

THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.

II. SAMUEL.

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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 I.

Vers. 2—16. **A man came out of the camp.**—*The man who professed to have slain Saul:*—On the day that Saul fell by his own hand, and before his body had been discovered by the Philistines, an Amalekite, passing by, recognised the corpse of the fallen king, and bethought him how best to turn the event to his own advantage. He determined to hasten to David, at Ziklag, and to inform him that, at the king's own request, he had consented to slay him, being persuaded that in any case he must perish, as his wounds were mortal. Thus he hoped to render himself acceptable to David, whose name doubtless was prominently mentioned in popular report as that of the coming king, and who was known moreover to have been injured by Saul. His professed cruelty, ingratitude, and falsehood earned for him, not a reward, but the penalty of death. **I. THAT OUTWARD APPEARANCES ARE DECEITFUL.** How often are signs of sorrow thus assumed, when the heart within is joyful! How often is a cheerful countenance worn outwardly when the spirit within is broken! Scriptural phrases may be upon the lips of the ungodly, and falsehood may have a "godly outside." The Lord alone can see into the heart, and can discern between the hypocritical and the sincere. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." **II. THAT SYCOPHANTIC ADORATION OF THE FORTUNATE OUGHT NOT TO BE VALUED.** The tendency of humanity is to worship the rising sun, to follow whatever fashion may be in vogue, be it good or evil. If the inclinations of the leading personages of the day tend towards impiety, then the great mass of the people will be godless; if, on the other hand, the leaders of society condescend to extend their patronage to religion, then the people of the age become generally assiduous attendants on the ordinances of religion. Notwithstanding the genuflections of the Amalekite, David did not accord to him the welcome that he had expected. **III. THAT THOUGH EVIL COMMUNICATIONS CORRUPT GOOD MANNERS, ASSOCIATION WITH THE RIGHTEOUS DOES NOT MAKE RIGHTEOUS.** This Amalekite came out of the camp of Israel. A worthy parent has often an unworthy child, a godly man is found in union with an ungodly friend. **IV. THAT GULEFTL HEART MAKES CRAFTY TONGUE.** "There is a world of iniquity in the tongue, and we need to guard against the errors into which it leads us." **V. THAT SYCOPHANCY LEADS TO FALSEHOOD.** There are three f's closely allied with each other—namely, flattery, fulsomeness, and fiction—that ought to be avoided by the Christian. There are three h's also related to each other, that he should strive to develop, namely humanity, honesty, and honour. **VI. THAT EVEN THE MOST HARDENED CRIMINAL TRIES TO PALLIATE HIS OFFENCE.** We all attempt to make excuses for our faults and failings, to soften down our guilt, to palliate our offences, to lay our sins at the door of others. Is it fear, or a relic of man's better nature, that thus induces men to desire to exculpate themselves in some degree from their crimes? Who can tell? God alone, who "trieth the hearts." **VII. THAT THE MOST INGENIOUS EXCUSES, AFTER A STATEMENT HAS BEEN DELIBERATELY MADE, CANNOT INVALIDATE THE FORCE OF THAT STATEMENT.** Noting, doubtless, that David was indignant at his treason, the Amalekite answers, when

asked by David, "Whence art thou?" "I am the son of a stranger, an Amalekite." So futile will be our excuses in the Judgment Day; so vain, indeed, are they often found to be now, even in the light of conscience, not to say in the sight of God. VIII. THAT DECEIT LEADS TO DESTRUCTION SOONER OR LATER. "How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?" No subterfuges or cunningly devised fables can deceive the Almighty, or can prevent Him from giving to every man according to his works. "Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile." "Is not destruction to the wicked, and a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity?" IX. THAT HE WHO HAS SOWN THE WIND MUST EXPECT TO REAP THE WHIRLWIND. Saul, contrary to the Divine command, spared a certain portion of the Amalekites, instead of destroying them utterly, as it had been determined, for their sins, that they should be thus severely punished. This very Amalekite may have been one of the captives thus spared; and lo! he comes now in triumph, as it were, in the death of the king whose mercy to the nation of the Amalekites had led to the ruin of Saul himself. "Thus, of our pleasant vices the gods make instruments to scourge us with." "He that pursueth evil, pursueth it to his own death." X. THAT THE PATH OF HONOUR IS THE PATH OF REAL SUCCESS. In selfishness we often injure self, and with a most short-sighted policy sacrifice a glorious and eternal future for a paltry and fleeting present. (*R. Young, M.A.*) *Tidings from Gilboa*:—The horrors of the battle-field are far from terminated when the actual encounter is over, and victory has declared in favour of one of the contending parties. The after-scenes are often such as cause humanity to shudder; and to one of the most revolting of these we are introduced by the circumstances under which the tidings of Saul's death first reached David. We refer to the traversing of the field of blood, for the purpose of spoiling and plundering those who can no longer resist the hand of violence. And, probably, it happened in this case—as it has many a time occurred in the annals of robbery and plunder—that the thing stolen has no sooner been actually obtained, than the spoiler finds its possession very inconvenient, on account of its unusual character, or extraordinary value. Had it been of less splendid material, or of less intrinsic worth, its possession would have excited no remark, and it could have been parted with without difficulty. But a crown and a royal bracelet, which every one would know he could scarcely have acquired by fair means, which every Israelite would recognise as having belonged to his fallen king, and in which the Philistines, too, would have discovered a property to which they, as victors, were entitled, and of which they had been unlawfully deprived by the haste with which he had commenced his predatory excursion on the battle-field—what was to be done with these spoils? It did not answer his purpose to keep them, and yet they were far from being marketable commodities, for the ordinary ways of turning property to account were not available there. It was at this juncture we find him coming to David, and while professing to sympathise with the disgrace of Israel, telling them not only were Saul and his sons dead, but that he himself had put the finishing stroke to his existence; in token of which he stood there as the bearer of the crown and bracelet. The interested part which he had to act accounts for the discrepancy between the recital which he gave, and the narrative previously furnished by the sacred writer. In his own estimation, however, he was taking the surest way to honour and to the advancement of his worldly interests. What reward could be too large for the messenger who brought to David the intelligence of the death of his enemy?—nay, more, who had, by his own hand, put an end to the life of that bitter persecutor? Well contrived as was the plan, it nevertheless failed; and the reason of the failure deserves notice. Many an apparently well-arranged scheme of iniquity has broken through from exactly the same cause. The Amalekite had made a grievous miscalculation as to the character of the man with whom he had to deal. He had done David a gross injustice; and he, doubtless, was not long in discovering his mistake; but then it was quite too late to recede. His mistake was fatal. He was treated as a murderer, on his own confession. He had failed in his scheme for securing his own advantage and aggrandizement, because he had formed altogether a wrong estimate of the character of David. 1. The incident gives us an opportunity of marking the immense difference in the order of mind and character which may subsist between two individuals brought together by one event, and having their attention occupied by one and the same

object. And we observe, too, in this instance, a circumstance which is the natural attendant upon this diversity—the incapability, on the part of the possessor of the meaner and inferior order of mental and moral qualities, to enter into the feelings and principles of the possessor of superior endowments. This incapability operates to prevent its unfortunate subject from suspecting the existence, in a fellow-creature, of any other mode of thinking and acting than that which he himself adopts and employs; and it issues, therefore, in the habit of judging all around him by his own standard, and of reckoning that they will be actuated, in their conduct, by the principles which direct his own proceedings. Now, whenever such judgments are formed, and on the same principle, it must be obvious that a considerable amount of personal injustice is perpetrated; and in reference, too, to that very point upon which a well-regulated mind will be most sensitive. To an upright man—to one who exercises himself to have a conscience void of offence towards God—character is a far more momentous consideration than thousands of silver and gold could ever be; and judgments formed on the principles of which this passage reminds us, do injustice to personal character. Nor is it to be wondered at that David should have felt the injustice acutely. For assuredly where, by the Grace of God, a man has been taught the lesson of true self-respect—where he has been enabled, as the child of God, to hold that principle humbly, firmly, and for sanctified purposes—where the Spirit of God has produced moral elevation, and has stamped sin with its real character of debasement and dishonourableness—where these results have been brought about in the moral history of an individual, there is something very humiliating, something peculiarly distressing, because felt to be deeply degrading, in this very circumstance of having been so misunderstood and misjudged, as to have been supposed capable of finding gratification in acting out the principles which rule minds of another order, and of sympathising with the courses to which these principles conduct. There is scarcely a trial which is more hard to endure, or which pierces the heart with so deep a pang, than thus to find one's self standing, in the estimation of a man whose feelings and principles are low, on that same low platform which marks his own moral position, and side by side with himself. It may be said, indeed, that conscious integrity—the personal conviction of uprightness—ought to have a power to heal the pang, that it ought to be enough for a man to know that the judgment formed of him is wrong. But a more delicate perception will discover that it is this very circumstance which occasions the pang, which embitters the trial. It would be no trial but for this consciousness of personal integrity; and in employing this argument as a comfort to the child of God writhing beneath an injurious and unjust supposition, whether implied or expressed, the danger would be, that instead of mitigating the smart, you should only increase the anguish of the wound. The true solace, then, for the heart bleeding at the injustice perpetrated by a false and injurious estimate of character will be found in an intelligent view of those important ends which such a trial is peculiarly calculated to answer, and in yielding to the trial for the sake of the spiritual benefit which it is designed to promote. It may be hard to bear—it will be; yet it will be worth while to have had the spirit wounded by the injustice, and the heart depressed by the injury, if only the principles of gratitude to God, of humility, dependence, and caution, acquire power in the painful process; if only sin become more hateful—self become more completely laid in the dust—and God be more completely glorified. So long as human nature is what it is—so long as men of corrupt minds want excuses for their sins, or sanction and encouragement in the commission of them—so long we must expect that they will find it convenient to form for themselves, and, if necessary, to present to others, a low and unjust estimate of the character of those whom Divine grace has made the subjects of a better nature. But “the Lord taketh part with them that fear Him.” 2. But let it not be thought by any that they can with impunity commit, under any circumstances, the injustice which has now been described. Apart from the injury which they inflict upon religious character by so representing it to themselves or to others, as that it shall be employed as a sanction for their own sins, or as an excuse for their wrong-doing, it must not be forgotten that, supposing the real character of a professor of religion were such as they represent it—supposing that beneath a profession of purity and love, in any instance, there really did exist a cherished impurity and an indulged malignity,

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from which they might gain encouragement in their plans, and from which they might secretly expect sanction, yet even this would not justify them in sinning. God looks at sinners in their individual capacity, and deals with them as such. Sin is felt by God to be a personal matter in reference to Himself, and nothing can justify its commission; no, not all the suspected hypocrisy, nor all the proved unfaithfulness of professors of religion, with all the imaginary sanction which the one might give, and all the real encouragement which the other would afford. We know, indeed, that the formation of these wrong judgments of character constitutes a chosen method by which the great enemy of souls seeks to entrap men to their own destruction. He belies and misrepresents religion in their view. He suggests that the high standard of a religious profession is a thing of imagination rather than of reality. He whispers stealthily that, notwithstanding the untoward difference between the men whose lives are avowedly under a higher influence and the rest of mankind, it is not very difficult—for a consideration—to induce these very professors, either to act upon a lower principle themselves, or to give their sanction to those who adopt an inferior standard of religion and morals. He thus removes the checks and restraints which religious example and influence would exert in discouraging the young from evil. He does more; for, by the insinuation and imputation of real sympathy with sin on the part of professors, he gives direct encouragement to evil courses. Having thus, by acting out his character of “accuser of the brethren,” produced an impression of personal religion as being hollow and valueless, the enemy of souls next presents some well-adapted temptation—some well-arranged enticement—to secure present advantage by means which involve personal guilt and expose to heavy penalty. The scheme succeeds—the youth falls into the trap prepared for him—the criminal deed is done—the actual guilt is incurred—and then, the tempter’s object being gained, conscience is allowed to speak, to make itself heard; and, amidst shame and misery, the discovery is made that the impressions about religion and religious professors which induced to the commission of sin, were wrong after all. Then the victim of the temptation wakes up to learn that there is such a thing as religious principle; that it does produce a state of mind which holds sin in abhorrence; that it teaches men to press the inquiry for themselves, “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” There is a fearful peril which the Scripture exposes to view, and to which nothing will so certainly conduct men as this habit of misjudging the character of the people of God for the purpose of gaining sanction to their own sins. The transition is made from entertaining unjust and low thoughts of the people of God to forming unworthy and degrading views of God Himself; and in the same way that a transgressor finds encouragement and sanction for personal sins in attributing to his fellow-creatures the same vicious motives which rule his own heart, so may he proceed a step further, and imagine that the Creator is altogether such an one as himself. It would seem hardly credible, at first sight, that such an idea could ever find entrance in the human heart; but Omniscience records the fact as the object of its own discovery and censure—proving that there is no length to which the hardening influence of sin will not carry a man. (*J. A. Miller.*) *The Amalekite messenger*:—1. A scrutiny touching the veracity of this Amalekite’s long harangue: Though I find some learned men patronising this Amalekite, and purging him from lying to David, saying his story was a real truth, for Saul had indeed fallen upon his own weapon, but his coat of mail had hindered it from piercing deep enough to be so speedily a mortal wound, but that the Philistines might come and catch him alive and abuse him; and though it be said (when his armour-bearer saw that Saul was dead) he slew himself (1 Sam. 31. 5). Which yet Dr. Lightfoot senseth thus: When he saw Saul had given himself so deadly a wound, he did the like, and died indeed, but Saul’s wound was not of so quick a dispatch, therefore he desired this man to kill him outright. Notwithstanding all this, yet upon a more serious inquest into particulars, this whole story seems more probably to be a pack of lies, one stitched to another for these reasons:—’Tis altogether improbable, either that Saul, after he had given himself such a deadly wound, whereof he was ready to die, should be able to call him, and spend so many words in talking with him; or that this man should dare to stay so long in this discourse with Saul, seeing he also was fleeing (with the whole army) to save his own life, which he might have lost by making this halt, had

the Philistines overtaken him in their pursuit (which Saul feared for himself) during this parley. Nor can it be probable that Saul should desire to die rather by the hands of an uncircumcised Amalekite, than of the uncircumcised Philistines which he so much feared. He could not put any such difference between them, seeing Amalek was more accursed and devoted to destruction than the Philistines. 'Tis expressly said, that Saul fell upon his own sword (1 Sam. 31. 4), but this fellow saith, he fell upon his own spear (ver. 6). 'Tis as expressly said, that Saul's armour-bearer, being yet alive, saw that Saul was dead (1 Sam. 31. 5), which doubtless he would thoroughly know before he did kill himself. Had the armour-bearer been yet alive when Saul called this Amalekite to dispatch him, he would certainly have hindered him from doing that which himself durst not do (1 Sam. 31. 4). Nor could that be more probable, which he told David, "I took the crown that was upon his head" (ver. 10), but looked rather like a lie, for it is not likely Saul would wear his crown upon his head in battle; this would make him a fair mark to his enemies, whom they chiefly aimed at. A wise general will rather disguise himself (1 King. 22. 30) than be so fondly exposed, etc. The scripture of truth does manifestly ascribe Saul's death to be his own action (1 Sam. 31. 4, 5), even to his falling upon his own sword, which must be of more credit with us, than an artificially composed speech of an accursed Amalekite, who had taught his tongue to tell lies (Jerem. 9. 5), and all to curry favour with David, from whom he promised to himself some great preferment by thus glozing with him. 2. A just hand of God on this Amalekite for his lying. (C. Ness.)

