts gone by the board, barely able to keep afloat. Many a dying pillow has been wet with the penitential tears of saints, who have then fully seen their formerly unobserved shortcomings and failures and laxities in the family, in the business, in the church, and in the world. Brethren, it is beautiful to see the repentance of a dying saint; travel far as you may, you will not readily behold a more comely spectacle. Yet at the sight of such instances it has struck me that the fruit though precious was scarcely seasonable; it must be acceptable to God, for He never rejects repentance anywhere, but yet a brighter state of soul would have glorified Him more in dying moments. We regret to see mourning of soul as the most conspicuous feature in a departing brother, we desire to see joy and confidence clearly manifested at the last. 2. It has not unfrequently occurred that the dying scene has been to the Lord's departing champions a battle, not perhaps by reason of any slips or shortcomings—far from it, for in some cases the conflict appeared to arise by very reason of their valour in the Lord's service. Who among us would assert that Martin Luther failed to live up to the light and knowledge which he had received? So far as he knew the truth, I believe he most diligently followed it; beyond most men he was true to conscience, he knew comparatively little of the truth, but what he did know he maintained with all his heart, and soul, and strength; and yet it is exceedingly painful to read the record of Luther's last few days. Darkness was round about him, thick clouds and tempest enveloped his soul. At the last the sky cleared, but it is very evident that, among all the grim battles in which that mighty German fought and conquered, probably the most tremendous conflict of his life was at its close. Can we not guess the reason? Was it not because the devil knew him to be his worst enemy then upon the earth, and therefore hating him with the utmost power of infernal hate, and feeling that this was his last opportunity for assaulting him, he gathered up all his diabolical powers, and came in against him like a flood, thinking that mayhap he might at the last overcome the stout heart, and cow the valiant spirit! Only by Divine assistance did Luther win the victory, but win it he did. Is this form of departure to be altogether deprecated? I think not. Is it to be dreaded in some aspects, though not in others, for is it not a noble thing for the knight of the Cross to die in harness? a blessed thing for the Christian soldier to proceed at once from the battle field to his eternal rest? 3. To many saints their departure has been a peaceful entrance into the fair haven of repose. The very weakest of God's servants have frequently been happiest in their departing moments. John Bunyan, who had observed this fact, in the description of Mr. Feeblemind's passage of the river, "Here also I took notice of what was very remarkable; the water of that river was lower at this time than ever I saw it all my life. So he went over at last not much above wet-shod." Heaven's mercy tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, and gives to babes no battle, because they have no strength for it: the lambs calmly rest on the bosom of Jesus, and breathe out their lives in the Shepherd's arms. What encouragement this ought to be to you who are the tender ones among us! what cheering tidings for you who are weak in faith! 4. Many of the saints have gone farther than this, for their death-beds have been pulpits. When Mr. Matthew Henry was dying, Mr. Illidge came to him, and he said, "You

have been used to take notice of the sayings of dying men; this is mine, 'A life spent in the service of God and in communion with Him, is the most pleasant life that any one can live in the world.' " Well spoken! Our pulpits often lack force and power; men suppose that we speak but out of form and custom, but they do not suspect dying men of hypocrisy, nor think that they are driving a trade and following a profession. Hence the witness of dying saints has often become powerful to those who have stood around their couch; careless hearts have been impressed, slumbering consciences have been awakened, and children of God quickened to greater diligence by what they have heard. 5. And, brethren, we have known not unfrequent cases (nay, commonly this is the case) when the dying bed has become a *Pisgah*, from the top of which the saint has viewed his inheritance, while anon his couch has glowed on a sudden into the chariot—a flaming chariot such as that in which Elias was borne away to dwell with God. Saints have frequently been in such triumphant conditions of mind, that rapture and ecstasy are the only fit words in which to describe their state. "If this be dying," said one, "it is worth while living for the mere sake of dying." (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Jacob's debit and credit account*:—The struggle is over. Life's record is completed. The sorrows of a hundred and forty-seven years, like the sufferings of the dying babe, come to an end. And now that the balance is struck, how stands the account? Debit: infirmities many; sins not a few; wrongs done to Esau; polygamy with its legacy of bickerings; partiality in the family; murmurings under the succession of distresses which his own conduct brought upon him. Credit: The early choice of Jehovah; habitual reliance upon Divine guidance; deep and abiding impressions of piety; an unquenchable faith in God; the approval of a conscience, which though not greatly enlightened was evidently sincere; a life marred by transgressions of deep moral turpitude, but remarkably exemplary for the rude age in which he lived. (J. S. Van Dyke.)

CHAPTER L.

VERS. 1-13. Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father.—*The honour paid to the departed Jacob*:—I. PRIVATE. 1. The tears of his family. 2. The respect paid to last wishes. II. PUBLIC. (T. H. Leale.) *Ceremonies after death*:—The order of the ceremonies alluded to, and on the whole agreeing with classical and monumental records, was as follows: 1. When the extinction of the vital breath could no longer be doubted, the relatives began a preliminary mourning, perhaps observed during the day of death only (ver. 1), and consisting in public lamentations, in covering the head and the face with mud (or dust), girding up the garments, and beating the breasts. 2. Then the body was delivered up to the embalmers, who, in the case of Jacob, completed their work in forty days (ver. 3), though it more frequently required seventy. 3. Simultaneously with the operations of embalming commenced the chief or real mourning, which, lasting about seventy days (ver. 3), usually ended together with the process of mummification, but which, in the instance of the patriarch, exceeded it by thirty days. 4. The body, after having been enclosed in a case of wood or stone (ver. 26), was then either deposited in the family vaults (ver. 13), or placed in a sepulchral chamber of the house of the nearest relative (ver. 26). (M. M. Kalisch, Ph.D.) *Three modes of embalming*:—1. If the most expensive mode, estimated at one talent of silver, or about £250, was employed, the brain was first taken out through the nostrils, partly with an iron (or bronze) hook, and partly by the infusion of drugs; then an appointed dissector made with a sharp Ethiopian stone, a deep incision (generally about five inches long) in the left side, at a part before marked out by a scribe; but having scarcely performed this operation, he hastily fled, persecuted by those present with stones and imprecations, as one who was guilty of the heinous crime of violently mutilating the body of a fellow-man. Then one of the embalmers, holy men, who lived in the society of the priests, and enjoyed unreserved access to the temples, extracted through the incision all intestines, except the kidneys and the heart; every part of the viscera was spiced, rinsed with palm-wine, and sprinkled with pounded perfumes. The body was next filled with pure myrrh, cassia, and other aromatics, with the exception of frankincense; sewed up, and steeped