Ver. 17. **And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son.**—*David's lament*:—1. The Bible has been called "the record of human sorrows," and so it is. There are, however, parts of the sacred Scriptures where the shadows lay thickest, and the notes are ever in the minor key: I refer to the lamentations. What strains in music are more pathetic and moving than those of the "Marcia Funebre"! and when did ever Handel, or Beethoven, or Chopin exercise their genius with greater effect than in those compositions which unveil in sound the secret agony of bereavement! So in Holy Scripture, when the spectrum of the Spirit sweeps across the chords of the human soul in the dark hour of grief, there is something unspeakably touching in the inspired cadences. 2. Such outpourings of grief as are found in the dirge in this lesson, composed by David, may be "highly poetical," and betray the tense condition of the emotions; yet they are not devoid of moral teaching, and vividly depict the affectionate character of him who was a type of "the Man of sorrows." I. **DAVID'S LAMENT OVER SAUL.** 1. I see in this the spirit of forgiveness. There was enough in Saul's dealings with David to have dulled the poignancy of grief, and even to have called up resentment. David's conduct seems an anticipation of the Christian precept, not only to forgive, but to love your enemies. Forgiveness of injuries, "the flower of charity," was ripened by the rays of the Sun of Righteousness, for there was little enough of it in the world before Christ came. I am not forgetting that Solomon said, "It is the glory of a man to pass by a transgression" (Prov. xix. 11). On the other hand, there is a tone of vindictiveness in parts of the Old Testament—in the Psalter, for instance—which reveals a low standard of morality in some respects. The "eye for eye" and "tooth for tooth" principle required nothing short of the Life and Death of Christ to dislodge it. Even David, on another occasion, betrayed something very much like the spirit of revenge (1 Kings ii. 9). However, before us we have a beautiful instance of forgiveness, when the maxim, "De mortuis nil nisi bonum," was certainly not in the ascendant. 2. Moreover, David not only gave vent to his grief in the utterances of this elegy; but he taught it to the people. This arose from his generous desire that Israel should remember the greatness of Saul. 3. The object of teaching this dirge to the people was that they might remember it and repeat it. In the same way, the "Lamentations" of Jeremiah are repeated by the Jews at the "Wailing Place" with weeping, and thus the recollection of their sins and miseries is perpetuated. David willed that the memory of his predecessor should live in the hearts of the people. 4. David weeping over Saul is a type of Christ weeping over Jerusalem which rejected Him. II. **DAVID'S LAMENT OVER JONATHAN.** 1. This was the climax of his grief, the bitterest element in the cup of sorrow. 2. David's sorrow arose

from the friendship which existed between him and Jonathan (1 Sam. xviii. 1). Similarly, Jacob's love for Benjamin is described (Gen. xlv. 80). But this was outside all family ties. Strangers found in each other what they could not find in the domestic circle. This romantic form of love played a conspicuous part in the ancient world. Poets, artists, and philosophers made it their subject. Christianity has been taunted with its disregard of friendship. Yet the wider circles of love did not obliterate, in the heart of Christ, that "love of mutual benevolence" which could delight in certain souls through an "affinity of natural qualities and feelings." Thus Lazarus was a friend of Christ, and St. John "the disciple whom Jesus loved." 3. But it may be admitted—although there are Christian friendships recorded in the history of the Church, and to be found amongst Christians, which are beautiful and separate from all that is essential or merely sentimental—that friendship has not the same conspicuous place which it had when Aristotle took two books of his "Ethics" to treat the theme; and there are reasons for this which need not now be discussed. It is sufficient to observe that its rightful value as a form of love is preserved. "What it seems to lose in importance, it gains in inward worth by the consecration it receives from the Christian spirit" (Luthardt).

4. The description of Jonathan's love for David has ever been interpreted as a type of the love of the Christian for Christ, David's Son and Lord; and the covenant which he made with him, and the way he stripped himself of his robes and weapons (1 Sam. xviii. 3, 4), to be an image of the covenant with Christ, and the willingness to be stripped of all for His sake. The strong language which depicts the fervour of natural affection is a vehicle to describe the intensity and transforming character of Christian love. Lessons: 1. To try to learn the lesson—hard for flesh and blood, but possible through the grace of the Holy Spirit, not only to forgive, but to love those who have injured us. Though Saul had sought David's life, David wept over Saul's death. 2. To learn from the friendship between Jonathan and David, and the value which has been set upon friendship, how important is the choice of friends. How the influence may be powerful either for good or evil which comes from companionship: "With the holy thou shalt be holy, and with a perfect man thou shalt be perfect;" so the opposite, "With the froward thou shalt learn frowardness" (Ps. xviii. 25, 26). 3. All human friendship must be subordinate to the love of that Friend who laid down His life for us, and who is faithful when all others desert us. (W. H. Hutchings, M.A.) *Death of Saul and Jonathan*:—I. A GOOD CHANCE WILL NOT ENSURE A SUCCESSFUL CAREER. Be thankful for an open path to success. But be cautious. Education, fortune, and friends will not make a man. That, his own energy and faithfulness must do. The world's competition makes short work of external advantages, and a good chance makes more conspicuous poor achievement. Indeed, the kindest choice may be the adversity which puts men on their mettle, calling out that earnestness and thoroughness which the world loves to honour. A thousand times it has been proved that he who will succeed, can; a thousand times, that the fairest opportunity may be thrown away by reckless or impotent or unwise favourites of fortune.

II. DIVINE HELP WILL NOT SECURE SUCCESS. What more could Heaven have done for this king with a ruined life? And are there none in these days for whom God seems to have done everything? Their very birth was into blessings. How sacred influences have sung over their cradles, and rocked them to sleep in a fond mother's arms. How friends have taken them by the hand, wise to counsel, patient to bear, helpful to instruct. And God has come very near. It is almost impossible for a youth to grow up in a Christian land without feeling strongly and persuasively the claim of God upon him. Companions, older friends, become Christians. He joins them and catches the inspiration. He knows God has come to him, and thinks he has come to God. Is it genuine? Will it last? Each of us knows some Saul who has fought against Heaven's kindness to accomplish his own ruin. Divine love cannot save an unwilling heart. III. ENTIRE CONSECRATION TO GOD IS THE ONLY ASSURANCE OF A SUCCESSFUL CAREER. Saul's ruin sprang from his disobedience. Absolute surrender to God, unquestioning and unswerving obedience, would have fixed his will and enthroned the good in his nature. Though God gives opportunity, man must use it. Special Divine favours heap up condemnation, if not met with a consecrated will. The Divine purpose may use a bad man against his will and without his profit. There is no sadder

sight than the gradual breaking down of a lofty soul under the influence of unresisted temptation. Religious impressions are not religious principles. Good and evil dwell together in every soul; character is determined, not by our sensitiveness to their influence, but by our choice. How do I know but that now some of you may be hesitating before great temptations—to use for yourselves that which is not yours; to break over the pure and sacred laws which control the relations of man and woman? That way lies death. The laws of God cannot be overcome. Though you lived a king, shame would defile you, gloom and fear gather about your last hours. But to the wise, God increaseth knowledge; to the obedient He addeth strength. On this earth they have peace and honour; among the angels, before the face of God, eternal blessedness. (*Monday Club Sermons.*)

Ver. 18. **The use of the bow.**—I. ACTIVITY IS A VALUABLE SOLACE FOR SORROW :—The people were very grieved; for Saul and Jonathan, the king and the crown prince, were slain. David indulges their grief: he writes them a plaintive song which the daughters of Israel may sing. But to take off their minds from their distress he at the same time issues the order to teach the children of Judah the use of the bow, for activity is an effectual remedy in the time of sorrow. Certainly the opposite of it would tend towards blank despair. Do not be tempted to brood over your affliction. Do not shut yourself up alone to ruminate upon the great ill that has befallen you, so as to nurse your wrath against God: this can do you no good whatever. You have heard of Alexander Cruden. Perhaps you do not know that he was crossed in love, and met with certain other trials which drove him nearly mad; and yet Alexander Cruden did not become insane, for he engaged upon the immense work of forming a concordance of sacred Scripture. This work kept him from becoming altogether insane. A valuable solace for sorrow is activity, especially, I think, in reference to new work. The poet Rogers tells us of a rich man in Venice who was the subject of despair, and became such a hypochondriac that he went down to the canal to drown himself; but on the way he was met by a poor little boy who tugged at his skirts, and begged for bread. When the rich man called him an impostor, the boy besought him to come home with him, and see his father and mother who were dying of starvation. He went up into the room, and found the family literally perishing for lack of food. He laid out the money which he had in his pocket in making them all glad with a hearty meal, and then said to himself that there was something worth living for after all. He had found a novel enjoyment, which gave a fresh motive for living. I would like to ask you who have suffered a great trouble whether the Lord may not be pressing you by this means into a new path of delight, directing you to a fresh method of glorifying God and doing good to your fellow-men. II. AN ADMIRABLE USE OF DISASTER IS TO LEARN ITS LESSONS. What was the disaster? Saul and Jonathan had been shot by archers. The Philistines were evidently strong in the use of the bow; but Saul's army was short of archers, and so they were not able to smite the Philistines at a distance. Before they came to close quarters, where Israel might have been a match for Philistia, the arrows of the Philistines had reached their king. Had they known how to use the bow, they might have been conquerors; and therefore David hastens to teach the men of Judah the use of the bow. 1. Find out where your weakness is. Search and see. Is it a sin beguiled? Is it some point where you ought to have been guarded, but where you have been unwatchful? Is it weakness in prayer? Is it neglect of the word of God? Is it indifference to Divine truth? Is it coldness of heart? Or what is it? If you have been defeated, there is a cause for it. If you have been cast down and brought low, say unto God, "Show me wherefore Thou contendest with me." 2. Learn the way to victory. David judged that if they were defeated by the bow they might yet win by the bow. It is right to learn from our adversaries. There is something to be learnt from Satan. If he goes about, let us be diligent; if he seeks whom he may devour, let us seek whom we may save; and if he watches carefully to find out our weak points, let us watch those whom we would bless to find out how we may best reach their hearts. 3. A call to action—to general action. Saul had a little standing army, and did not drill all the nation for war; but David says, "I will teach all my own tribe the use of the bow." Now, whenever a church begins to

get low, dull, stupid, then it is time to teach the children of Judah the use of the bow, and to wake them all up to holy enterprise. It was the glory of the Moravians that all their members were missionaries; and such ought to be the glory of every church: every man, woman, and child in the church should take part in the battle for Jesus. This, by God's grace, is the cure for spiritual decline: teach the people the use of the bow. III. A NOBLE MONUMENT TO A FRIEND IS TO IMITATE HIS EXCELLENCIES. When Jonathan and David communed together they fixed the meeting by Jonathan shooting certain arrows: it is evident that Jonathan was a man who greatly favoured the use of the bow; and though his father did not largely introduce it into the army, yet Jonathan was well skilled therein. "Well then," says David, "in memory of Jonathan, instead of piling up a great monument, we will teach the children of Judah the use of the bow." IV. IT IS A GREAT ADVANTAGE TO BELIEVERS TO LEARN THE USE OF THE BOW SPIRITUALLY. There is the bow of prayer. Its use has not gone out of date; but I wish that all of us knew how to shoot the arrows of the Lord's deliverance much better than we do. Holy men of old would pick out an arrow, and when they had chosen it they knew how to use it. They knew what they wanted, and they prayed for it. They fitted their arrow on the string: that is to say, they took God's promise, the promise that answered to their desire, and fitting the one to the other, they took straight aim at heaven, and watched the flight of the arrowy petition. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The song of the bow*:—David, after the bloody battle of Gilboa, in which he lost his old enemy, Saul, and his dear friend, Jonathan, infused into the hearts of the people a spirit of national pride. The words in the text, "the use of," you will notice are not in the original; they are supplied, carefully printed by our translators in italics, to show that they are an interpolation, from the supposition that they were wanted to mark the sense of what followed. In fact, they are not needed. "The Bow" is the title of the poem which is then given, and it would rather read, "Also he bade them teach the children of Israel the song of the bow,"—the bow, by which their King and Prince had been slain; the bow, dear to the poet's memory as the means by which the young prince, Jonathan, had saved his friend's life, in that tender story when the unwitting lad through its instrumentality warned him; the bow, by which they were to assert and maintain their nationality. So he taught them not only the use, but he taught the song of the bow. Song filtrates and refines, gives passion and fervour to national feeling, and this, though so old, is a very wonderful song—surely one of the most pathetic and wonderful of all elegies, and it furnishes the key, and gives the fulness to that most wonderful of all funeral wails, the Dead March in Saul. The bow became representative of every kind of furniture of war. Just as bread stands for every kind of food in the Hebrew, so also the bow represents every kind of furniture for war. He turned, therefore, the death of Saul in his song into the means of bringing all the energies, the glowing patriotism of the land, upon national defence. He roused and concentrated the military spirit, and taught them the use, while he taught them the song, of the bow. History is inspiring. The bow, in Scripture, stands for something more than the mere engine of earthly war. Joseph was not a soldier, but it is the grand commendation of his character that "his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the mighty God of Jacob." And you will notice that in the Bible no name becomes permanently great, no name is recorded of sterling and lasting worth, which is not moved by the Spirit of God, and which does not represent a firm compliance with His will. God spoke to each of these old heroes, God separated each, usually early in life. The heart looked up, knew the voice, owned it, and followed it. Life is no more matched and mastered without a struggle, without discipline and endeavour, than you are likely to be accomplished in your service of arms without training and trial. You know we speak of a Standard Bearer, and somebody has said that that means stand hard, and bear well. 2. The Song of the Bow is, therefore, a song of war. In the old Hebrew fashion, this is full of the grief of life. Nature is called, as it were, to put on mourning for the illustrious dead; "Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be on you no dew," no refreshing shower, no bubbling desert spring. It is as if the plants and the woods were called to join in the melancholy wail, and the very flowers to sigh forth their grief; and it is so that in a great and sorrowful deprivation, trees and herbs, flowers and forests are called to

sympathise with human sorrow; the rose to blush mournfully, and the anemone and the hyacinth to speak forth in their floral leaves the tokens of grief, what conquers, what overcomes this. The Song of the Bow is not only the song of battle, discipline, and trial, but a song of victory and triumph. In Christ we adore the God of resurrections. We see Him, indeed, whose bow was made quite naked in the sight of all the tribes; "there brake He the arrows of the bow, the spear, the shield in the battle;" there "He brake the bow, and snapped the spear in sunder." Verily, when I think of the death of Christ and His resurrection, I feel that we may teach the children the Song of the Bow. Life is, indeed, full of resurrections. In many a floral and insect world she seems to exhibit something of the gospel of the resurrection, and hangs over the grave "resurrection lights." From repulsive shells which look forbidding to the eye and the touch, emerge creatures delicate and beautiful, bursting their harsh black prison, and on gossamer wings soaring and sailing through light and air. Out of the body of crawling worms comes forth the winged splendour of the butterfly; it spun its shroud, its coffin, its grave, and so prepared for its resurrection; then, instead of creeping on the earth, and feeding on the dust, it indulges its variable flight and sucks the pollen from the fragrant flowers. (*E. Paxton Hood.*) **It is written in the book of**

Jasher.—*Lessons from a lost book*:—Without entering into the controversy on "the book of Jasher," let us consider the text as it is presented in our version. We have in the text an illustration of—I. **THE COMBINATION OF THE POETICAL AND THE PRACTICAL IN ONE PERSON.** Where will you find a truer, sweeter, deeper, more gifted poet than David? Where will you find a more natural and soul-moving lyrical outburst of grief than this over Jonathan? Tennyson's tender and touching, delicate and profound, and, to bereaved hearts, unspeakably precious "In Memoriam" is poor compared with this Davidic ode. Yet the poet, in his sorrow and his dirge, is wise, forecasting, politic, practical. With the bow and arrow Saul and Jonathan had been slain, so David would have the children of Judah well trained in "the use of the bow." 1. When the poetic is unpractical, merely dreamy, unsubstantial, vain, it loses all true worth—ceases, indeed, to be poetry; for the poet, as the name indicates, is a maker, a creator. 2. When the practical is dissociated from the poetic, it becomes dreary, unexalting, ignoble. When men aim at the merely utilitarian, they miss even their own low mark. We need the ideal, the poetic, in combination with the practical and utilitarian, to attain to completeness and symmetry. "The use of the bow" and the use of the lyre must go together, if we would have a symmetrical order of things—a cosmos. II. **THE DISORDER OF HUMAN NATURE.** Saul and Jonathan are slain. The earth has not yet absorbed their blood. A deep, genuine, sacred sorrow is wailing in sad minor key through the soul of David. Surely it is a most pathetic, reverent time with the poet king! Yet he must give instructions as to "the use of the bow." Sorrowing for the absent ones removed by skilful archers, yet he deems it prudent to have the children of Judah made skilful archers, that they in their turn may make wives widows, happy children orphans, and take other Jonathans away from other Davids. There must be some "cursed obliquity" in human nature; the normal must have given place to the abnormal, ere this could have come to pass. The Biblical narrative of human apostasy is, we believe, the key to the enigma. III. **THE IMPERMANENCE OF HUMAN WORKS.** Where is "the book of Jasher?" Who knows it? What did it contain? Was it in prose or poetry? Was it dialectical or didactic? We know something of the theories concerning it; but with any theory we must feel how impermanent are human doings. Suppose it means: 1. A book by some one named Jasher. Well, who was he? What was his character? What was his book about? Where now is all the treasure of his heart and brain, which he poured forth in his book? Alas! Jasher, we condole with thee. 2. A book for the regulation of equity between man and man. How sad that any attempt, even the feeblest, to rectify the disordered state of human affairs, should fail! Surely, in any normal state, any effort to promote equity should succeed and be remembered. But even such a book is not permanent. 3. A book in which the heroic deeds of righteous men were recorded. That must live! A righteous man—how grand! But what adjective is adequate to set forth "the heroic deeds of a righteous man"? A righteous man and heroic worker—surely the book that speaks of such must live! Alas, no! This book of the heroic deeds of the upright has gone. IV. **THE**