in natrum during seventy days, after the expiration of which period it was washed, and wrapped in bandages of linen cloth covered with gum. By this procedure all the parts of the body, even the hair of the eyebrows and eyelids, were admirably preserved, and the very features of the countenance remained unaltered. 2. The cost of the second mode of embalming amounted to twenty minæ, or about £81. No incision was made, nor were the bowels taken out; but the body was, by means of syringes, filled with oil of cedar at the abdomen, and steeped in natrum for seventy days. When the oil was let out, the intestines and vitals came out in a state of dissolution, while the natrum consumed the flesh, so that nothing of the body remained except the skin and the bones; and this skeleton was returned to the relatives of the deceased. The possibility of an injection, as here described, without the aid of incisions, has been doubted; and, in some cases, incisions have indeed been observed near the rectum. 3. A third and very cheap method, employed for the poorer classes, consisted merely in thoroughly rinsing the abdomen with *syrmæa*, a purgative liquor (perhaps composed of an infusion of *senna* and *cassia*), and then steeping the body in natrum for the usual seventy days. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 15-19. Forgive.—*The message of his brethren to Joseph:*—The death of great characters being often followed by great changes; conscious guilt being always alive to fear; and the chasm which succeeds a funeral, inviting a flood of foreboding apprehensions, they find out a new source of trouble. But how can they disclose their suspicions? To have done it personally would have been too much for either him or them to bear, let him take it as he might. So they "sent messengers unto him," to sound him. We know not who they were; but if Benjamin were one of them, it was no more than might be expected. Mark the delicacy and exquisite tenderness of the message. Nothing is said of their suspicions, only that the petition implies them; yet it is expressed in such a manner as cannot offend, but must needs melt the heart of Joseph, even though he had been possessed of less affection than he was. 1. They introduce themselves as acting under the direction of a mediator, and this mediator was none other than their deceased father. He commanded us, say they, before he died, that we should say thus and thus. And was it possible for Joseph to be offended with them for obeying his orders? But stop a moment. May we not make a similar use of what our Saviour said to us before He died? He commanded us to say, "Our Father—forgive us our debts." Can we not make the same use of this as Jacob's sons did of their father's commandment? 2. They present the petition as coming from their father: "Forgive, I pray thee, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil." And was it possible to refuse complying with his father's desire? The intercessor, it is to be observed, does not go about to extenuate the sin of the offenders, but frankly acknowledges it, and that, if justice were to take its course, they must be punished. Neither does he plead their subsequent repentance as the ground of pardon, but requests that it may be done for his sake, or on account of the love which the offended bore to him. 3. They unite their own confession and petition to that of their father. Moreover, though they must make no merit of anything pertaining to themselves, yet if there be a character which the offended party is known to esteem above all others, and they be conscious of sustaining that character, it will be no presumption to make mention of it. And this is what they do, and that in a manner which must make a deep impression upon a heart like that of Joseph. "And now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father." It were sufficient to have gained their point, even though Joseph had been reluctant, to have pleaded their being children of the same father, and that father making it, as it were, his dying request; but the consideration of their being "the servants of his father's God" was overcoming. But this is not all: they go in person, and "fall before his face," and offer to be his "servants." This extreme abasement on their part seems to have given a kind of gentle indignancy to Joseph's feelings. His mind revolted at it. It seemed to him too much. "Fear not, saith he: for am I in the place of God?" As if he should say, "It may belong to God to take vengeance; but for a sinful worm of the dust, who himself needs forgiveness, to do so, were highly presumptuous: you have therefore nothing to fear from me. What farther forgiveness you need, seek it of Him." (*A. Fuller.*)

Ver. 20. Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good.—*Good out*

of evil:—1. God permits evil, but from the evil He unceasingly causes good to proceed. If good were not destined to conquer evil, God would be conquered, or rather God would cease to be. 2. Since the Scriptures call us to be imitators of God, like Him we must endeavour to draw good out of evil. For believing souls there is a Divine alchemy. Its aim is to transform evil into good. Evil, considered as a trial, comes from three different sources: it comes either from God, through the afflictions of life; from men, through their animosity; from ourselves, through our fault. We may learn Divine lessons from sorrow, and lessons of wisdom from our enemies; we may even gather instruction from our faults. (E. Bersier, D.D.)

Providence.—I. BY THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD I MEAN THAT PRESERVING AND CONTROLLING SUPERINTENDENCE WHICH HE EXERCISES OVER ALL THE OPERATIONS OF THE PHYSICAL UNIVERSE, AND ALL THE ACTIONS OF MORAL AGENTS; or, as the Shorter Catechism has succinctly expressed it, "His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions." That there is such a thing is clearly taught in the Word of God, is matter of daily observation, and follows naturally and necessarily from the very fact of creation. That which could be produced alone by the will of the Omnipotent can be maintained and regulated only by the same volition. II. Advancing now another step, it will follow from the reasoning which we have just concluded THAT THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IS UNIVERSAL, having respect to every atom of creation and every incident of life. Take any critical event, either in the history of a nation or the life of an individual, and you will discover that it has depended on the coming together and co-operation of many smaller things, which, humanly speaking, might very easily have been, and indeed almost were, different. Hence there can be no watchful superintendence over those things which are confessedly important unless there be also a care over those which to men seem trivial. III. Advancing yet another step, we may observe that THIS UNIVERSAL PROVIDENCE IS CARRIED ON IN HARMONY WITH, OR RATHER PERHAPS I OUGHT TO SAY BY MEANS OF, THOSE MODES OF OPERATION WHICH WE CALL NATURAL LAWS. "This is, in fact, the great miracle of Providence, that no miracles are needed to accomplish its purposes." IV. But taking yet another step, we may lay it down as a further principle THAT GOD'S PROVIDENCE IS CARRIED ON FOR MORAL AND RELIGIOUS ENDS. There is a retributive element in the workings of Providence. We see, we cannot but see, that idleness is followed by rags, intemperance by disease, dishonesty by suffering or dishonour, and deceit by cruelty. One cannot take up a newspaper without having that fact sternly confronting him from almost every column; and though the Nemesis may be long in overtaking the guilty, sooner or later the wrong-doer is brought low, and men are constrained to say, "Verily He is a God that judgeth in the earth." Thus in the universe of God the moral and the physical go hand in hand, and still the law is vindicated in morals as in the fields of the agriculturist: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." V. But if that be so, we are prepared now to put the capstone on the pyramid of our discourse by saying THAT THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD CONTEMPLATES THE HIGHEST GOOD OF THOSE WHO ARE ON THE SIDE OF HOLINESS AND TRUTH. "All things work together for good to them who love God." "God meant it unto good." (W. M. Taylor, D.D.)

Difficulties in providence mitigated by revelation.—The sound of the words is comforting. They were spoken by a brother to his brethren, in reference to events long past, yet still vivid and present to memory and to conscience. No sorrow, and no sin, ever quite dies. No lapse of time, no length of experience, no depth of repentance, can absolutely divide the one life into two, while the person is the same, or cut off the thing that was from the thing that is. But there may come a time when even suffering—in a certain sense, when even sin—may be regarded in a light subdued and softened; when the bitterest trial of the whole life, however mingled and entangled (as most of life's bitterest trials are) with human unkindness and human sin, shall be seen to have had in it a kind as well as a cruel intention; when the old man, or the dying man, shall be able to distinguish in the retrospect between man's part in it and God's; saying, with the noble-hearted and saintly man who speaks in the text, "As for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good." The mind is staggered and astounded by the sight of the prevalence of suffering amongst beings altogether or comparatively innocent of sin. The lower you descend in the scale of being, the more unaccountable does this suffering appear to you. That a wicked man should find misery in his wickedness; that, even as the vultures gather to the carcase, so sorrow and trouble should fasten upon the evil-doer—this is to be expected, if the rule is the rule of justice. It is more difficult to understand why this punishment should extend

itself to persons not implicated in the particular ill-doing; why, for example, a profligate spendthrift son should be allowed to ruin his father, or why the sins of a drunken dissolute father should be visited upon his children (as they often are seen to be) to the third and fourth generation. Still, in these cases, as none can plead absolute innocence, a perfectly upright nature and an entirely sinless life, it seems not wholly iniquitous that there should not be an exact discrimination, in effects and consequences, between the particular sin and the general. It is when we see the overflowing of that misery which is engendered of sin upon whole classes and departments of being which have never sinned and never fallen; when we see the animal world laid under the power, and subjected to the uncontrolled tyranny, of a race called rational, but employing reason, largely or chiefly, in ingenuity of sinning—it is then that the heart revolts against the order of things established, and finds it most of all difficult to understand in what possible sense the text can have an application here, "But God meant it unto good." Now, the difficulty, though it must ever press, and press heavily, upon thoughtful men, is evidently much lightened by the suggestions of revelation, as to a coming time of refreshing and restoration, when these innocent ones shall cease to suffer, and the whole creation, now "groaning and travailing," shall be delivered, as St. Paul writes, evidently (to careful students of the passage) with reference not only or chiefly to the human creation, "into the glorious liberty," into the liberty belonging to and accompanying the glory, "of the children of God." There may be much that is unexplained—a dark fringe and border of mystery must ever lie around each revelation of the unseen—still, in so far as there is revelation, there is light and there is reconciliation. With it we can believe at least that all shall be well; we can wait, without credulity, for the key and for the lamp; we can expect, and not irrationally, a day, near or far off, when the text shall receive, in this connection, its warrant and its demonstration, "But God meant it unto good." There are two thoughts, besides that of the glorious rest reserved for God's people, which bring with them, wherever they are entertained, harmony and reconciliation at once. 1. One of these is the length of the Divine vision. "A thousand years are with the Lord as one day." "He sees," it is written again, "the end from the beginning." "God meant it unto good"—yea, the loftiest good and the most durable of all—if He taught one soul, by the unroofing or the unbuilding of its home here, the comparative, the superlative importance of a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. If when He severed from you, by death or banishment or (sadder still) alienation, that friend who was your life, He thus made you look onward towards heaven, or upward towards Himself; if He strongly, sharply, roughly, rudely rebuked your tendency to make man your trust, and to hew out for yourself broken cisterns which can hold no living water—was it not unto good? Or if, by a more conspicuous visitation of one of His four sore judgments, He should at last teach a frivolous though gallant nation that by Him alone counsels are established, by Him alone republics, like kings, govern, and that without Him there is neither strength nor permanence, was not this too "meant unto good"? Learn of God the length of His vision; learn not to weigh with the light weights and false balances of time, but with that "shekel of the sanctuary" which is the recollection of eternity, and you will find no cause to impugn God's wisdom or God's justice in the arrangements of His providence, whether as concerning men or nations. You will say, "He hath done all things well"; and even when He seems to provoke the prophet's question, "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" you will be able also to answer it in the end, out of a full heart and a firm conviction, "But He meant it unto good." 2. The other thought which suggests itself as tending powerfully towards the justification of the ways of God is that of the largeness of the Divine view. It differs in some respects from the former, as the breadth differs from the length of the vision. It has special reference to those dealings in which sin is concerned. No reflection, because no revelation, reconciles the true heart to the existence of evil. That mystery lies still in its darkness. We fret and we struggle against it in vain. But that mystery is not one of God's mysteries. God's secrets are always secret's told. You will find no instance in Scripture of the term "mystery" applied to things incomprehensible. God's mysteries, indiscoverable to human search, are apprehensible, when revealed, to human faith. The existence of evil is no mystery, because it is a fact; the origin of evil is no mystery, in God's sense, because it is not revealed. But, evil being recognized as a fact and unexplained as a secret, the question which remains is all-practical, and the text forces it upon our attention—Is there any sense in which God has to do with it? any