PERMANENCE OF LIFE, AS CONTRASTED WITH ITS TEMPORARY HUMAN RECORDS. "The book of Jasher" is no more; but the men and their deeds of whom it contained records, they are not no more; the men live, the influence of the deeds lives. Books pass away, men endure; records of deeds are soon lost, the influence of deeds lives on. Do not write a poem; live a poem. Trouble not about the record of the life; but be careful of the life. "The book of Jasher" may be unimportant; but the life of Jasher is of incalculable importance, perhaps to many, certainly to Jasher. (William Jones.) *The book of Jasher*:—There is great diversity of opinion as to "the book of Jasher," or, as it is given in the margin, "the book of the upright." It is mentioned only here and in Josh x. 18. Here are some of the opinions concerning it which seem to us more or less probable: 1. That it was a book of upright or authentic records or chronicles, probably those of the high priest, and from which much of the Old Testament history was compiled. 2. That Yashar "is better taken as a collective term for Israelites, like y'sharim in Num. xxiii. 10; Psal. cxi. 1; and so translated Book of the Israelites, i.e. national book" (Fuerst). The same theory is put thus by Mr. Aldis Wright: "The book of Jasher . . . so called because it contained the relation of the deeds of the people of Israel, who are elsewhere spoken of under the symbolical name Jeshurun. 3. That it was a collection of state poems, written by some one named Jasher, and probably a continuation of "the book of the wars of Jehovah" (Num. xxi. 14). 4. Others assert that it was a collection of national songs, and in proof of this allege that Yashar is equivalent to Hashshir, the song or poem. 5. That the book of Jasher contained the deeds of national heroes of all ages" celebrated in verse, and included Joshua's victory over the five kings of the Amorites (Josh. x.), and David's lament over Saul and Jonathan. 6. That it was a choice collection of ancient songs, and was called "the book of the just or upright," because it celebrated the praise of upright men. We may fairly conclude that it was written in verse "from the only specimens extant, which exhibit unmistakable signs of metrical rhythm"; but with regard to the contents nothing can be confidently affirmed. We ought also, perhaps, to call attention to the difference of opinion as to the meaning of "the bow." Instead of supplying the use of, as the translators of the A.V. have done, some would read "the song of the bow." "He bade them teach the children of Judah the bow," i.e. the following threnody, which was so called either because Saul was shot by an archer, or because the bow of Jonathan is here celebrated (ver. 22). Others regard "the bow" as the name of some musical instrument. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 19-20. **The beauty of Israel is slain.**—*The fall of Christians*:—We have here an illustration of the degenerating influences of sin upon the character of Christians, and the lamentable effects in the eyes of the world. I. **THE BEAUTY OF ISRAEL.** Christianity imparts a distinguishing character to the believer; the moral counterpart of Israel's separation from the heathen inhabitants that surrounded them, and the evil practices from which they were called. II. **THE BEAUTY OF ISRAEL SLAIN.** The history of souls proves this possibility. III. **THE BEAUTY OF ISRAEL SLAIN IN THE HIGH PLACES.** Many Christians who flourished in the Church while they occupied a lowly position, have had their beauty "slain by an ecclesiastical or secular elevation. God's gems shine best in the shade. But few trees of His growth can challenge the stormy winds of "high places." IV. **THE LAMENTATION.** "How are the mighty fallen," etc. V. **THE CHURCH'S PROCLAMATION.** "Tell it not," etc. (*The Study.*) **How are the mighty fallen!**—*The death of the great*:—1. How is the mighty fallen!—fallen under the superior power of death!—Death, the king of terrors, the conqueror of conquerors; whom riches cannot bribe, nor power resist; whom goodness cannot soften, nor dignity and loyalty deter, or awe to a reverential distance. Death intrudes into palaces as well as cottages; and arrests the monarch as well as the slave. How astonishing and lamentable is the stupidity of mankind! Can the natural or the moral world exhibit another phenomenon so shocking and unaccountable? Death sweeps off thousands of our fellow-subjects every year. Our neighbours, like leaves in autumn, drop into the grave, in a thick succession; and our attendance upon funerals is almost as frequent and formal as our visits of friendship or complaisance. Yet how few realise the thought that they must die! Pilgrims and strangers imagine themselves everlasting residents; and make this

transitory life their all, as if earth was to be their eternal home; as if eternity was but a fairy land, and heaven and hell but majestic chimeras. 2. Since the mighty is fallen, how vain are all things beneath the sun! Vanity of vanities; all is vanity! How unworthy the hopes, how inferior to the desires, how unequal to the duration of human nature! "Who then art thou, who settest thine affections on things below? Dost thou value thyself on thy birth? Dost thou value thyself on thy riches? Dost thou value thyself on thy power? Dost thou glory in thy constancy, humanity, affection to thy friend; justice, veracity, popularity, universal love?" If even kings cannot extract perfect happiness from things below; if the gross, unsubstantial, and fleeting enjoyments of life are in their own nature incapable of affording pure, solid, and lasting felicity, must we not all despair of it? Yet such a happiness we desire; such we need; nay, such we must have; or our very existence will become our curse, and all our powers of enjoyment but capacities of pain. And where shall we seek for it? where, but in the supreme Good? But though crowns, and thrones, and kings, though stars, and suns, and worlds, sink into promiscuous ruin, there is one gift of Heaven to mankind which shall survive; which shall flourish and reign for ever; a gift little esteemed or solicited, and which makes no brilliant figure in mortal eyes; I mean religion. Religion! Thou brightest ornament of human nature! Thou fairest image of the Divine! Thou sacred spark of celestial fire, which now glimmers with but a feeble lustre; but will shine bright in the night of affliction; will irradiate the thick gloom of death, and blaze out into immortality in its native element! This will be an unfailing source of happiness, through the revolutions of eternal ages. These majestic trifles are not the tests of real worth, nor the badges of Heaven's favourites: it is religion that marks out the happy man; that distinguishes the heir of an unfading crown; who, when the dubious conflict of life is over, shall inherit all things, and sit in triumph for ever with the King of kings, and Lord of lords. (*S. Davies, A.M.*)

Vers. 20, 22. **Tell it not in Gath.**—*The elegy*:—We are far from assigning the peculiar complexion of this elegy to that mere commonplace thing which goes by the name, though most wrongfully, of charity; but which should rather be characterised as perilous unfaithfulness to God, to the interests of religion, and to the safety of men's souls—a charity which is, however, very popular with a certain class of persons who are ever ready to throw its mantle over the defects of others, provided that they can manage, at the same time, to effect concealment beneath its folds for some indulged sins of their own. Nor can we perceive in this composition the utterance of a spirit of flattery, which, to answer an end, can speak good things of a bad man with cool effrontery, and with perfect consciousness of the falsehood which the lips are uttering. There was no end to be answered here which would serve as a temptation; and how little sympathy there was in David's mind with such a practice, we may gather from those repeated expressions of abhorrence in regard to it which meet us in his writings. Still less do we discover in these words of David nothing more than a tribute to the claims which death is allowed to put forth for a respectful mention of the departed. We cannot regard it as a mere exemplification of the doctrine, good enough within certain limits, that when a man is dead his failings are not to be made the subject of remark. I. IN ACCOUNTING FOR THE PECULIAR TONE OF THIS FUNERAL-SONG, IN ITS ALLUSION TO SAUL, the history seems to justify us in regarding the elegy itself as the testimony which David desired to bear to the completeness with which he forgave Saul every injury which he had inflicted on him. We discover the traces of an unusually close imitation of the Divine character and procedure in the manner in which David here refers to Saul? Do we not see at work the heart of one who has completely "blotted out" the impression of the cruel persecution which Saul had carried on against him—who had "cast behind his back" all personal offence—who had no desire "to remember any more" one of the many occasions on which his own spirit had been riven by the ill-treatment and jealousy of him for whom he had repeatedly hazarded his own life? In regard to one aspect of moral character, and that one the manifestation of which involves a difficult encounter with, and a great victory over predominant self, David's example serves to show what measures of resemblance to God—of "bearing the image of the heavenly"—may be, by Divine grace, attained by man. It serves to show how we may be

"imitators of God;" how we may "walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing."

2. The entireness with which David had forgiven Saul is testified in the absence from this death-song of any reference to the painfulness of the past. This circumstance, on which we have been dwelling, may not of itself fully account for another feature of the elegy. There is not only the absence of condemnatory allusion, but there is the presence of a considerable amount of matter of a positively and uniformly commendatory character. It happens with descriptions of character, as it does with delineations of outward nature—they are taken from particular points of view, and must, of course, vary greatly, and differ from each other according to the standpoint selected for making the observation or forming the sketch. In order to identify with the actual scenery a representation by the pencil of some inviting landscape, or of any particular objects which give it interest, we must take the trouble to find out the precise spot at which the artist stood, and forth from which he looked abroad when he sketched the picture. Thus, too, in estimating the truthfulness of sketches of individual character, we are not at liberty to take up our position exactly where we like; the only fair way of forming a judgment of the portraiture is to find out the standpoint at which the author of the sketch fixed himself, and, adopting it as our own, we must, from that position, make our observation. Any other course would obviously be unjust.

3. The true key to the elegy which David here pronounced is the point of view from which he looked at Saul—the position, in relation to the departed monarch, which he occupied at the moment. He simply noted down the features of the character and aspects of conduct which met his eye where he stood; and if we will go and stand side by side with him, looking as he looked, and feeling as he felt, we shall at once acknowledge the accuracy of his portraiture. There are some circumstances which are peculiarly favourable for forming a full and accurate estimate of an individual; there are others, however, which only permit us to take a limited view at best, and looking from the midst of these, the eye most generally allows itself to be engrossed with one or two characteristic features, which come very near ourselves, and which appear, for that very reason, separated in a measure from all the rest. At such a point David now stood.

4. In such manifestations of natural feeling as we discover in this and other passages of the same order, there is much that is encouraging, in a practical point of view. We find our spirits brought into contact with men "of like passions" with ourselves. In David, as he uttered this elegy, we see a man who could weep, just as we weep; who could break down with the pressure of sudden bereavement, just as we break down; who, under the influence of sorrows, looked at men and things just as, under the same influence, we look at them. He does not stand apart from us as a being of higher nature, whose superiority should awe us, and keep us at a discouraging distance; but he comes near to us, and wins our interested attention. We can feel at home with him; we can read his heart as that of a fellow-creature; we can understand him as a man. He stands on the level of a common humanity with every reader of the narrative. It is human nature which we recognise at work—a nature like our own. It is a man shedding tears as we shed them, and doing exactly the same things as, we are disposed to think, we should have done under the same circumstances. And we argue from this point, and argue hopefully. We say to the discouraged spirit, "You see that David and you are alike as regards human nature. Divine grace has the same material on which to work in your case as in his, the same views of things in general, the same emotions under particular dispensations—then why should not Divine grace do for you what it did for him? meeting you on the same level as that at which it met him, why should it not conduct you to the same point to which it elevated him? Reverting from the elegy, however, to the man over whom it was pronounced, it is important that we should bear in mind that our destiny in the next world will be decided, not by the estimate which survivors may, under any circumstances, form of our character and conduct, but by the view which the eye of Omniscience has taken of us, from the beginning to the termination of our earthly existence. It will not be the record of our life which will meet us at God's tribunal, but the pages of the book of God's remembrance will be opened then, presenting the most exact transcript of each portion of our existence, however minute. The account to which every man will be summoned will comprehend "the things done in his body" in the whole course of life. How affecting is the contrast which, alas! there is too much reason to fear would sometimes be presented between what

survivors are doing and saying in reference to individuals who have left the world, and the actual condition of the souls of those individuals, if for a moment we could be admitted to make ourselves certainly acquainted with it. How many an one would be "lifting up his eyes in hell, being in torment," as having lived "without God in the world," whose manly form the artist's chisel has preserved from being forgotten, and whose earthly virtues are graven on the marble beneath. This is an awful truth; but it is one which is too much and too fatally overlooked. Our fellow-creatures may forgive us, but we may yet go into eternity unpardoned by God. And this, not because man is kinder to his fellow than God is to His creatures. No! but because of the unwillingness of sinful man to seek pardon in that way in which alone God dispenses it, and in which, while He passes by transgression, His law is honoured, His truth is maintained, and the respect due to His moral government is ensured. In the atonement effected by the Son of God, to which all sacrifice pointed, and which was made known from the earliest time with sufficient clearness to meet the case of sinful men, that way of forgiveness is discovered—God, for Christ's sake, forgives men their trespasses. To this propitiation all are invited, with the assurance that none who come in faith and repentance shall be rejected. (*J. A. Miller.*) *David's lament over Saul*:—David lamented the king's death, and was sad with genuine and noble sorrow. There are events in life which make the commonest men almost sublime: how much more do such events elevate the princeliest men until they sing as angels or burn as seraphs? David's life has up to this point charmed us by its simplicity and heroism: to-day we see it in its highest mood of veneration and magnanimity. I. One of the first lessons impressed upon us by this lament relates to DAVID'S NOBLE-MINDED FORGETFULNESS OF ALL PERSONAL INJURY. Do not some of us cherish the memory of our personal injuries, even after death has dug the awful gulf of the grave between the present and the past? Death is not to obliterate moral distinctions; but why should we judge when the man who injured us has passed on to the dread invisible—the very seat of the Just One? II. The lament shows how DAVID WAS ENABLED TO TAKE THE HIGHEST AND BRIGHTEST VIEW OF HUMAN CHARACTER. He did not detract from the valour of Saul. Some people delay their praise too long. They keep back their affection until they have to suggest an epitaph. Make your love longer, even if you make your epitaphs shorter. III. The lament impresses us with the BEAUTY OF A ZEALOUS AND TENDER CARE FOR THE REPUTATION OF THE LORD'S ANOINTED. Death is not the only fall. Men fall morally. The mighty men of the church fall like stars from heaven. The great preacher becomes a debauchee. The trusted professor is caught in fraud. The feet of the strong are tripped up. And there are men who delight in telling these things in Gath and Askelon! IV. THE LAMENT SHOWS HOW BITTER IS THE DISTRESS WHICH FOLLOWS THE IRREPARABLE LOSSES OF LIFE. We do not always give full value to the positive side of life. We hold advantages and blessings as if we had a right to them. It is so in the very commonest things. It is so in nature: in family life: in church relations: sunshine; water; bread; friendship; ministry. The application of the whole: (1) Let us so live, that death will be but a momentary separation. (2) In commending the wonderful love of Jonathan, let us remember that there is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 21. **Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew.**—*The blood of Christ speaking better things than the blood of Saul*:—These words form a part of that song of lamentation which David composed after that Saul, and Jonathan his son, had fallen in battle with the Philistines. The death of Saul was in the eyes of David an exceedingly grievous event; an event in connexion with which he considered that no small degree of guilt had been incurred; because Saul was the Lord's anointed: and so grievous, and so guiltful, if we may use such an expression, was that event in the eyes of David, that in this solemn lamentation he imprecates Divine vengeance even upon the very place where the foul deed had been perpetrated; he prays, that henceforth on these mountains of Gilboa there might be neither dew nor rain nor fields of offering. We may take occasion from it to illustrate the enormity of that sin of which those were guilty who embred their hands in our Saviour's blood; and we may take occasion to draw a like contrast with that which the Apostle has drawn in the case of Abel; and we may dwell with delight upon the encouraging fact, that while the blood of Saul that was thus shed called for vengeance on the very spot where it was shed, the blood

of Christ calls for nothing but blessings, the very opposite of these curses.