sense in which God, in His mercy and compassion, deigns to use it as His instrument "unto good"? Does He merely threaten it with judgment present and to come? Or does He, as the text seems to say, coerce and even rule it for the welfare of His children? We would tread warily on this perilous ground; yet firmly too, under the guidance of the Holy One. We say that even sin is made, in some sense, to confess and to glorify God. The sin of these men addressed in the text was made to save life. The sin of the murderers of the great Antitype of this saint was made to save souls. Yes, we cannot evade the conclusion, "As for you, ye thought evil, but God meant it unto good." And it gives a very magnificent, however incomplete, conception of the greatness and goodness of God, that He forces even this inexplicable, this adverse existence, this sin which He hates, into subserviency to the good of His redeemed. (*Dean Vaughan.*) *God's providence*:—In the ancient city of Chester, which is one of the few links connecting the world of this nineteenth century with the age of the Roman rule in Great Britain, there is an old building, which some of you, perhaps, have seen, having these words engraved on the lintel of the door; "God's providence is mine inheritance." It is said that when the plague last visited the city that was the only house which escaped the visitation, and so its inmates sculptured these words upon it as a record of their gratitude. I trust that God's providence was the heritage of many who died as really as of those who were preserved. But the Christian may always adopt that inscription as his own. God's providence is his inheritance, and is so as much and as really when he is suffering calamity or enduring persecution as when he is prosperous and honoured. Friends, if we could but believe that, how much of the bitterness would be taken out of our trials! (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *God's providential care*:—In Palestine and Asia Minor the winter of 1873-4 was unusually severe. The snow lay at one time from two to five feet deep in the streets and on the flat roofs of the houses. Many roofs were crushed, and many houses fell in ruins under the unwonted burden. In Bethlehem, where Jesus was born, thirteen houses were thus prostrated. In Gaza, where of old the temple of Dagon fell and slew Samson and three thousand of the Philistines, the following remarkable incident occurred in connection with the great snowstorm of February 7th and 8th:—A robber during the night broke into the house. After having collected several articles on the lower floor, he entered the chamber where the master of the house was peacefully sleeping. His little child was also asleep in his cradle. The robber reflected that he might be betrayed by the child, so he took the cradle and set it outside of the house near the door. The child began to cry. The mother hastens to the cradle, but finds it gone. The child kept on crying. The father awoke and exclaimed, "The child is crying out of doors. How can that be?" They both hasten to the cradle, wondering who could have taken it out. While they are wondering and speculating on the strange circumstance, the roof, pressed under the burden, falls, and in a moment their house is in ruins. But they are all three unharmed. In the morning, when the stones and lumber were taken away, a man was found dead among the ruins. The things he had stolen were found partly sticking out of his pockets, partly tied up in a bundle on his back. Thus God and death had overtaken him. He carried out the child lest he should wake his father and mother by crying, and so, without meaning it, by the wonderful providence of God, he rescued the lives of all the family, while he himself died in his sin. How truly were the words of Joseph to his brothers fulfilled in him—"Ye meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." "Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." God's angel averted the evil which the enemy would have gladly done. It would be difficult to find a more striking instance illustrating God's providential care—saving those whom He resolves to save, even by the agency of the wicked, whose sin He condemns; and while He employs the agency of the sinner as a means of life, visits upon him, according to his deserts, judgment and death.

Ver. 21. He comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.—*Joseph's last forgiveness of his brethren*:—I. THEIR NEED OF FORGIVENESS. II. THE PLEA ON WHICH THEY URGE IT (vers. 16-18). 1. The dying request of their father. 2. Their own free confession of guilt. 3. Their father's influence with God. 4. Their willingness to utterly abase themselves. III. THE COMPLETENESS OF THEIR FORGIVENESS. 1. He speaks words of peace. 2. He will not presume to put himself judicially in the place of God. (1) As an instrument of vengeance. (2) As presuming to change

God's purposes. (3) As presuming upon God's prerogative of forgiveness. 3. He assures them that their suspicions were unfounded. 4. He was ready to prove his forgiveness by his actions. 5. The silent testimony of his tears. (*T. H. Leale.*)

Joseph and his brethren:—I. SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF HUMAN GUILT. 1. An instinctive dread of punishment. 2. This dread was allayed during the lifetime of their father. 3. When guilt sees the approaching storm, it will sue for exemption from punishment. II. SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF DIVINE GRACE, WHEN IT IS ALLOWED TO CONTROL HUMAN CONDUCT. 1. It produces tender-heartedness. 2. It manifests real sympathy. (1) In seeking to allay the fear of the true penitent. (2) So far as possible in palliating the wrong. (3) In giving abundant assurance of forgiveness, protection, and plenty. III. SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUE FAITH. 1. It has power to enable its possessor to maintain an habitual, lifelong, and consistent religious life. 2. It has power to enable its possessor to maintain an unwavering assurance in God's promises in the presence of death, and for all the future. Lessons: 1. Sooner or later, our sins will rise to plague us. 2. Forgiveness of sins is the only permanent panacea for a guilty conscience. 3. The Divine Joseph is as ready to forgive the truly penitent, as was Joseph the son of Jacob. (*D. C. Hughes, M.A.*)