I. THE ENORMITY OF GUILT CONTRACTED BY THOSE WHO SHED THE SAVIOUR'S BLOOD, AS THAT GUILT MAY BE ILLUSTRATED BY THE ENORMITY OF THE GUILT OF THE DEATH OF SAUL. 1. What was the principal circumstance upon which David dwelt, but that Saul was the Lord's anointed? But if it be said of Saul, that he was the Lord's anointed, how much more may it be said of Christ, whose very name—Messiah, signifies the Anointed, or the Christ of God. It was indeed manifest to every unprejudiced mind, by the whole course of our Saviour's history, that he was indeed the Lord's Anointed—the Son of God. It is recorded of Saul, that he had on more than one occasion rejected the Lord, rejected the authority of that God who had caused him to be anointed king over Israel. What shall we say, therefore, in contrast, with reference to our blessed Saviour? He glorified and adorned the doctrines of his heavenly Father, by the most unreserved, entire, and continued obedience; so that the great adversary of man when he came to search and to sift him, could find nothing in him; yea, his very accusers had nothing that they could allege or prove against him, when they had arraigned him. 2. David dwelt upon the disgrace connected with his death, as adding bitterness to the event—that he had been slain by the hands of the Philistines, the sworn enemies of the Children of Israel. If we turn to the history of our blessed Saviour we shall find that there were still more embittered circumstances in his history, which made His cup even still more cruel. 3. If we turn again to the history of Saul, we shall find a variety of other particulars, all lessening the enormity of the guilt; and we shall find the contrast again heighten the guilt of our Saviour's death. 4. And whilst in the case of Saul, we may observe, that it was made most manifest in the hour of his death, that he had not the fear of God before his eyes, it was made most manifest to all those who surrounded our Saviour as he hung upon the cross, that He was indeed the Son of God.

II. TO DRAW AN ILLUSTRATION FROM THE CASE OF SAUL, AND THE VENGEANCE OF HIS DEATH—IN CONSEQUENCE OF HIS HAVING BEEN THE LORD'S ANOINTED—THE VENGEANCE THAT WAS IMPRECATED BY DAVID. 1. It may be fairly admitted that the language of David is poetical where he prays, that there may be neither dew nor rain upon the mountains of Gilboa; "Ye mountains of Gilboa," etc. And we may, therefore, at once turn to the striking, but all-important contrast which may be obtained as it respects the death of Christ. Had they been dealt with according to their deservings, the vengeance would have come on those who were guilty of our Saviour's death, and that without remedy. 2. But we shall proceed a little further in this illustration, to show the excellence of the blood-shedding of Christ. And we may take encouragement from this fact, that it was at Jerusalem that the glad tidings of the forgiveness of sins, and of the Spirit of promise, were first to be made known. Surely, if they of Jerusalem—if many of the priests who had been foremost in stirring up the people to ask that Christ might be crucified, if many of these very priests received the dew and the rain of heaven—if many of these very persons were enabled to offer themselves up to God to be His servants for ever, through the merit of the atoning sacrifice of Christ, there are none but may hope that they also, approaching God in the same way, shall also be kept, shall be visited with that grace of the Holy Spirit, and shall be privileged to be numbered among the servants and the children of God. (*A. Brandram, A.M.*)

Ver. 22. The bow of Jonathan turned not back.—*Successful archery*:—The old archers took the bow, put one end of it down beside the foot, elevated the other end, and it was the rule that the bow should be just the size of the archer; if it were just his size then he would go into battle with confidence. Let me say that your power to project good into the world will correspond exactly to your own spiritual stature. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

Ver. 23. Lovely and pleasant in their lives.—*The Master and the disciple*:—The words from the elegy of David for Saul and Jonathan, describe their character and relations in both life and death. 1. Great value is always to be attached to inspiring personal influence. None of us can fully compute the benefits which arise from it. The Eternal God has put it within the power of each one of us to affect others for good or harm. We communicate our intellectual interests, our moral tone, our spiritual bias to those with whom we come into contact. Not more surely is the infection of disease given off than the infection of character. Some men are very mighty in this respect. There is about them

a strange contagion. They cannot have intercourse with others without in some degree affecting them. These are men of character: they leave their stamp upon whomsoever they meet. There is about them, always and everywhere, a distinct, distinguishing manner and style of influence, which it is nearly impossible to resist; and equally so to lose, once it has laid hold upon you. 2. We recognise the importance of the earnest reception of inspiring personal influence. The mightiest inspiration fails to affect some people. They do not receive it. They are like blocks of marble or granite kissed by the sunshine, or sprinkled with the soft sweet rain of heaven. If, in this world, and in our strange human life, when we come near to a good and great man, we open all the doors and windows of our nature to him, He will shine into it, and give to it the warmth and comfort that it needs. When such good people are near, we should see to it that they do not pass away without leaving a blessing upon us. I will indicate a few of the points in which the Master and the disciple strikingly resembled one another:—I. **BREADTH OF VIEW IN REGARDING IMPORTANT MATTERS.** The Christian Church has many eminent men occupying positions of prominence in its ministry or its membership, whose power of intellect, and intensity of nature, are related to the circumstance that they look and walk along straight lines, and confine themselves to a defined field of observation. They never change their point of view. It is the one with which they are most familiar, and from which they fancy they can see most. From that point they have been looking for ten, twenty, thirty, fifty years. It is easier thus to limit one's field of vision. II. **GREAT REFINEMENT WAS MANIFEST IN THE CHARACTERS OF THESE TWO FRIENDS.** It is wonderful how it ever came to pass that a vulgar person could gain credit for being a Christian; for Christianity is the most refining of influences. It sheds a beautifying, chaste, and hallowing effect upon human life. It is the everlasting foe of everything that is vulgar. The coarse, and the harsh, and the hard elements of character have no recognition from it. III. **COURTESY.** Some might ask if this is a Christian virtue. Indeed it is. But, like so many Christian virtues, it has been invariably relegated to the domain of cultured, graceful paganism. (*W. Dorling.*)

Ver. 25. **How are the mighty fallen.**—*The dirge of the mighty*:—"How are the mighty fallen!"—the words sound in our ears like a deep undertone in some mournful harmony. The warrior-bard is celebrating the memory of a king and a king's son—warriors themselves of no mean prowess, "swifter than eagles, stronger than lions," the crown and glory of their land. Yet ever and anon we hear that sad refrain—the knell of their departed greatness, "How are the mighty fallen!" 1. "How are the mighty fallen!" It is the doleful dirge of human history through all time, the monument of many a blasted reputation, the brief but telling epitaph of a thousand wrecked lives. A statesman engaged in the service of his country, honoured as a public minister of his sovereign, a maker of laws in the Senate and a ruler of men in the State, is overtaken in a career of baseness unworthy of the meanest citizen. Indeed, the greater the eminence, the deeper and deadlier the fall. The clergyman who ought to set forth God's Word by preaching and living too often only negatively illustrates the truth he preaches, and furnishes a warning rather than an example. The trusted guide along the heavenly heights reveals by his fall the yawning gulf to which every traveller is exposed, and against which he himself gave men warning. A tradesman exchanges the counting-house and the shop for the dock and the cell. Another scene rises before my eyes. There sits one in dust and ashes who has lost the glory of woman. The unmanliness of a man has betrayed her too frail virtue. The flower that might have bloomed long days to come lies uprooted, withered, dead. She who was once belle of the social circle, "the observed of all observers," is now an outcast. Thus and thus in so many instances "how are the mighty fallen!" But in all such cases was there not a cause? The open disgrace, like the death of Saul, only marks and manifests the consummation and the consequences of sin. For we may be sure the heart was wrong long before the life betrayed itself. The mountain of fire long held in its awful depths the springs of death before it belched forth the liquid molten flood, bringing devastation and destruction over the land. If you could trace the inner history of these fallen ones of the mighty you would find Saul's disobedience repeated. They made their own will and pleasure the standard of their moral conduct, and though at first this was only seen by God, self-enlarged its desire till its baseness was laid bare before the world. Life apart from God was the beginning of evil, actual conflict with

God's will and law, the development of it, and abandonment by God to the devil's devices the end thereof. "They chose not to retain God in their knowledge, and so He gave them up to their own hearts' lusts and let them follow their own imaginations." The leaking drop has become at last a wide breaking in of waters and ruin is in the breach. It is the poet's touching tale—

"the little rift within the lute,
Which by-and-bye will make the music mute,
And ever wideening slowly silence all."

See then that your heart is right with God and your desires centred in Him. The heart that "is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" will deceive you, if you do not yield it unto God, who alone can know it, who alone can renew it in holiness after His own image. 2. But there are several considerations that will hold us back from exulting over these fallen ones of society—(1) Let us remember that they have carried many down with them in their fall. Men may sin alone but they cannot suffer alone. "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself," and the thought of our relations with others should act as a motive to deter us from sin. The husband suffers with the wife, parents with children, brother with sister, friend with friend. Saul, the foe of David, involves Jonathan, David's friend, in his own fall. 2. But again, remember that though these fallen sinners are banished from the world's society, Christ will receive them, if they will not in pride and obstinacy of heart sink to a yet greater depth. It is still true of Him that "He receiveth sinners and eateth with them." God takes the world's castaways and gives them—weary of sin and broken in heart—an inheritance in His house, and often as our Lord said, the publican and the harlot go into the kingdom of God before the self-righteous. 3. Notice the concluding words of our text, "How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle!" Such language may fitly teach, as by a parable, the solemn lesson that the conflict of evil with good, of darkness with light, is still raging around us, and that our danger is not past. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. x. 12). Let us, then, utterly distrustful of self, find our strength, our safety, our all, in Jesus, and cleave ever unto Him. Let us "go forth in the strength of the Lord God, and make mention of His righteousness, even His righteousness only." (*J. Silvester, M.A.*) *The fall of the mighty*:—The mighty, you know, are the puissant and great; and persons may be styled mighty on account of their birth, station, abilities, or noble exploits. This title is given in common to the kings, princes, and nobles of the earth: but the term is more peculiarly adapted to persons of a military profession, and fitly sets forth a champion or general experienced in war. They are properly mighty who are justly renowned for their valour and skill, like the princes of Israel, recorded in 1 Chron. xxvi. And this idea of the word agreeth with the character of those whose decease David mourns. "How are the mighty fallen!" Fallen indeed! Not merely fallen. A general may fall from his horse, or by a dangerous wound. But from such falls the mighty may recover, rise up again, speak with the enemy, and gloriously triumph in the end. The mighty are fallen; fallen like Sisera (Judges v. 27) fallen down dead. This is his sorrowful dirge! 'Tis added, "And the weapons of war perished!" I cannot be of opinion that this is to be taken in a literal sense, as though the loss of these instruments of war, properly speaking, grieved the soul of the Psalmist. Could the value of any number of weapons which can with reason be supposed to be broken or lost on this fatal defeat, demand so deep a lamentation; and especially after weeping over the mighty themselves, who were famous for handling the instruments of battle with skill and success? It seems evident to me that David concludes the elegy with a figure, under which he describes those eminent persons whose fall he bewails. The mighty who are fallen, and the weapons of war, are one and the same. I. CONSIDER THE FACT, namely, that the noblest of princes, or the most valiant and honourable of the earth, are liable to fall. Death reigns over all without distinction, under the prince of life, our exalted Saviour, who is alive from the dead, and hath the keys of the grave. Crowns and sceptres, thrones and palaces, and the whole force of the mighty, secure them not for an hour; yea, not for a moment from the domination of darkness. II. REASONS FOR GREAT LAMENTATION WHEN A MIGHTY MAN FALLS. 1. That when the mighty fall, in proportion to their zeal, puissance, and highness, the glory of a people is departed. 2. By the fall of the

mighty the strength of a people is impaired, which is another reason for mourning when such are removed. The mighty, in proportion to their rank and activity, for the welfare of the public, are the defence of a nation. 3. The known disposition of the enemies of a land to rejoice, and to avail themselves of the loss a people sustain when their mighty men die, is a further reason for mourning their fall. On this account we have seen David enjoin it on Israel, not to spread the melancholy report of Jonathan and Saul. 4. Individuals have just cause of mourning the fall of great men, on account of the general grief that spreads through the nation. Under such awful strokes the land mourns, and every one who seeks its prosperity is sensibly afflicted. II. Since the mighty fall, and die, as other men, and since the most noble and valiant are liable thus suddenly to perish, **LET US TAKE HEED THAT WE DO NOT PLACE AN ABSOLUTE DEPENDENCE UPON THEM.** Under God, there is a just expectation and confidence in wise and good princes: we see they are in some measure the glory and defence of a land; and are doubtless to be honoured and trusted; yet, since they must die, and may be cut down in a moment, our ultimate hope should not be in them. This also shows it to be foolish and vain for great men to exalt themselves as though they were gods, and the baseness of those sycophants who at any time flatter them; such instances are upon record. In one word, when the mighty fall, how vain is this world in its best estate, how uncertain and transitory its honour and beauty! The advantages gained by the exploits of the greatest men on earth are temporal, but one thing is needful, an interest in the triumphs of the cross, and the redemption obtained by the blood of the Son of God. (*B. Wallin.*)

Ver. 26. **I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan.**—*Bereavement*:—Perhaps you know by experience what a choking sensation there is in looking at an emigrant vessel clearing out, even though you have no personal interest in anyone on board. The confusion and hurry that attend her departure; the crowded deck, the thronging crowd on shore to say, "Farewell." Grey-headed men bidding good-bye to their native land, and a final good-bye, too. Who can ever forget the sobs that burst as the last rope was cast off and the great ship solemnly passed away. The loneliness that came upon you as with a rush then, how like, only very faint in degree, what comes when loved ones say "good-bye" in death and "the time of their departure is at hand." (*H. O. Mackey.*) *The loss of a friend*:—Emma Lazarus used to tell how pathetically W. E. Channing spoke of his friend Thoreau's removal. He never spoke of his death but always of "Thoreau's loss," or "when I lost Mr. Thoreau." One day when I sat with him in the sunlit wood, looking at the gorgeous blue and silver summer sky, he turned to me and said, "Just half the world died for me when I lost Mr. Thoreau." None of it looks the same as when I looked at it with him. (*Ibid.*) **Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.**—*The love of Jonathan to David*:—I. THE LOVE OF JONATHAN TO DAVID WAS WONDERFUL IN ITS CONDESCENSION. If we take into account the state of society at the time, the difference between a prince and a shepherd was not so great as it now appears. But still the social difference was great. The heir to the throne of Israel loved the shepherd lad. II. THIS LOVE WAS WONDERFUL IN ITS DEPTH AND INTENSITY. Jonathan "loved him as his own soul" (1 Sam. xviii. 1). The love of Christ is in the same respect wonderful. His love is no feeble flame. "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you." His soul is indeed "knit" to us so closely that "nothing can separate us from the love of Christ." III. THIS LOVE WAS WONDERFUL IN ITS UNSELFISHNESS. Had Jonathan been of less nobler mould, he might have felt envious when David's deed of valour brought him into such notice in the camp. But Jonathan's generous nature knew nothing of such feelings. If they rose for a moment, they were strangled in their birth. Jonathan could expect to reap no advantage from his friendship. So with Christ's love to us. We are eternally enriched by His love gifts, and can make but poor return. We give Him, it is true, our love, our service, our devotion, but what at best are these returns for His great love to us? IV. THIS LOVE WAS WONDERFULLY PRACTICAL. True love ever seeks to utter itself in action, rather than words. It finds in loving deeds its fittest expression. 1. This practicalness was seen in Jonathan taking his own robe and putting it on David, so that he was clothed in princely attire. Has not Christ clothed us with His own raiment? We become beautiful in His comeliness. 2. In the promise he made him (See 1 Sam. xx. 4). Christ has made to us

exceeding great and precious promises, even to a share of His glory, His eternal glory. 4. In pleading with his father on David's behalf. The result of this pleading was David's restoration to favour at court. There is, however, this difference. In this case Jonathan pleads David's merit; but Christ pleads not ours, but His own. 4. Jonathan revealed to David his father's thoughts concerning him. Saul proposed to slay him. Jonathan makes this known (See 1 Sam., xx. 35). Jesus has unbosomed to us the father. He has made known to us His purpose of mercy. Jonathan's was a warning voice, bidding David flee, but Christ's is a voice of love, bidding us to return to the bosom of God. V. THE LOVE OF JONATHAN WAS WONDERFULLY CONSTANT. No change in David's circumstances altered the character of his friendship. When David was an outlaw, when Saul was seeking his life, Jonathan remains true (See 1 Sam. xxiii. 16). Whatever changes human friendship may know, the love of Jesus, like Himself, is the same "yesterday, to-day, and for ever." (*The Study.*) *Wonderful love.*—My text is a fragment of the lament, composed and sung by David, to the memory of the slain. Let us forget the battle scene where poor Jonathan, all still and stark and blood-stained, lies, and let us turn to Calvary, and behold the wounded dying form of God's beloved Son. I. THE LOVE OF CHRIST WAS WONDERFUL WHEN WE CONSIDER THOSE HE LOVED. I. There was nothing lovely in us. It is as natural for anything lovely to draw forth our admiration as for the magnet to attract the iron or the flower to attract the bee. There was great reason why Jonathan should love David. But when we come to consider our Lord's love for us, we have to say—

What was there in me that could merit esteem,
Or give the Creator delight?

It is recorded that a minister once announced his intention of being in the vestry of his Church, for a certain time on a certain day, to meet any one who might have scriptural difficulties, that he might try to solve them. Only one came. "What is your difficulty," said the minister. The man answered, "My difficulty is in the ninth chapter of Romans, where it says, 'Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.'" "Yes," said the minister, "there is great difficulty in that verse; but which part of the verse forms your difficulty?" "The latter part, of course," said the man. "I cannot understand why God should hate Esau." The minister's reply was this: "The verse has often been a difficulty to me, but my difficulty has always been in the first part of the verse: I never could understand how God could love that wily, deceitful, supplanting scoundrel, Jacob." 2. There was nothing loving in us.—We have a familiar saying that "love begets love." And it is very largely true in daily experience. "Why is it that everybody loves you?" said Dr. Doddridge to his little daughter when she was dying. "I do not know, without it is because I love everybody." Many a one who could not aspire to be called beautiful, nevertheless has become greatly loved because of an affectionate, loving disposition they possess. But this is not the key that unlocks the mystery of Christ's love to us. No love of ours drew it forth. If we love Him at all, it is because He first loved us. "Come, bright spirit, I charter you to find for us when first Christ's love began." Away into the past speeds our messenger. He lingers at the cross. "Pause not there," we say, "He loved us before that." He waits a moment at the manger cradle. "We know that His coming was a great sign of love, but it began not then." He flies on to the days of creation, and seeing the loving provision made for us he pauses yet again. Yet His love began not then. On flies the spirit into the dim recesses of eternity, when as yet there was no creation, when God was wrapped about in His own solitude, even there he finds God loved us. The task is given up, for he finds from all eternity God loved His people. We are stricken dumb at the greatness of such love. Its nature is indeed a marvel to us. Nothing lovely and nothing loving in us, and yet He loved us. Again let us give utterance to our text, and say, "Thy love to me is wonderful." II. THE LOVE OF CHRIST IS WONDERFUL IN ITS EXPRESSION. 1. Calvary. The greater expression of the love of Christ is seen in Calvary. A tragedy in the street will always attract a crowd. Business men will spare a moment to make inquiries, frail women will venture in the throng to hear of the deed, and even the infirm and aged cannot be kept away. There was once a tragedy which stopped the flight of angels as well as the flight of

men. A cross is lifted up, bearing its load of shame and pain. Who is He? How came He there? He is the Son of God! Love brought Him there. Thinkest thou it was the nails, the cords, that Roman soldiery kept Him there? It was none of these, it was love! Jesus our love was crucified. Here was love passing what tongue can tell, or mind imagine, or heart conceive. His love to us was wonderful. 2. We still have expressions of His love. It was the misfortune of David that he had to speak in the past tense—"Thy love to me was wonderful." III. THE LOVE OF CHRIST IS WONDERFUL IN ITS POWER. 1. There is its melting power. We feel confident there is more power in love than in fear. Fear is a power, but love is a greater power. Some may have been driven into the kingdom by fear, but more have been wooed into it by love. It is said that when the Moravian missionaries first laboured in Greenland a considerable time passed without any fruit being seen to their labour. They had been earnest, truthful, consecrated, and yet there was no result. Anon they gathered the Greenlanders together and read the story of the Lord's death as recorded by Matthew. The bare recital of the story without any comments upon it had a marked effect upon the Greenlanders. Tears were in many eyes. Some said, "Did He die for me?" Many gave themselves to the Lord, and thus commenced a great revival in those regions. The love of Christ is wonderful when we remember its melting power. 2. Think, too, of its constraining power. It bends the saint to the will of Christ. "The love of Christ constraineth me." The word "constrain" is a strong word, meaning to press, to press painfully. It is used by Paul in the Acts of the Apostles, where it is translated, "being pressed in spirit." That well-known text, "I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" contains this same word, translated "straitened." The love of Christ is a great power. It restrains our life from useless aims, and compresses it into the right channel. There is a beautiful Greek story, which may be mythical in its origin, but bears in it a beautiful moral. It is said a prince, his wife, and two sons were taken prisoners by a neighbouring monarch, and were brought before him. Said the king to the prince, "If I let your elder son go free, what givest thou me?" And the prince made answer, saying, "I will give thee half my possessions." "And if I let your younger son go free what givest thou me?" And the prince answered, "I will give thee the other half of my domains." The monarch spoke again, saying, "If I let the princess go free, what wilt thou give me?" Now the prince had given all away for the redemption of his sons, and knew not what answer to make; but anon he said, "If thou lettest my wife go free, I will give thee myself." So pleased was the monarch that he let them all free. As they went homeward the prince said to his consort, "Didst thou see the beauty of the king's countenance?" "Nay," said the princess. "Didst thou see the glory of his court?" "Nay," again said the princess. "Didst thou see the splendour of his throne?" "Nay," again replied his wife, "for I had only eyes to see him who was willing to give himself for me." Oh, my soul, Jesus was not only willing but did give Himself for thee. Have only eyes for Him. The realisation of His love will be a power in thy life. No command of his will be grievous. His love will prove to be wonderful in its constraining power. 3. Christ's love has also a translating power. There seem to be many persons, even good persons, who all their life are held in bondage by the fear of death. The only reason why this is so is that they must fail to understand the power of the love of Christ. What is death? It is the journey home. "To be with Christ" is how the apostle described the result of death. "Absent from the body, present with the Lord." Now, if you really love a person, and realise deeply the love of that one to you, you long to get to them, and no journey, however inconvenient and distressful, would make you hesitate or shrink. You would be glad to go. Apply this to Christ and death. (W. L. Mackenzie.) *The love of Jonathan, and the love of Jesus*:—I. JONATHAN'S LOVE TO DAVID. 1. Jonathan's was a singular love, because of the pureness of its origin. Jonathan loved David out of great admiration of him. When he saw him come back with the head of Goliath in his hand, he loved him as a soldier loves a soldier, as a brave man loves another brave man. 2. Jonathan's love proved also to be most intense. It is said that "he loved him as his own soul." He would at any moment have sacrificed his life to preserve the life of David; in fact, I do not doubt that Jonathan thought David's life much more valuable than his own, and that he was quite willing to expose himself to peril that David might be preserved.

Jonathan's was a very intense love. 3. Jonathan's love was very disinterested. David had been anointed king by Samuel. The kingdom was to be taken from the house of Saul, and given to the house of David. That friendship, in which a man can set himself on one side for the sake of another, is not yet so common that we can hawk it in the streets. 4. Jonathan's love was a love which bore up under all opposition. 5. And this love was very active, for you know how he pleaded for David with his father. He went out into the field, and took counsel with David. He arranged plans and methods for David's preservation; and, on one occasion, we find that he "went to David in the wood, and strengthened his hand in God." Yes, his love was not a matter of mere talk, it was real, practical, active; it was a love which never failed. II. THE LOVE OF CHRIST TO ME. "Thy love to me was wonderful." 1. I think that we feel this most when we see our Saviour die. Sit down at the foot of the cross, and look up. Behold that sacred brow with the thorny wreath upon it. See those blessed eyes, red with weeping; mark those nailed hands, that once scattered benedictions; gaze on those bleeding feet, which hurried on errands of mercy; watch till you can peer into that gaping side, how deep the gash, how wide the breach, see how the water and the blood come streaming forth! This is the Lord of life and glory, who thus dies amid derision and scorn, suffering the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God. 2. I think, also, that we sometimes feel the greatest love to dear friends when we find others doing them despite. When David found that Jonathan's body had been dishonoured by the Philistines, that they had taken away the bodies of King Saul and his sons to hang them on the wall of Beth-shan, then was he sorely troubled, and his love broke forth again in sighs, and cries, and tears. And I must say to-night that I love my Lord all the more because of the insults others heap upon him. 3. Now let me briefly tell the story of that love. Part of its wonder lies in the object of this love, that it should be bestowed upon me: "Thy love to me." Then throw the emphasis on the first word, "Thy love to me," and you have another part of the wonder, that is, in the Giver of this love. Now begin, if you can, to consider the commencement of this love. When did God begin to love His own elect? There was a time when He began to make the worlds; but from eternity He has loved His chosen. Before the first flash of light illumined the primeval darkness God loved His people. Christ's love, then, is wonderful in its beginning; and when it began to work on me it was still wonderful, for what did I do? I refused it. And when Christ's love led Him to come here, and take our nature, was it not wonderful? He reigned enthroned in heaven; seraphim and cherubim gladly did his bidding. He was God, and yet He came down from yonder royal palace to that stable at Bethlehem, and to the manger where the horned oxen fed. 'Tis He! 'Tis He! But as George Herbert reminds us, He hath unrobed Himself, and hung His azure mantle on the sky, and all his rings upon the stars; and there He lies, a babe in swaddling bands, taking human nature into union with His divinity because He loved us. The brotherly and condescending character of this love. Times have been when we, who love Christ's name, have been in trouble, and He has been very near to us. Times have been when we have been misrepresented, and abused, and He has smiled, oh, so sweetly on us! Times have been when bodily pain has made us very faint, and He has put underneath us the everlasting arms. Think, also, of the comforting and thoughtful provisions of Christ's love. Our lives are not all to our credit; there have been sad moments, when unbelief has crept in on the back of thoughtlessness, and you have been almost a sceptic. There have been evil moments when sin has insinuated itself into the imagination, and you have almost done that which would have been your ruin. Have there not been times in your life when you have been smitten, and if there had not been some One to uphold you, you would have fallen, almost unconsciously fallen, and there have lain down to die? But, oh, how Jesus has watched over you, and cared for you! But the love of Christ to us is most of all wonderful in its plans for the future. (C. H. Spurgeon.) The love of Christ:—I. THE LOVE OF CHRIST TO US IS WONDERFUL, BECAUSE THERE WAS NOTHING IN US LOVELY. In the spangled sky, the rainbow, the woodland hung with diamonds, the sward sown with pearly dew, the rosy dawn, the golden clouds of even, the purple mountains, the hoary rock, the blue boundless main, Nature's simplest flower, or some fair form of laughing child or lovely maiden, we cannot see the beautiful without admiring it. That is one law of our nature. Another is that so far as earthly objects are concerned, and apart from the beauty of holiness, we cannot help loving what is lovely, and

regarding it with affection. Our affections are drawn to an object as naturally as iron is charmed by a loadstone. God made us to love; and when brought near to such an object our feelings entwine themselves around it, as the soft and pliant tendrils of the vine do around the support it clothes with leaves, and hangs with purple clusters. Such analogy is there between the laws of mind and matter! Without detracting from Jonathan's merits, it must be owned that, however wonderful the love was which He bestowed on David, it was not bestowed on an unworthy object. One brave man loves another. In the old days of chivalry, men honoured courage in their enemies; loving and admiring bravery even when it was in arms against them. We turn now from them to Jesus and ourselves; and what do we find in man to win the love of Calvary? It is not enough to say that there was nothing lovely in us; that, as a holy God, God saw nothing in us to love. Sin, that abominable thing which He hates, the seed and germ of all evils, a thing so hateful that it is said, "He cannot look" on it, had so pervaded the nature of every individual man, and the whole race of men, that it necessitated God to abhor His own creatures. Look at a corpse! putrid, bloated, infecting all the air; every feature of humanity shockingly defaced; the bright eye; the damask cheek; the sweet lips; the lovely form changed into vilest loathsomeness; a banquet to worms which, as they creep out and creep in, give a horrible life to death! Were the dearest, fondest object of our affections reduced to a state like that, how would we throw it, shuddering, from our embraces; regard it with the utmost horror; and turning away our eyes, call in pity for a grave to bury our dead. This may teach us how sin makes those whom God once loved with Divine affection abhorrent in His sight. Historians relate how, with all her baseness, her duplicity, her cruelty, her bloody bigotry, the passions and crimes that have left an indelible stain on her memory, Queen Mary had much queenly grace. So perfect was her form, her face so beautiful, her smile so winning, that it was only men cast in the stern mould of Knox that could resist their witchery. And to advert to better attractions than the beauty which is consumed before the moth, I have seen some who, with not a little calculated to repel, possessed in moral and mental excellencies, some loveable, compensating, and redeeming properties. But, in the sight of God's infinite and unspotted holiness, sin left us none. If it be true of all mankind that they are altogether become filthy; true that there is none that doeth good, no, not one; true that "every imagination of man's heart is evil continually;" true that we may all adopt the words of the Apostle, and say, I know that in me, that is in my flesh, there dwelleth no good thing—then sin left us with nothing to engage, but everything to repel, the affections of a holy Saviour.

II. THE LOVE OF CHRIST TO US IS WONDERFUL, BECAUSE THERE WAS NOTHING IN US LOVING. We love what loves us. Such is the law of our nature; and love comes in time to see its own face reflected in the heart of another, as in water at the bottom of a draw-well. We cannot resist loving what loves us; it matters not who or what it is; though but the dog that barks, and bounds, and wheels in joyous circles around us on our return—"the first to welcome and foremost to defend." I would hold his friendship cheap who did not love a dog that loved him; and care little for the child that would not drop some tears on the grave of his humble but faithful playmate—or, to borrow a figure from Bible story, of the "little ewe lamb which the poor man nourished, which ate of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was to him as a little daughter." Let a poor dumb creature love us, we are drawn to love it in return, by a law of nature as irresistible and Divine as that which draws a stone to the ground, or makes the stream flow onward to the sea. Whatever secrets this key unlocks; whatever strange and singular marriages it may explain, it does not open the mysteries of Calvary; it does not explain the love of Christ. I have, indeed, seen some that had abandoned themselves to a life of vice who still respected virtue, and look back with remorseful regret to their days of childhood and the innocence of a father's home. I have seen a profligate son, who, though wringing a pious mother's heart and bringing her grey hairs with sorrow to the grave, yet loved her; mourning his own failings, he returned her affection; yielding to sin, still he clung to his mother as a drowning wretch to a piece of the wreck which he hopes may float him to the shore. Now, if our love of goodness had survived the loss of it; if we had retained any love to God after we had lost his image; if we had cast back some lingering looks on Eden; and, like Absalom, who felt pained at being two whole years in Jerusalem without being admitted into his father's presence, if we had been grieved at God's displeasure, then, with such

goodly vestiges of primeval innocence, Christ's love to us would not have been so wonderful. But there were no such feelings in man to awaken the love of Christ.