Joseph's forgiveness of his brethren:—I. THE PETITION OF THE BRETHREN. 1. The petition was suggested by their own anticipations of vengeance. Now whence came these anticipations? I reply, from their own hearts. Under similar circumstances they would have acted so, and they took for granted that Joseph would. We suspect according to our nature; we look on others as we feel. Now the error of Joseph's brethren is our error towards God. Like them, we impute to God our own vindictive feelings; and, like them, we pray a prayer which is in itself an insult or absurd. Think you that God, if revengeful, can be bought off by prayer, by rolling in the dust, by unmanly cries, by coaxing, or flattery? God's forgiveness is the regeneration of our nature. God cannot avert the consequences of our sin. We must get rid of these heathen ideas of God. God's forgiveness is properly our regeneration. You cannot by prayer buy off God's vindictiveness: for God is not vindictiveness, but Love. You cannot by prayer avert the consequences of sin: for the consequences are boundless, inseparable from the act. Nor is there in time or eternity anything that can sever the connection. If you think that you can sin, and then by cries avert the consequences of sin, you insult God's character. You can only redeem the past by alteration of the present. 2. Next, observe the petition was caused by their father's insisting on their asking pardon. He recognized the duty of apology. For Jacob knew that Joseph bore no malice. Not to change Joseph, but to fulfil their obligations, he gave the charge that required satisfaction. We know how false men's conceptions are of satisfaction; in the language of the old duel, to give satisfaction meant to give one who had been injured by you an opportunity of taking your life. In the language of semi-heathen Christianity, to satisfy God, means to give God an equivalent in blood for an insult offered. No wonder that with such conceptions the duty of apology is hard—almost impossible. We cannot say, "I have erred," because it gives a triumph. Now the true view of satisfaction is this—to satisfy, not revenge, but the law of right. 3. Plea—as servant of the same God (ver. 17). Forgiveness is not merely a moral, but a religious duty. Christianity says, just as Judaism did, "Forgive the servants of the God." Its pleas are, "Forgive; for he is thy fellow-servant. Seventy times seven times forgive thy brother." But it expands that word "brother" beyond what the Law ever dreamed of—God is the Father of man. If there be a soul for which Christ did not die, then that man you are not, on Judaistic principles, bound to forgive. If there be one whom the love of God does not embrace in the Gospel family, then for that one this plea is unavailing. But if God be the Father of the Race, and if Christ died for all; if the word "neighbour" means even an alien and an heretic; then this plea, narrowed by the law to his nation, expands for us to all. Because the servant of our Maker and the child of our Father, therefore he must be forgiven, let him be whosoever he may. II. JOSEPH'S FORGIVENESS. 1. Joseph's forgiveness was shown by his renunciation of the office of avenger—"Am I in the place of God?" 2. Joseph forgave, or facilitated forgiveness, by observing the good results of what had seemed so cruel (ver. 20). Good out of evil—that is the strange history of this world, whenever we learn God's character. No thanks to you. Your sin dishonoured you, though it will honour God. By our intentions, and not by the results, are our actions judged. 3. He forgot the injury. He spake kindly to them, comforted them, and bade them fear not. An English proverb has joined forgiving and forgetting. No forgiveness is complete which

does not join forgetfulness. You forgive only so far as you forget. (F. W. Robertson, M.A.)

Vers. 22-26. **Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you.**—*Dying Joseph*.—I. SATISFIED WITH THE GOODNESS OF THE LORD. II. FULL OF FAITH. 1. Sure of God's covenant. 2. Superior to the world. 3. The possessor of immortality. (T. H. Leale.) *The last days of Joseph*.—I. THE REMOTE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN (vers. 15-17). To fear God and keep His commandments, always, is the only safe way and sure way for the soul. Men are peopling their future with calamity when they go one step out of the right path. II. The last days of Joseph were an illustration of THE MYSTERIES OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE (ver. 20). The strange problems of human history should not cause us to lose faith. Behind the web into which so much that seems chaotic and unintelligible is being wrought, God sits wise to purpose and almighty to accomplish; and when His work is done, the assenting acclaim of the universe will proclaim, "Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of Saints." Morbid views of life are unwarranted. What God pleases is best, and what God pleases is sure to come to pass. III. Very noticeable also is THE FAITH WHICH COMFORTED THE LAST DAYS OF JOSEPH (ver. 24). He saw already the blooming fields and laden vineyards which his descendants were to inherit, and he "took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence." That same sort of faith has a place and power among men now. Outlook and confidence are not the peculiar privileges of any one age. The victories of faith are world-wide and world-old. IV. Notice also some INCIDENTAL TEACHINGS of this passage. 1. The last days of Joseph were the natural result of his first days. He began right. 2. Righteousness pays in the long run. Men who are tempted by the speciousness of strong temptation do well to listen to the Saviour's question "What shall it profit?" God's pay-days may be in the future, but He pays well when the time of reckoning comes. 3. What power there is in a good life. (E. S. Atwood.) *The Israelite's grave in a foreign land*.—I. THE LIFE OF JOSEPH. 1. Its outward circumstances. (1) Chequered with misfortune. It is the law of our humanity, as that of Christ, that we must be perfected through suffering. And he who has not discerned the Divine sacredness of sorrow, and the profound meaning which is concealed in pain, has yet to learn what life is. The Cross, manifested as the necessity of the highest life, alone interprets it. (2) Besides this, obloquy was part of Joseph's portion. His brethren, even his father, counted him a vain dreamer, full of proud imaginings. He languished long in a dungeon with a stain upon his character. He was subjected to almost all the bitterness which changes the milk of kindly feelings into gall; to Potiphar's fickleness, to slander, to fraternal envy, to the ingratitude of friendship in the neglect of the chief butler, who left his prison and straightway forgot his benefactor. Out of all which a simple lesson arises, "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils." Yet that may be over-stated. Nothing chills the heart like universal distrust. Nothing freezes the genial current of the soul so much as doubts of human nature. Human goodness is no dream. Surely we have met unselfishness, and love, and honour among men. Surely we have seen, and not in dreams, pure benevolence beaming from human countenances. Surely we have met with integrity that the world's wealth could not bribe, and attachment which might bear the test of any sacrifice. It is not so much the depravity as the frailty of men, that makes it impossible to count on them. (3) Success, besides, marked the career of Joseph. Let us not take half views of men and things. The woof of life is dark; that we granted, but it is shot through a web of brightness. Accordingly, in Joseph's case, even in his worst days, you find a kind of balance, to be weighed against his sorrows. The doctrine of compensation is found through all. Amidst the schemings of his brothers' envy he had his father's love. In his slavery he had some recompense in feeling that he was gradually winning his master's confidence. In his dungeon he possessed the consciousness of innocence, and the grateful respect of his fellow prisoners. 2. The spirit of Joseph's inner life. (1) Forgiveness. The Christian spirit before the Christian times. (2) Simplicity of character. He bore a simple, unsophisticated heart amidst the pomp of an Egyptian court. (3) Benevolence. This was manifested in the generosity with which he entertained his brethren, and in the discriminating tenderness with which he provided his best beloved brother's feast with extraordinary delicacies. II. THE DEATH OF JOSEPH WAS IN ACCORDANCE WITH HIS LIFE. 1. The funeral was a homage paid to goodness. Little is said in the text of Joseph's funeral. To know what it was, we must turn to the earlier part