III. THIS LOVE IS WONDERFUL IN ITS EXPRESSION. A sight is here that might have stayed an angel's wing; and filled both heaven and earth with wonder. Who is this? Hear, O heavens, and be astonished, O earth! By the cross where He dies, the ear of faith catches the voice of the Eternal: "This is my beloved Son." He there, who is buffeted by cruel hands, and meekly bears the blows; who faints from loss of blood, and sinks beneath his cross; who hangs upon the tree, while the blood streams from his hands and feet; whose dying ear is filled, not with holy prayers and psalms, but with the shouts and mockery of an impious crew; He, hanging mangled and lifeless on the middle cross, with head dropped on his breast, the pallor of death spread over His cheek, the seal of death on His lips, the film of death on His eyes, is the Son of God. The Prince of life has become the prey of death; at once its noblest victim and its almighty conqueror. How did it happen? One word conveys the answer—that word is Love; love to sinners, to the greatest, guiltiest sinners. Love brought him from the skies; love shut Him up in Mary's womb; love shut Him up in Joseph's tomb; love wove the cords that bound His hands; love forged the nails that fastened Him to the tree; love wept in His tears, breathed in His sighs, spake in His groans, flowed in His blood, and died upon His cross. (*T. Guthrie.*)

Jonathan, the model friend:—The most interesting thing in the life of Jonathan is the friendship that existed between him and David. I. JONATHAN WAS THE MODEL OF A LOVING-FRIEND. A friend is good for nothing unless he really loves us. And the better he loves us, the more his friendship is worth. Let us look at some illustrations of what loving friends will be, and do. A boy in a town in Germany was playing one day with his sister, when the cry was heard—"A mad dog! a mad dog!" The boy saw the dog coming directly towards him; but instead of running away, he took off his coat, and wrapping it round his arm, boldly faced the dog, holding out his arm covered with the coat. The dog flew at his arm, worrying over it, and trying to bite through it, till men came up and killed him. "Why didn't you run away from the dog, my little man?" asked one of the men. "I could easily have done that," said the brave boy, "but if I had the dog would have bitten my sister." He was truly a loving friend and brother. There is a well-known story of two men, who lived about four hundred years before the birth of Christ, that comes in very nicely here. Their names were Damon and Pythias. They were educated men, and what were called—philosophers—in those days, and were very warm friends. Some one accused Damon to Dionysius, the king of the country, of doing something that made him very angry. Kings, in those days, had the power of life and death in their own hands. So Dionysius ordered Damon to be put to death. Before this sentence was executed, Damon begged to be allowed to go home and arrange the affairs of his family. The king said he might go, if he could get some one to take his place in prison, and to die for him, if he did not come back by the time fixed for the execution. As soon as his friend Pythias heard of this, he came and offered to take his place. He was put in prison, and Damon went to visit his family. The day fixed for the execution arrived, and Damon had not returned. He had to cross the sea to get back, and the wind had been ahead for several days. A platform had been erected, on which the execution was to take place, and the king sat by, on a sort of throne. Pythias was brought out for execution. He asked permission to say a few words to the crowd of spectators. Permission was granted. "My countrymen," said he, "this is a happy day for me. I am not only willing, but glad to die in the place of my friend Damon. I am thankful that the wind has kept him back. He will be here to-morrow. And it will be found that he has done nothing wrong. He is an honest, upright, honourable man, and I am glad of the opportunity to shed my blood in order to save his life. Executioner, do your duty." Just as he had finished speaking, a voice was heard in the distance crying—"Stop the execution!" The crowd around the scaffold took up the cry, and exclaimed, in a voice of thunder—"Stop the execution!" The execution was stopped. Presently, panting, and out of breath, Damon appeared. He mounted the scaffold. He embraced his friend Pythias; and said how happy he was that a change of wind had allowed him to get there just in time to save his life. "And now," said he, "I am ready to die." "If I may not die for you," said Pythias, "I ask the king to let me die with you; for I have no wish to live any longer in this world, when my friend Damon, whom I have loved so truly, is taken out of it." I have one other story

to illustrate this part of our subject. A teacher in a day-school had to punish one of his scholars for breaking the rule of the school. The punishment was that the offending boy should stand, for a quarter of an hour, in a corner of the school-room. As the guilty boy was going to the appointed place, a little fellow, much younger than he, went up to the teacher, and requested that he might be allowed to take the place of the other boy. The teacher consented. The little boy went, and bore the punishment due to the other boy. When the quarter of an hour was passed, the teacher called the boy to him, and asked if his companion had begged him to take his place. "No, sir," he replied. "Well, don't you think that he deserved to be punished?" "Yes, sir; he had broken the rule of the school, and he deserved to be punished." "Why, then, did you want to bear the punishment in his place?" "Sir, it was because he is my friend, and I love him." II. JONATHAN WAS THE MODEL OF—A GENEROUS—FRIEND. Let us look at some illustrations of this same kind of friendship. In one of the battles in Virginia, during the late war, a Union officer fell, severely wounded, in front of the Confederate breast-works. He lay there crying piteously for water. A noble-hearted Confederate soldier heard his cry, and resolved to relieve him. He filled his canteen with water, and though the bullets were flying across the field, and he could only go at the risk of his life, yet he went. He gave the suffering officer the drink he so greatly needed. This touched his heart so much that he instantly took out his gold watch and offered it to his generous foe. But the noble fellow refused to take it. "Then give me your name and residence," said the officer. "My name," said the soldier, "is James Moore, of Burke County, North Carolina." Then they parted. That soldier was subsequently wounded, and lost a limb. In due time the war was over, and that wounded officer went back to his business as a merchant, in New York. And not long after, that Confederate soldier received a letter from the officer, to whom he had given the "cup of cold water," telling him that he had settled on him \$10,000, to be paid in four annual instalments of \$2,500 each. \$10,000 for a drink of water! That was noble on the part of the Union officer. But to give that drink of water at the risk of his own life was still more noble on the part of that brave soldier. I never think of it without feeling inclined to take off my cap and give a rousing "Hurrah!" for that noble Confederate soldier. Thomas Samson was a miner, and he worked very hard every day for a living. The overseer of the mine said to him one day: "Thomas, I've got an easier berth for you, where there is not so much work to do, and where you can get better wages. Will you accept it?" Most men would have jumped at such an offer, and would have taken it in a moment. But what did this noble fellow do? He said to the overseer: "Captain, there's our poor brother Tregony: he has a sickly body, and is not able to work as hard as I can. I am afraid his work will shorten his life, and then what will his poor family do? Won't you let him have this easier berth? I can go on working as I have done." The overseer was wonderfully pleased with Samson's generous spirit. He sent for Tregony, and gave the easy berth to him. How noble that was! It was indeed the very spirit of Christ. Now, all the four stories we have here show the same generous spirit that Jonathan had in his friendship with David. He was the model of a generous friend. III. JONATHAN WAS THE MODEL OF—A FAITHFUL—FRIEND. (R. Newton, D.D.) *True friendship deathless*:—May heaven give us such generous friendship as this! A star that breaks the darkest clouds of earth and that will shine on us for ever. True friendship is immortal. "The friendship," says Robert Hall, "of high and sanctified spirits loses nothing by death but its alloy; failings disappear, and the virtues of those whose faces we shall behold no more appear greater and more sacred when beheld through the shades of the sepulchre." (*Christian Endeavour Times*.) *A test of friendship*:—Getting along well with another is a small matter. There is no friendship in that. Decent enemies can get on with each other when there is no particular occasion for conflict or variance. But friendship makes both friends gladder, happier, more efficient in very sphere, together than apart. As Thoreau said, "Friends should not only live in harmony, but in melody." (*Great Thoughts*.) *Divine goodness in human friendship*—*Luther and Melancthon*:—With such feelings did Luther and Melancthon meet; and their friendship continued till death. We cannot sufficiently admire the goodness and wisdom of God in bringing together two men so different, and yet so necessary to each other. Melancthon was as remarkable for calmness, prudence, and gentleness, as Luther was for wisdom, impetuosity, and energy. Luther communicated vigour to Melancthon; Melancthon moderated

Luther. They were like positive and negative agents in electricity, by whose reciprocal action an equilibrium is maintained. If Melancthon had not been at Luther's side, the torrent might have overflowed its banks. When Luther was not by, Melancthon faltered and gave way, even where he ought not. Luther did much by power; Melancthon did no less, perhaps by following a slower and gentler method. Both were upright, open-hearted, and generous: both, full of love for the word of eternal life, proclaimed it with a fidelity and devotion which governed their whole lives. (*Merle D'Aubigné.*) *True friendship in union of kindred spirits*:—"And it came to pass that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David." You knit things together that are of the same kind: things that are of the same substance, and fibre, and texture, and strength, and endurance. You knit a thread to a kindred thread. You knit a cord to a kindred cord. You knit a threefold cord to a threefold cord. You knit a chain of iron to a chain of iron; a chain of brass to a chain of brass; a chain of gold to a chain of gold; and a chain of gold of the same size, and strength, and purity, and beauty to a chain of gold of the same size, and strength, and purity, and beauty. Now, Jonathan's soul was a chain of gold of the same size, and strength, and purity, and beauty as David's soul. Jonathan, as being the elder man, had for long been looking and longing for a soul like David's soul to which his own soul might be knit; and before the sun set that day the son of Saul had found in the son of Jesse a soul after his own soul, and he was at rest. Jonathan's soul was that day knit to another soul, if possible, still more tender, and pure, and pious, and noble, and loyal than his own; till Jonathan was the happiest man in all Israel that day. And that pattern of friendship, knit that day between Jonathan and David, has been the ensample and seal of all true friendships among men ever since. It was a sweet fancy of Plato that at the great aboriginal creation of human souls they all came from the hand of the God of power, and wisdom, and love, and holiness twain in one. All human souls came into existence already knit together like the souls of Adam and Eve, like the souls of David and Jonathan, like the souls of Jesus and John, like the souls of Christ and His Church. But Sin, the great sunderer and separator and scatterer of souls, came in and cleft asunder soul-consort from soul-consort till all our souls since the fall start this lonely life alone. And all the longings, and cravings, and yearnings, and hungerings, and thirstings, and faintings, and failings that fill the souls of men and women—it is all in search of that brother-soul, that sister-soul, that spousal-soul that we have all loved long since and lost awhile. And every true friendship, every true courtship, every true espousalship, every true married-life is the Divine recovery and reunion of twin-soul to twin-soul, as all human souls were in the great beginning, and will for ever be in God and in God's house of love and rest and satisfaction. And had Plato read Hebrew—and would God he had!—how he would have hailed Jonathan and David as another example of two long-lost and disconsolate souls finding rest in their primogenial, spousal, re-knit, and never again to be separated soul. (*Alex. Whyte, D.D.*) **Passing the love of women.**—*Passing the love of women*:—There are few things in this sinful earth so thoroughly Godlike, so fragrant of Heaven, as true, unselfish friendship, which hopes all things, believeth all things, beareth all things: and we shall have not read this Scripture in vain if we only learn this one lesson—to try and help each other, to try and stand by each other, shoulder to shoulder, in the great rough battle of life, and to have for our friends a love so pure, so disinterested, so trustful, that like that of Jonathan, it "passeth the love of women." I might recall how for love of her country Joan of Arc armed her tender form and fought before Orleans, how for love of her husband Queen Eleanor sucked the poison from King's Edward's wound, how for love of perishing souls Grace Darling steered her boat through the waves of the wintry sea, and Elizabeth Fry braved the fever-haunted dungeons of Newgate to read Christ's Gospel to the prisoners, and Florence Nightingale fitted like a guardian angel round the beds of the bloody hospitals of Scutari. I might tell you of the deeds of saintly women who worked and suffered for Jesus Christ, and whose names are written in Heaven, of Dorcas who sanctified the needle by her labours, of the pure S. Agnes, of the gentle S. Margaret, of the simple peasant maid of Milan, S. Veronica; but I would lead you to contemplate a purer, better love than any of theirs, a love passing the love of women, the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. It is human nature to love something, the worst of criminals has often shown an affection for some thing or person, one of the most cruel and

blood-thirsty leaders of the old French Revolution loved a dog. A man either loves the creature or the Creator, and whilst I would have you love God's creatures, aye, "the dumb driven cattle," and those creatures which we call in our pride the lower animals, as well as your fellow men and women, I would remind you that your greatest, highest, strongest love shall be for Jesus who loved you and redeemed you from your sins. We should love Him because He first loved us, and his love is shown (1) in the greatness of the undertaking to which it prompted Him, the Salvation of mankind. A greater work this than the creation, for God's pleasure we were created, but by God's pain and grief and suffering we were saved. (2) Next, His love is shown in the humiliation which He suffered. He exchanged a throne in Heaven for a manger in Bethlehem, He gave up the peace of the untroubled courts of Paradise for the heat and clamour of a carpenter's shop. (3) Again, His love is shown in the greatness of the suffering which He endured. The hardest part of trouble is its anticipation, and our Blessed Lord knew from the first what men should do unto Him. (4) But once again, the love of Christ is shown in the greatness of the deliverance which it purchased, and the richness of the inheritance which it procured. (H. J. W. Buxton.) *The love of woman*:—A young man named James Rivers was engaged to be married to a young woman named Ellen Boone. The time for their wedding was not far off when the war broke out. Then the wedding was put off. James went to the war. Battle after battle was fought, and he conducted himself like a brave soldier as he was. He was promoted again and again. His letters home were all full of hope and encouragement. The time passed swiftly on, and everyone was hoping that the sad strife would soon be ended. Then came the greatest struggle of the war. Thousands fell on both sides and sorrow took her seat by many firesides. Ellen Boone received a letter one day written in a strange hand. She hastily tore it open, and read as follows: "Dear Ellen,—These lines are written for me by the ward master of the hospital. In the last battle I lost my arms. They have both been taken off close to the shoulder, and now I am a cripple for life. I send this note to tell you that you mustn't think anything more of marrying me. I can never care for you now, as a husband ought to care for a good wife, as you would be. You are released from all the precious promises you have given me. They say I am doing well. Our regiment was badly cut up. Affectionately yours, James Rivers." No answer was ever written to that letter. James Rivers was alone for a few days in the great hospital, but he was not alone one day longer than it took to make a certain journey. One afternoon there were quiet footsteps on the hospital stairs and a lady was seen walking hastily down the aisle that led to the place where the armless soldier was lying. All the patients in the hospital were astonished when they saw her kneel down at his bedside and put her arms tenderly round his neck. And then she spoke the best words of all her life: "James, don't mind the lost arms too much. You are dearer to me now than when you had them. I will never let you leave me again." (Richard Newton, D.D.)

CHAPTER II.

VERS. 1—32. **And it came to pass after this, that David inquired of the Lord.**—*Strength and weakness*:—David's sense of dependence upon God! 1. His passive patience is exquisitely touching, and presents such a contrast to his recent unsettled haste of spirit. We shall find this quiet restfulness characterising his triumphant hours. Not inertness and supineness—active dependence. Not sloth—that marked his faithless hours—but a calm restfulness, betokening living faith. He makes no effort to secure the throne, and yet every hope concerning it he has ever nourished is moving toward fruition. Had his eye rested upon the human side, he was well able to make the forward movement. By nature a man of quick decision and quicker action, his valiant men would urge him to move towards Jerusalem. Instead of any such movement, he stays "to inquire of the Lord" (chap. ii. 1). 2. Additional emphasis is given to this view of David's state of heart in the tone of his prayer: "Shall I go up into

any of the cities of Judah?" not selecting the city. Being of the tribe of Judah, it rises to his lips to ask if he may be among his own people. Do we not often ask advice, with deepest emphasis when we see not our way? It is strong faith, genuine humility, which submits our choice to Divine over-ruling. 8. How simple the record! "So David went up thither." How much the record covers! Prompt obedience and unfaltering trust. This is the way to move towards the consummation of Divine purposes—to obey Divine commands unhesitatingly. "I made haste, and delayed not to keep Thy commandments" (Ps. cxix. 60). 4. The consequences of sin remain long after the sin itself is forgiven. David's sojourn among the Philistines bore fruit after many days—fruit that was bitter to the taste. For David to ally himself with the Philistines could bring only pain and weakness. To-day the believer marries the worldling, the child of God takes into partnership the child of the world. Ziklag experiences are repeated all too surely around us. Prompted to the deed by personal jealousy or fear of losing his position, Abner sets up as king Ishbosheth, Saul's son (ver. 8). To this the western tribes agree;—their fear lest David's compact with Philistia be yet undissolved largely minister.—(H. E. Stone.)

Vers. 3, 4. And they dwelt in the cities of Hebron, and the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David.—*David's reign at Hebron*:—The death of Saul did not end David's domestic troubles, and did not leave him free, for a considerable number of years, to employ his energies for the good of the whole kingdom. It appears that his chastisement for allying himself with Achish was not yet exhausted. The more remote fruits of that step were now only beginning to emerge, and years elapsed before its evil influence ceased to be felt. The close alliance which had subsisted between him and the great enemy of his country, and author of its disasters, could hardly fail to render him an object of distrust and suspicion to many of his countrymen. All his former achievements against the Philistines—the cruel injustice of Saul which had driven him in despair to Achish—his recent services against the Amalekites—the generous use he had made of the spoil—and the influence of his high personal character, however powerfully they might tell in his immediate neighbourhood, would have but little weight in his favour in the more distant parts of the kingdom. For after a great disaster, the public mind is often exasperated, and ready to lay an enormous amount of blame on any one who can be assailed with any plausibility. Beyond all doubt, David would come in for his full share of such attacks. It was, therefore, in every way the most expedient course for David to establish his quarters immediately in one of the cities of Judah. But in the admirable frame of mind in which he now was, he declined taking this step, indispensable though it seemed, until he had obtained Divine direction regarding it. The form in which he made the inquiry shows how clear the expediency of going up to one of the cities of Judah was to his own mind. The city of Hebron, situated about eighteen miles to the south of Jerusalem, was the place to which he was directed to go. In was a spot abounding in holy and elevating associations. It was among the first, if not the very first haunt of civilised men in the land—so ancient, that it is said to have been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt (Numbers xiii. 22). The Father of the Faithful had often pitched his tent under its spreading oaks, and among its olive groves and vine-clad hills the gentle Isaac had meditated at eventide. There, Abraham had watched the last breath of his beloved Sarah, the companion of his wanderings and the partner of his faith; and there, from the sons of Heth, he had purchased the sepulchre where so much holy and venerable dust was deposited, in the hope of a glorious resurrection. Thither Joseph and his brethren had brought up the body of Jacob, laying it, in fulfilment of his dying command, beside the bones of Leah. It had been a halting-place of the twelve spies, when they went up to search the land; and the cluster of grapes which they carried back was cut from the neighbouring valley, where the finest grapes of the country are still found. The sight of its venerable cave had doubtless elevated the faith and courage of Joshua and Caleb, when the other spies became so faithless and fearful. In the division of the land it had been assigned to Caleb, one of the noblest spirits the nation ever produced; and afterwards it had been made one of the Levitical cities of refuge. No place could have recalled more vividly the lessons of departed worth, and the victories of early faith, or abounded more in memorials of the blessedness of following the Lord.

It was a token of God's kindness to David that He directed him to make Hebron his headquarters. And it was a further token of His goodness, that no sooner had David gone to Hebron, than "the men of Judah came and anointed him king over the house of Judah." (W. G. Blaikie, M.A.) *Fresh anointing*:—Anointed first by Samuel in the secrecy of his father's house, he was now anointed king over his own people; just as the Lord Jesus, of whom he was the great exemplar and type, was anointed first by the banks of the Jordan, and again as the representative of His people, when He ascended for them into the presence of the Father, and was set as King on the holy hill of Zion. We cannot turn from this second anointing without emphasising the obvious lesson that at each great crisis of our life, and especially when standing on the threshold of some new and enlarged sphere of service, we should seek and receive a fresh anointing to fit us to fulfil its fresh demands. There should be successive and repeated anointings in our life-history as our opportunities widen out in ever-increasing circles. (F. B. Meyer, B.A.)

Vers. 5—32. **And David sent messengers unto the men of Jabesh-Gilead.**—*Attempts at conciliation defeated*:—1. The chief anxiety of David, after being anointed king over the house of Judah, would naturally be how to secure the peaceful allegiance of the other tribes. Prompted by the desire to prevent civil war, and also by the amiable feelings of his own heart, he sent a kind and grateful message to the men of Jabesh-Gilead, complimenting them on the respect they had shown for the mutilated remains of Saul and his sons. Every action of David in reference to his great rival evinces the superiority of his spirit to that which has often prevailed in similar circumstances. Within the Scriptures themselves we have instances of the dishonour that was often put on the body of a conquered foe: the cases of Jehoram and Jezebel will readily occur to every one. The shocking fate of Hector's dead body, dragged thrice round the walls of Troy behind the chariot of Achilles, was regarded as only such a calamity as might be looked for amid the changing fortunes of war. Mark Anthony is said to have broken out into laughter at the sight of the hands and head of Cicero, which he had caused to be cut off. It is very true that David was not strong enough at this time to offer any such outrage to his opponents, even if he had been willing; it would have been alike impolitic and cruel; but it is unfair to allege, that motives of policy were the only consideration that influenced him. The spirit of kindly regard, both to the person and the family of his predecessor, evidently breathed out from David's inmost soul, and is not to be denied or disparaged because the course it prompted was likewise the course of sound policy. When we come to examine his proceeding in giving up seven of Saul's sons to the Gibeonites, we shall see that that act was not an exception to his ordinary spirit. 2. The message which David sent to the men of Jabesh-Gilead was not merely fitted to gratify them, but was calculated to give confidence to the old friends and supporters of the former king. It would have been natural enough for them to apprehend—considering the ordinary practice of conquerors and the ordinary fate of the conquered, that when David came to power he would adopt very rigid measures against the comrades of his persecutor. By the message which he sent to them across the country, and across the Jordan, he showed clearly that he was animated by quite an opposite spirit; that instead of trying to punish those who had served with Saul, he was rather disposed to show them favour. Divine grace, acting on his native character, made David thus kind and forgiving, and presented to the world the beautiful spectacle of an eminent religious profession in union with most honourable and magnanimous behaviour. 3. But the spirit in which David acted to the friends of Saul did not receive the fitting return. His peaceable purpose was defeated through Abner, captain of Saul's host, who set up Ishbosheth, one of Saul's sons, as king, in opposition to David. Ishbosheth himself was evidently a mere tool in Abner's hands; he was a man of no spirit or activity; and in setting him up as a claimant for the kingdom, Abner most probably had an eye to his own interest. It is plain that he acted in this matter in the spirit of daring ungodliness; he knew that God had given the kingdom to David, for he afterwards taunted Ishbosheth with the fact (iii. 9); and nothing but personal motives of irresistible strength could have induced him to act in direct opposition to God. Under Saul, he had been chief captain of the host; under David, he could not expect to hold so high a position; and if the secret motive that induced

him to set up Ishbosheth were revealed, it would probably be this—that a better place might be provided for himself—that Abner might be the first subject in the realm. The world's annals, alas! contain but too many instances of such reckless selfishness; wars without number, with their untold masses of victims, have sprung from no higher motive than the ambition of some Diotrefes to have the pre-eminence. What need has every man to guard against this selfish and therefore murderous spirit, and to pray that the animating spring of his conduct may be that love—that Christian charity, which is the queen of all the graces, and the very bond of perfectness! The well-meant and earnest efforts of David to ward off strife were thus frustrated; it was now his bitter lot to see the kingdom torn by that most dreadful of all scourges—civil war. As regarded the immediate occasion of the war, he had a perfectly clear conscience—Abner alone was responsible; but the war itself, to a feeling and patriotic heart like David's, must have occasioned inconceivable anguish. Did it ever occur to him that he was now brought, against his will, into the very position which he had professed to King Achish to be so eager to occupy? Did he ever think that in the providence of God, placed, as he now was, in an attitude of hostility to his own countrymen, he was undergoing chastisement for the words he had then so rashly uttered? From a proposal made by Abner, with a view to simplify the contest (ii. 14), it would appear that that general's conscience was not quite at ease in regard to the dismal slaughter he was on the point of provoking. The proposal seems to have been, that a small and equal number of young men should be chosen on each side, and that the contest should be held as settled in favour of the army whose young men should be victorious. The practice was common enough in ancient times; Roman history furnishes some memorable instances of it—that of Romulus and Aruns, and that of the Horatii and Curiatii; the challenge of Goliath to the host of Israel was another instance of the same practice. The young men were accordingly chosen; but they rushed against each other with such terrible impetuosity, that each of them slew his opponent, and the contest remained undecided as before. There was now nothing for it but a general appeal to arms; and when the shock of battle came at Gibeon, the victory fell to David; Abner and his troops were signally defeated. At the conclusion of the battle, at the sight of the flying foe, David might have said (though the psalm was, probably, not written for this occasion)—“Now know I that the Lord saveth His anointed; He will hear him from His holy heaven, with the saving strength of His right hand. Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God. They are brought down and fallen, but we are risen and stand upright. Save, Lord: let the king hear us when we call (Psalm, xx. 6-9). (W. G. Blaikie, M.A.)

Ver. 8. Ishbosheth.—*Ishbosheth and Abner*:—Saul's son was a poor, weak creature, who would never have thought of resisting David but for the stronger will behind him. To be weak is, in this world full of tempters, to drift into being wicked. We have to learn betimes to say “No,” and to stick to it. Moral weakness attracts tempters as surely as a camel fallen by the caravan track draws vultures from every corner of the sky. The fierce soldier who fought for his own hand while professing to be moved by loyalty to the dead king, may stand as a type of the self-deception with which we gloss over our ugliest selfishness with fine names, and for an instance of the madness which leads men to set themselves against God's plans, and therefore to be dashed in pieces, as some slim barrier reared across the track of a train would be. To “rush against the thick bosses of the Almighty's buckler” does no harm to the buckler, but kills the insane assailant. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Vers. 12, 13. The servants of Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, went out . . . the servants of David went out.—*Taking sides*:—Guizot, in his life of St. Louis of France, says that the latter had many vassals who were also vassals of the King of England, and that many subtle and difficult questions arose as to the extent of the service which they owed to these kings. At length the French King commanded all those nobles who held lands in English territory to appear before him, and then he said to them, “As it is impossible for any man living in my kingdom and having possession in England rightly to serve two masters, you must either attach yourselves altogether to me, or

inseparably to the King of England." After saying this, he gave them a certain day by which to make their choice.

Ver. 23. **Abner with the hinder end of the spear smote him.**—*Death comes unawares*:—Observe here—1. How death often comes upon us by ways that we least suspect. Who would fear the hand of a flying enemy, or the butt end of a spear? yet from these Asahel receives his death wound. 2. See how we are often betrayed by the accomplishments we are proud of. Asahel's swiftness, which he presumed so much upon, did him no kindness, but forwarded his fate; and with it he ran upon his death, instead of running from it. (*M. Henry.*)

Ver. 26. **Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end?**—*Bitterness*:—Abner was the cousin of King Saul, and commander-in-chief of his army. Even after the death of Saul, Abner's ability and skill enabled him to uphold the failing fortunes of the family. While David reigned in Hebron, a son of Saul was the head of ten revolting tribes beyond Jordan. Abner was an eloquent lecturer on prudence, when recklessness had wrought his own ruin. Like many old men who had been dissipated all their lives, when they can no longer be rakes and libertines, they gravely advise young men to be chaste and sober. It would be well if every headstrong Abner would ask himself, in season to repent and amend, "Knowest thou not it will be bitterness in the latter end?" There is a dreadful condition, in the future, towards which every guilty soul is surely and swiftly drifting—a state of bitterness. It may serve a good purpose to inquire, in what this bitterness consists? I. One of the ingredients in the cup of bitterness which the wrong-doer will assuredly drink is THE CONSCIOUSNESS THAT IT WAS HIS OWN DOING. "Thou hast destroyed thyself!" will be the taunting cry of the demon. The easy, good-natured world has a nice way of smoothing over such things, and saying, "He is not very steady, poor fellow; but, then, he does not mean any harm." And the same mistaken spirit of charity adds, "He is nobody's enemy but his own!" The Bible teaches a different lesson: "The enemy of God, by wicked works" (Colossians i. 21). Inwardly and outwardly, the impenitent sinner is hostile to God. II. Another reason why bitterness must be the portion of the transgressor will be, that HE RISKED SO MUCH AND RECEIVED SO LITTLE. The cup of worldly pleasure had a very small flavour of sweetness in it, after all. The most seductive forms of sensual indulgence are always followed by bitterness. Let any one study that terrible picture, sketched from real life, "The Man about Town," in "The Diary of a London Physician," and as he turns with a shudder from the sight, he will discover a new meaning in the prophet's words, "It is an evil thing, and a bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God" (Jeremiah ii. 19). III. Another ingredient of bitterness to the lost will be THE MEMORY OF EVIL-DOINGS. Hell is a place where the condemned will be shut up with themselves. Moreover, there will be a development of character in its inmates—no longer kept under any degree of restraint, by better surroundings—which imagination cannot conceive of. It would be well for them to remember that the devil is daily administering anodynes to keep men stupefied and inactive. Among these narcotics, are—1. The business and distractions of life. 2. Another anodyne which the devil offers to his unsuspecting victim is the cup of worldly pleasure. If one has swallowed an overdose of laudanum, he must be kept moving about briskly, or he will sink down into the sleep of death. So, too, with those stupefied by Satan's arts, we must give them no peace, until they are fully aroused to a sense of their danger. (*J. A. Norton.*) *A sweet beginning but a bitter end*:—These are the words of Abner, a near relation of king Saul, and a distinguished general of his armies. They are addressed to Joab, one of David's nephews and a commander of his army, a man valiant it is true but bounding with ambition and burning with vengeance. A course of wrong conduct ends in bitterness. I. That SIN DOES NOT ANSWER IN THE LONG RUN. A course of sin may and often does answer for a certain time; it may yield profit and pleasure to its author for years. 1. Unrighteous avarice may answer for a certain time. The greedy and over-reaching man of the world may be wondrously successful. He may see his fortune rising higher and glittering brighter as the result of his unscrupulous and unremitting efforts. In all this he may for a time find great pleasure. Success keeps his brain active and his blood warm.