of the chapter, where that of Jacob is mentioned. A mourning of seventy days; a funeral whose imposing greatness astonished the Canaanites, they said, "This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians." Seventy days were the time, or nearly so, fixed by custom for a royal funeral; and Jacob was so honoured, not for his own sake, but because he was Joseph's father. We cannot suppose that Joseph's own obsequies were on a scale less grand. Now, weigh what is implied in this. This was not the homage paid to talent, nor to wealth, nor to birth. Joseph was a foreign slave, raised to eminence by the simple power of goodness. Every man in Egypt felt, at his death, that he had lost a friend. There were thousands whose tears would fall when they recounted the preservation of lives dear to them in the years of famine, and felt that they owed those lives to Joseph. Grateful Egypt mourned the good foreigner; and, for once, the honours of this world were given to the graces of another. 2. We collect from this, besides, a hint of the resurrection of the body. The Egyptian mode of sepulture was embalming; and the Hebrews, too, attached much importance to the body after death. Joseph commanded his countrymen to preserve his bones to take away with them. In this we detect that unmistakable human craving, not only for immortality, but immortality associated with a form. The opposite to spirituality is not materialism, but sin. The form of matter does not degrade. For what is this world itself but the form of Deity, whereby the manifoldness of His mind and beauty manifests, and wherein it clothes itself? It is idle to say that spirit can exist apart from form. We do not know that it can. Perhaps even the Eternal Himself is more closely bound to His works than our philosophical systems have conceived. Perhaps matter is only a mode of thought. At all events, all that we know or can know of mind exists in union with form. The resurrection of the body is the Christian verity, which meets and satisfies those cravings of the ancient Egyptian mind, that expressed themselves in the process of embalming, and the religious reverence felt for the very bones of the departed by the Hebrews. Finally, in the last will and testament of Joseph we find faith. He commanded his brethren, and through them his nation, to carry his bones with them when they migrated to Canaan. In the Epistle to the Hebrews that is reckoned an evidence of faith. "By faith Joseph gave commandment concerning his bones." How did he know that his people would ever quit Egypt? We reply, by faith. Not faith in a written word, for Joseph had no Bible; rather, faith in that conviction of his own heart which is itself the substantial evidence of faith. For religious faith ever dreams of something higher, more beautiful, more perfect, than the state of things with which it feels itself surrounded. Ever, a day future lies before it; the evidence for which is its own hope. (F. W. Robertson, M.A.)

Comfort from the thought of the eternity of God:—These words bring before us the contrast between the mortality of men and the eternity of God. They die, but He abides "the King eternal, immortal, the only wise God." Now this truth is full of comfort, on the one hand, to the dying servant of God, and, on the other, to the bereaved who are called to mourn his loss. 1. It is full of comfort to the dying, for whatever of good he has done in the world shall not be lost when he is gone. In the words of the appropriate inscription on the monument to the Wesleys in Westminster Abbey, "God buries the workers, but He carries on the work." The sower may die, but the seed which fell from his hands matures into a harvest which is reaped by others, and becomes in its turn the food of multitudes and the germ of many harvests more. I stood once on a Highland hill in my native land, and marked a spot upon the landscape greener than all else around. When I inquired into the reason, I learned that for many, many years there had been a village there, and that the gardens of the villagers so long under cultivation kept unwonted verdure still. So, through the operations of God's grace, the earth is greener where His servants have been at work, though the servants themselves have long since passed away. The operations of grace, like those of Nature, go on after men have died, because God lives to maintain them, and nothing done for Him is ever allowed by Him to come to nothing. So when we are called to leave the earth, the work in which we delighted shall not be lost. We die, but God lives; and we may be sure that under His care it will flourish. 2. Then what consolation comes from the eternity of God to those who are bereaved! Look at the 90th Psalm. It was written by Moses in the wilderness, when he was depressed by the death of those who had reached man's estate when he led them out of Egypt. There came a time when he was left wellnigh alone of all his generation; and then he took his comfort out of the permanence of God, singing, "Lord Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations; from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God," and by that he was

upheld. We see the same thing in David's case; for not far from the close of his life, and when many of his early companions had gone into "the silent land," he wrote the 18th Psalm, in which he said, "The Lord liveth, and blessed be my Rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted." Yes, "the Lord liveth," therefore let us not refuse to be comforted when dear ones are taken from our side. He can sustain us and He will. He is as near us as He was when they were with us, and they were but the agents whom He used for our welfare. But He is not tied to any instrumentality, and He can guide, uphold, and bless by one as well as by another. He takes away the earthly prop that we may learn to lean the more thoroughly on Himself. "He will surely visit us"; yea, He will be ever with us, and when our death-hour comes we shall be with Him. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

*All die, but God's work proceeds:—*I. THAT THE MOST DISTINGUISHED SERVANTS OF GOD MUST DIE. Even the Great Master Himself died. II. THAT THOUGH THEY DIE, THE CAUSE IN WHICH THEY WERE ENGAGED WILL MOVE ON. (*R. Stodhart.*)

*The death of Joseph:—*I. HIS BODILY FRAILTY. "I die." 1. Not all his honours and dignities can exempt him. The princely robe must be exchanged for the winding-sheet. 2. Not all his eminent piety can buy him off. It is the common lot. No exception to this rule. 3. Will you not remember this? Is it wise to forget it, or try to forget. The one thing that's certain in your earthly history. Ought it to be crowded out by a multitude utterly uncertain? There is nothing else I can foresee. I cannot tell how long you will live. I cannot tell whether rich or poor, strong or weak, joyful or sorrowful. No, I cannot discern anything of the complexion of your course. But this I know, that your course will have an end. And that the day, the hour will come, when (if syllable anything) you will say, "I die." That day—don't let it take you by surprise. Don't leave the preparation for death until death comes. But live habitually prepared. And see whether it is not possible to triumph over death. II. HIS ABUNDING FAITH. 1. See his calmness in prospect of departure. "I die!" That's all he has to say about it. No fears—no doubts—of any kind whatever. No vain regrets that his life come to an end. No painful forebodings of what may follow. It is not everyone can meet the last messenger like that. But it is possible to do so. His father Jacob did the same. 2. The consolation he gives those he leaves. "I die, but God will surely visit." Your earthly friend may be taken—your heavenly not forsake you. Nay! more than this—"He will bring you out of this land, unto the land which He swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Nearly three hundred years had passed away since this oath first uttered. More than one hundred must still pass before the time for its fulfilment. How it will be fulfilled Joseph does not know. But fulfilled it must be, for God had spoken it. Mark, brethren, this triumphant faith. My bones (says this dying man) shall not rest in Egypt. You may put them in sarcophagus—but label it "Passenger to Canaan." For when the people go to the promised land, take it with them. "Where they go, I will go—where they rest, I will rest. And there will I be buried!" 3. I call that abounding faith. So the apostle seems to think it, in Epistle to Hebrews. For he gives it a niche in that temple of faith, in chap. xi. By the side of Abel, and Noah, and Enoch—Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. Figure of Joseph, with this inscription, "By faith Joseph." And was this faith a mere delusion? III. A WORD OF APPLICATION. 1. Would not such faith be precious to you? Would it not be pleasant to be able to say, "I die!" without single fear. And to say to those we leave behind, "God will surely?" 2. Are there no precious promises for you? You are a sinner, I know—"If we confess our sins." "The wages of sin is death." "Gift of God is eternal life." Accept these promises—go and plead them. And all fear of death taken away—"Have a desire." I know you cannot take all your loved ones with you. And you may have many a fear on their behalf. "Be careful for nothing." "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them." Widow's trust. 3. Is there not precious confirmation of these? Ay! more precious than any Joseph ever knew. He knew there should be seed of Abraham, blessing to world—He saw bleeding lamb, emblem. But we can say the seed of Abraham has come—Great Sacrifice offered. "Christ has died." Now all the precious promises sealed with precious blood. "He that spared not." (*F. Tucker, B.A.*)

*Joseph's dying assurance to his brethren:—*I. THE REFLECTION WHICH JOSEPH MAKES UPON HIS PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES. "I die," or am dying. II. THE ASSURANCE HE GIVES THEM, THAT GOD WOULD VISIT THEM. III. THE FURTHER ASSURANCE HE GIVES THEM, THAT GOD WOULD BRING THEM INTO THE LAND OF CANAAN.

Application: I. To aged Christians. 1. Frequently to think and speak of dying. 2. Reflect that God will visit and take care of your posterity when you are gone.

8. Remind your posterity of this, for their encouragement, when you are dying and leaving the world, that "God will surely visit them." II. To those descendants of good men, who are in the prime, or middle of their days. 1. Encourage yourselves with this thought, that God will surely visit you when your parents and friends die. 2. Pray earnestly for His visits. 3. Be prepared to receive His visits. (*J. Orton.*)

Ver. 25. Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence.—*Joseph's faith in God*:—This is the one act of Joseph's life which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews selects as the sign that he too lived by faith. It was at once a proof of how entirely he believed God's promise, and of how earnestly he longed for its fulfilment. It was a sign of how little he felt himself at home in Egypt, though to outward appearance he had become completely one of its people. The ancestral spirit was in him true and strong, though he was "separate from his brethren." This incident, with the New Testament commentary on it, leads us to a truth which we often lose sight of. I. FAITH IS ALWAYS THE SAME, THOUGH KNOWLEDGE VARIES. There is a vast difference between a man's creed and a man's faith. The one may vary—does vary within very wide limits; the other remains the same. What makes a Christian is not theology in the head, but faith and love in the heart. The dry light of the understanding is of no use to anybody. Our creed must be turned into a faith before it has power to bless and save. II. FAITH HAS ITS NOBLEST OFFICE IN DETACHING FROM THE PRESENT. All his life long, from the day of his captivity, Joseph was an Egyptian in outward seeming. He filled his place at Pharaoh's court; but his dying words open a window into his soul, and betray how little he had felt that he belonged to the order of things in which he had been content to live. He too confessed that here he had no continuing city, but sought one to come. Dying, he said, "Carry my bones up from hence." Living, the hope of the inheritance must have burned in his heart as a hidden light, and made him an alien everywhere but upon its blessed soil. Faith will produce just such effects. Does anything but Christian faith engage the heart to love and all the longing wishes to set towards the things that are unseen and eternal? Whatever makes a man live in the past and in the future raises him; but high above all others stand those to whom the past is an apocalypse of God, with Calvary for its centre, and all the future is fellowship with Christ and joy in the heavens. III. FAITH MAKES MEN ENERGETIC IN THE DUTIES OF THE PRESENT. Joseph was a true Hebrew all his days; but that did not make him run away from Pharaoh's service. He lived by hope, and that made him the better worker in the passing moment. True Christian faith teaches us that this is the workshop where God makes men, and the next the palace where He shows them. The end makes the means important. This is the secret of doing with our might whatsoever our hand finds to do—to trust Christ, to live with Him and by the hope of the inheritance. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Joseph's instructions as to the disposal of his body*:—To keep alive among them the truth that they were yet to go to Canaan, and to preserve in the midst of them the evidence of his faith that they should ultimately possess that land, he left his body, embalmed, yet unburied, among them, with the instruction that when they did go, they should take it along with them. They say that at the feasts of Egypt it was usual to bring a mummy to the table, that the guests might be reminded thereby of their mortality. But Joseph here left his confined body to his people, that by its presence among them, and preservation by them, they might never forget that Egypt was not their final resting-place—their national home—and might be stimulated to hold themselves in constant readiness to arise and go to their own land. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *The fulfilment of Joseph's request as to his body*:—How was this request of Joseph's fulfilled? Read with me these two passages, and you will see: "And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you" (Ex. xiii. 19). It was a terrible night. The destroying angel had passed through Egypt and laid low the first-born in every household. The panic-stricken Pharaoh had ordered the Israelites away at once, and they started in great haste. Yet even in that crisis they did not forget the descending obligation of the oath which their fathers had sworn to Joseph, and they took time to carry with them his remains. Read again: "And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for a

hundred pieces of silver; and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph" (Josh. xxiv. 32). Thus, between the death and burial of Joseph an interval of probably from three to four hundred years elapsed, during all of which his remains were kept by the children of Israel, a witness to the faith by which he was animated; and a prophecy of their ultimate possession of the land of Canaan, so that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews had a right to say, "By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones" (Heb. xi. 22). (*Ibid.*) *Dying orders*:—The narrative reminds us of the memorable orders given by Lord Nelson when dying. As his comrades raised him from the deck where he had fallen after receiving the fatal wound, he exclaimed, "I die." On his way to the cabin, whither they immediately conveyed him, his observant eye perceived that the tiller ropes had been shot away. Still interested in circumstances from which he was soon to take a final departure, he instantly gave the order, "Replace the ropes." Laid upon a cot, he said to the attendant surgeon, "Leave me; render aid to those who can be profited by it." Entertaining the same twofold conviction he entertained when he issued the order for battle—victory for England, death for Nelson—he lay calmly awaiting the anticipated result. Thinking, apparently, of the signal which for the encouragement of his soldiers he had exhibited from the mast-head as the two fleets came within range—"England expects every man to do his duty to-day"—he whispered, "I have done my duty." As Hardy, the captain of the ship, reported, "The victory is complete," he slowly raised himself upon his arm to give his last order: "Bring the fleet to anchor to-night." When reminded that this duty would devolve upon another, he sternly exclaimed, "Hardy, obey my order; anchor to-night." Obedience to that dying order might have saved many a dismantled ship and hundreds of lives. But when the winds which scattered and nearly wrecked England's victorious navy were howling through the torn rigging and sinking one disabled ship after another, the voice which gave this needed order, and could have enforced it, was silent in death. Nelson's last energies were expended in giving a command in the interests of a nation whose honour he had died in defending: a command which he hoped would be obeyed after his death, though it might call for the surrender of present advantages in the anticipation of future security. Believing fully that a severe storm was pending, he gave an order which, though it could be of no value to him, might prove, if obeyed, an inestimable blessing to those who should survive him, and might save England's victorious fleet. In this incident three facts are especially worthy of note, as having a parallel in the dying words of Joseph: the conviction that he stood by death's river, that victory awaited his countrymen, that they needed an order which should be obeyed after his death. (*J. S. Van Dyke.*)

Ver. 26. So Joseph died.—*The death of Joseph*:—I. JOSEPH'S DEATH WAS THAT OF AN EMINENTLY GOOD MAN. Perhaps the best man of the Old Testament. He was not surprised by death, nor dismayed at its coming. He had lived to meet it—lived for the life beyond death—not for present indulgence, nor in heedless disregard of his highest good—but with wise and faithful reference to the will of God and the monitions of the Holy Spirit. II. JOSEPH'S DEATH WAS THE DEATH OF A GREAT PROPHET. (*P. Whitehead, D.D.*) *Joseph died*:—Joseph died! Then after all, he was but mortal, like ourselves! It is important to remember this, lest we should let any of the great lessons slip away under the delusion that Joseph was more than man. We have seen fidelity so constant, heroism so enduring, magnanimity so—I had almost said—divine, that we are apt to think there must have been something more than human about this man. No. He was mortal, like ourselves. His days were consumed as are our days; little by little his life ebbed out; and he was found, as we shall be found, dead. So, then, if he was but mortal, why can't we be as great in our degree? If he was only a man, why can't we emulate his virtue, so far as our circumstances will enable us to do so? We can't all be equally heroic and sublime. We can all be, by the grace of God, equally holy, patient, and trustful in our labour. Joseph died! Thus the best, wisest, and most useful men are withdrawn from their ministry! This is always a mystery in life: That the good man should be taken away in the very prime of his usefulness; that the eloquent tongue should be smitten with death; that a kind father should be withdrawn from his family circle; and that wretches who never have a noble thought, who do not know what it is to have a brave heavenly impulse, should seem to have a tenacity of life that is unconquerable; that drunken men and hard-hearted

individuals should live on and on—while the good, and the true, and the wise, and the beautiful, and the tender, are snapped off in the midst of their days and translated to higher climes. The old proverb says, "Whom the gods love die young." Sirs ! There is another side to this life, otherwise these things would be inexplicable—would be chief of the mysteries of God's ways. We must wait, therefore, until we see the circle completed before we sit in judgment upon God. Joseph died ! Then the world can get on without its greatest and best men. This is very humiliating to some persons. Here is, for example, a man who has never been absent from his business for twenty years. You ask him to take a day's holiday, go to a church opening or to a religious festival. He says, "My dear sir ! Why, the very idea ! The place would go to rack and ruin if I was away four-and-twenty hours." It comes to pass that God sends a most grievous disease upon the man—imprisons him in the darkened chamber for six months. When he gets up, at the end of six months, he finds the business has gone on pretty much as well as if he had been wearing out his body and soul for it all the time. Very humiliating to go and find things getting on without us ! Who are we ? The preacher may die, but the truth will be preached still. The minister perishes—the ministry is immortal. This ought to teach us, therefore, that we are not so important, after all ; that our business is to work all the little hour that we have ; and to remember that God can do quite as well without us as with us, and that He puts an honour upon us in asking us to touch the very lowest work in any province of the infinite empire of His truth and light. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

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