2. Unbridled sensuality may answer for a certain time. A young man gives himself up to the gratification of his animal appetites and lusts. He finds an elysium in purely sensual indulgences. 3. Unscrupulous ambition may answer for a certain time. In all men there is more or less a love of power; in some it is a dominant passion. These men, working out their passion, struggle upward in the social realm; their course yields them pleasure. 4. Social impositions may answer for a certain time. There are men who have a passion for deceiving, they live for imposture, and by imposture. Now, whilst in all these courses of conduct there is a certain kind of pleasure, the pleasure only runs on to a certain period. From an inevitable law in the moral universe, the time comes when the sweet becomes bitter, when all the pleasure becomes poison than rankles in every vein of the soul. We infer—II. **THAT WE DO NOT FINISH WITH LIFE AS WE GO ON.** The brute perhaps finishes his life as he proceeds; his yesterdays affect him only materially. Not so with man. We have not done with any of the conscious periods through which we have passed, not even with the earliest. Our first actions will vibrate on the ear a thousand ages on; the first scenes will unfold themselves to the eye in ages far on in the future. Two laws render this certain:—1. The law of moral causation. Our consciousness is ourselves; and this consciousness is the product of the past. It is to-day the cause of what it will be to-morrow. 2. The law of mental association. There is a faculty within us we call memory, and this memory gathers up the fragments of our past life so that nothing is lost. How often, by the principle of contrast, resemblance, and proximity, are the past actions of our lives called vividly up before us! Memory is the course of the wicked, the paradise of the innocent, and the common resort of all souls. We infer:—III. **THAT A SINNER'S MORAL SENSE IS DESTINED TO A GREAT REVOLUTION.** What was sweet once, becomes bitter in the future. Physically, the man who at one time felt an article of food delicious which afterwards he found to be nauseous, has had, of course, his natural palate greatly altered. Just so in morals: when a man finds that the things which at one time gave him highest delight yield him intense pain, some great change must have taken place in his moral sensibility. Ah, it is so. The time hastens when he will see with different eyes, hear with different ears, feel with different nerves, taste with different palate. The silver which Judas clutches with delight, through a change in his moral sensibility, becomes so red-hot that he throws it away as unbearable. The fact is, that all the pleasures connected with sinful life are dependent upon a torpidity of conscience; let the conscience be aroused to a sense of its guilty condition, and these pleasures vanish, nay, turn into wormwood and gall. (*Homilist.*) *Keeping the end in view*:—Here we have an inquiry which ought to be put under all circumstances that are doubtful, and especially under all circumstances that are marked by selfishness or disregard of the interests of others. The question never is, what is the present feeling, but what will be the ultimate condition. There is night as well as morning, and the darkness must be considered as certainly as the light. What do things grow to? What is the latter end? If a man sow good seed he will reap good fruit. He who sows the wind will reap the whirlwind. 1. This question may be put to every man who is pursuing evil courses:—Say to the indolent, “Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end?”—say to the drunkard the same thing; say to the debauchee, whose whole thought is taken up with the satisfaction of his passions, the same thing; say also to the gambler, the adventurer, to the man who is boasting immediate success founded upon immoral courses, “Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end?” Remind every one that there is a latter end; that there is a war in which there is no discharge; that there is an audit in which we must give up every account, every voucher, and undergo Divine judgment. The whole of our life should be conducted under the consciousness of its latter end. 3. This need not becloud our prospects, depress our spirits, or take the inspiration out of our action: a man may so contemplate his latter end as to know nothing of melancholy; he may rather see in it the beginning of the blessedness that is pure and immortal. We shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be bad. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Progressive character of sin*:—Sin is like the descent of a hill, where every step we take increases the difficulty of our return. Sin is like a river in its course; the longer it runs it wears a deeper channel, and the further from the

fountain, it swells in volume and acquires a greater strength. Sin is like a tree in its progress: the longer it grows, it spreads its roots the wider, grows taller, grows thicker, till the sapling which once an infant's arm could bend, raises its head aloft, defiant of the storm. Sin in its habits becomes stronger every day—the heart grows harder; the conscience grows duller; the distance between God and the soul grows greater; and, like a rock hurled from the mountain top, the farther we descend, we go down and down and down, with greater and greater rapidity. (*T. Guthrie, D.D.*)

Ver. 29. And Abner and his men walked all that night through the plain.—*The cost of success*:—We would remind ourselves of such events in order that we may see what has been accomplished by military discipline, by the subordination of merely personal whims and desires. Even conquerors have no easy time in life. We think of success, of triumph, of coronation, but we forget that before these things, and as necessary to them, there must be discipline, suffering, loss, trial of every kind. We read with glowing hearts the accounts of explorers, discoverers, adventurers, who have gone into regions unknown and undreamed of; and here, again, we forget the night watchings, the night marchings, the continual perils and difficulties of the road. Self-denial is not confined to Christian experience. Whoever would be great in any department or relation of life must know the pain of self-mortification—must, in other words, achieve the mastery over himself—must, so to say, stand upon himself in an attitude of triumph. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 32. They came to Hebron at break of day.—*The break of day*:—Joab and his men walking all night towards Hebron, and reaching it at break of day. See in this a symbol of the pilgrimage of our earthly life, in what must be as darkness compared with the wondrous light to which we press, but reaching rest at last, yet not till the break of that golden day. **I. ARE WE PILGRIMS OF THE LIGHT, OR OF THE NIGHT?** Of both. Of the light as we press to reach it, as even now its beams fall on our pathway here, enlightening much that else might perplex. Yet must that light only make the remaining darkness felt. Is it not of the New Jerusalem that it is written, "There shall be no night there?" Can I say there is no night here—no night of sorrow, no pain, no burden clouding heart and mind? Even when life is brightest with us, the very sense of comfort and joy abides because we know that they have about them a heavenly atmosphere. They are to us God's gifts, and we know that He has in reserve still richer blessings. If we are in sorrow we yearn for God, and in joy we rest still in Him. There is always something before the Christian, a brighter life that is to be. We speak of the night of death. Henry Fawcett used to say that from the great illness which prostrated him for so long, he arose, having learnt, what he had recognised before, that death was not to be feared. Nay, more than this, for we need not speak only of the physical aspects of death: we may learn that in death there is not so much a passing into dark valleys—the valleys of the shadow, at all events, are past when death is reached—as a stepping into wondrous light. Death is an unveiling which lets in light and life to our poor human experience. Let us press on in the pilgrimage, though we walk all the night. There is the appointed path and the allotted time. To few will that time, in God's mercy, seem too long, so full is the night of quiet mercies, so little are we alone. But even if the way seem rough, and the hours dark, the night has its own appointed law and limit. Bear up, press on, and all shall be well. **II. THE PILGRIM SHALL REACH A PLACE OF REST.** "And Joab and his men went all night, and they came to Hebron." Hebron is one of the most ancient cities of the world still standing. It is now a city of some 5,000 inhabitants. It has had many changes in its political history, and has once and again been in ruins. Abraham is called by the Mohammedans Khulil, "the Friend"—i.e., of God; and this, we are told by travellers, is the modern name of Hebron itself. It is "the city of 'the Friend of God.'" Among our quiet resting-places God not seldom brings us to the places from which we can look back, marking the goodness and mercy which have followed us since that long past when near to the same spot we built with them some altar to the Lord. The Lord accepted the offering of ourselves; through the pilgrimage He has been with us. **III. For notice, lastly, THE REST SHALL BE REACHED AT ITS APPOINTED TIME.** "And Joab and his men

went all night, and they came to Hebron at break of day." The eternal morning shall not be missed by any who follow on in the way of the Lord's choosing. Only be brave, be faithful, until the day break, and the shadows flee away. Often the shadows of some trouble or some anxiety pass away even here. New light is on our path; the way of lowly duty is plain. Whenever the day-break is upon us, it is only that we may turn, refreshed by rest, to the duty of the new day. (*J. Gasquiere, B.A.*)

CHAPTER III.

Vers. 1—39. **Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David.**—*Progress and termination of the civil war*:—What grief tales of distress are folded up in these brief words, "There was long war!" Probably it was only irregular war, without much bloodshed; the war of skirmish and surprise, not of pitched battles, or protracted sieges, or desperate assaults: but many a pillaged town, and many a homestead laid in ashes, and many a heart crushed to despair or maddened to fury, and many a deep and deadly curse, and many a fiendish vow of vengeance, would everywhere follow the track of war. And it was war of the most distressing and demoralising kind—not foreign but civil. Great national wars are usually attended by one counteracting benefit—they soften the keenness of private quarrels. But when parties in the same nation are fighting with each other, as the tribes of Israel now were, private quarrels, instead of being healed, are only exasperated to greater bitterness. 1. Before the remarkable change of policy on the part of Abner that led to the termination of the war is recorded, a glimpse is given us of the domestic life of King David (iii. 2-5); and whether it be by design or not, there immediately follows (vers. 6-11) a specimen and illustration of the kind of evils to which that mode of life was liable to give rise. Though polygamy was not allowed to David, it certainly was winked at; it was not imputed to him as guilt; it was not treated as an act of rebellion against God's law. But, on the other hand, this toleration of polygamy did not and could not prevent the evils to which, from its very nature, it gives rise. There could be no unity in David's family, none of that delightful feeling of oneness, which gives such a charm to the home. In his own breast, that sense of delicacy, that feeling of chastity, which has such a purifying influence in a family, could scarcely flourish. And further, as the absence of delicacy must have been characteristic of David, so was it also of his children; the unbridled passions of some of his sons gave rise to the most dismal tragedies; and left blots on their name that even time could never wash out. 2. It is immediately after this glimpse of David's domestic life that we come upon a sample of the kind of evils to which that mode of life commonly gives rise. Saul, too, had his harem; and it seems to have been a rule of succession in the East, that the harem went with the throne; hence to take possession of the one was regarded as setting up a claim to the other. When, therefore, Ishbosheth heard that Abner had taken one of his father's concubines he seems to have regarded that circumstance as a proof that Abner was setting up a claim to the kingdom for himself. Mistaking the semblance of power for the reality—forgetting that Ishbosheth had but the one, and Abner the other, Ishbosheth denounced the conduct of Abner with great bluntness and rudeness; and gave him such mortal offence that Abner abruptly and peremptorily assured him that he would not strike another blow in his service, but would at once go over to David. The loss of Abner was to Ishbosheth the loss of all. His cause had for some time been a losing one; it was now quite destroyed. 3. The next step in the narrative brings us to Abner's proposal to David, to make a league with him for the undisputed possession of the throne. As a preliminary to any further arrangements, David insisted, first of all, that his wife Michal, the daughter of Saul, should be restored to him. Some have pronounced this a harsh condition, especially considering that Michal was now living as the wife of another person, who appears to have been much attached to her, and most unwilling to surrender her. It is undoubted, however, that Michal was

not the wife of Phaltiel, but the wife of David; Phaltiel must have known that she was another man's wife when he received her; and it is misplaced compassion to be sorry for a man when called to surrender what he never had a right to take. It may be asked, however, what could have been David's motive for demanding back Michal, when he had so many wives without her? It might be enough to say in reply that Michal was his wedded wife, and that it would have been disgraceful to David, when he could prevent it, to allow his wife to live in adultery with another. Of all David's wives, Michal, as the daughter of a king like Saul, was the first in worldly rank; David, therefore, wished to recover her; probably also, he thought, that by having her again for his wife there would be a bond of union between the two royal families of the kingdom that might draw the people together, and save the further shedding of blood. Another consideration appears also to have influenced him. In demanding back Michal he makes special mention of the dowry he had given for her—a hundred foreskins of the Philistines. In mentioning this he probably desired to revive among the people the remembrance of his ancient services and exploits against these inveterate enemies of his country and religion. His recent alliance with the Philistines had brought him into suspicion; he wished to remind his people, therefore, of his ancient bearing towards these enemies, and to encourage the expectation of similar deeds of successful warfare. 4. When the preliminaries between Abner and David were settled Abner appears to have exerted himself with real sincerity and zeal in behalf of David. Most probably he was not sorry for the occasion of his breach with Ishbosheth; David's was obviously the rising star; probably he was watching an opportunity to transfer his allegiance from the one to the other. Abner now became as zealous for David as formerly he had been for Ishbosheth; and in holding communication with the elders of Israel and of Benjamin, and urging them very strongly to submit to David, he did him a service which no other living man could then have rendered. The tender heart of the shepherd king was doubtless inexpressibly grieved at the continuance of the war; he would have welcomed with unbounded delight any honourable arrangement that would have prevented further bloodshed; and when Abner was seen using his great influence with the leaders of the tribes in the cause of peace, he must have appeared to David like a very angel of God. When, therefore, at the most critical moment in these negotiations, the impetuous and vindictive Joab thrust his sword through Abner's heart—when, to the revolting ferocity of the deed itself, and its glaring outrage on the laws of hospitality, he added the crime of placing in jeopardy a most delicate national negotiation, and exasperating those whom it was most desired to conciliate, David's mortification must have been unbounded. (W. G. Blaikie, M.A.) *Perpetual war*:—I. **Warring interests.** 1. Saul's interests were natural—they were carnal—they were worldly—they were selfish. David's interests, on the contrary, were of God—they were spiritual—they were under God's sovereign direction—they were Divine. Just such is the distinction between the Church of God and the world. What is the result? Why, just warring, jarring, contending interests; for one is in the interest of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the other in the interest of the devil. Saul's house, the carnal, selfish, worldly multitude are all under the influence of the Prince of Darkness, the prince of the power of the air, who rules in the hearts of the children of disobedience; they are all under the sway of their carnal inclinations and affections, and the men of the world might not to be offended for being told by us what their own consciences must admit to be the fact. On the contrary, the army of David associates with the beloved soldiers of the cross; they are the ransomed of the Lord; they take this blessed book as their guide; the word of command of the Captain of their salvation is imperative, and they call on high for grace, implicitly to regard and obey it. The result is that Satan's interests are bolstered up by the former, and real Christianity is maintained by the latter. 2. Let us now take another view of the difference which subsists between the house of Saul and the house of David—I mean an experimental view. And what will you say when I declare unto you that there are both the house of Saul and the house of David in your own hearts—that there are both the house of Saul and the house of David inhabiting this body of flesh and blood—that there are all the vile corruptions and carnal inclinations of the house of Saul; but, blessed be God, there are also the especial graces, and the spiritual implantations of the house of David—an old and new nature—a propensity to every evil, as was the case with Saul, but a panting after every good, as was the case with David. 3. Observe,

they are so contrary, so opposed to each other, that they are altogether irreconcilable, and it is quite in vain, therefore, to attempt a reconciliation. He that is born after the flesh will persecute him that is born after the Spirit. What fellowship can light have with darkness? What communion can Christ have with Belial? What oneness, or intimacy, can subsist between him who is a believer and him who is an infidel? **II. THE ADVANCING POWER OF THE CONQUERING SIDE.** "David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker." 1. The first feature of David's prosperity lay in this, that his fame and his prowess were advancing and increasing, and his power extending. So with our glorious Lord, David's antitype; His kingdom is growing and extending, prospering and thriving. His name is exalted, and shall be exalted, and all His household. 2. But what constituted David's waxing stronger and stronger in the most conspicuous point of view, was the accessions which were constantly being made to his kingdom, and all of which were so many instances, not merely of the increase of his own strength, but of the diminution of the kingdom and power of Saul. The very way in which our glorious David advances. All the accessions that are made to His kingdom are lawful captives delivered from the terrible power of darkness and translated into His own kingdom. 3. The next point is the warring interests between the two houses that occupy our poor nature. Is it in your power honestly to say that within the circle of your experience the house of David is waxing stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxing weaker and weaker? I want the graces growing in strength. I want to have faith like Abraham's. I want to give glory to God and believe against apparent impossibilities. I want love to be growing like John's, so that no place will do for me but the bosom of Jesus; I want hope to be victorious, strong and firm, entering within the veil, sure and steadfast. I want humility to lay me at the feet of Christ, and keep me there. I want the zeal of the house of my beloved Lord to eat me up, and I want the meekness and patience of my Lord to make me quite immovable to all the provocations of the wicked world through which I am passing. Oh! if the graces of Jesus were thus exercised. If the new man were always thus enthroned. If the new man were always seated uppermost, always thus favoured with supplies of grace from above, how old Adam would groan! How he would be nailed up! How he would be mortified! **II. THE RESULTS OF THE WARFARE.** You know how it resulted with David: it resulted in the entire destruction of the house of Saul, in imperishable honours worn by himself and his household, his throne set above all the kingdoms of the earth, and a glorious lasting peace settled and secured. So shall it be with our glorious Christ and His household. All the honours which the covenant of grace provides, which the promises of the word unfold and exhibit, and which the grace of the Spirit can put on and wear, and which must after all return and redound to Jesus' precious name, are claimed and appropriated by the followers of the Lamb, the household of David. 1. Moreover, there is a peculiar circumstance in relation to this warfare and its results—that is that with all this fighting, and skirmishing, and wounding, never one soul is killed or destroyed. 2. The throne of our David must become noted for its fame, and be exalted above all others. It must be so established as to reign over all dominions, and put down every authority that opposes it, for it is written that He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. Then comes the glorious consummation, eternal peace. (*J. Irons.*) *A long war:*—1. There was war. David ascended the throne of Judah, but not to enjoy peace, as he might have presupposed. The descendants of Saul opposed his election, though ratified by heaven; usurped the throne, and maintained personally, or by their representative and chief agent, Abner, unceasing and bitter opposition to his government. Is it not thus with the Christian, after his decided confirmation in the faith? When we are in Christ, or rather Christ is in us, by virtue of our spiritual elevation, then it is that the enmity between our fallen nature and the true will of God betrays itself in vehement activity. 2. The war was long. With David the literal conflict endured but seven years and six months, till the last opponent of his rightful sway was removed. With every spiritual child of God the war must endure from conversion to death, while one fragment of this infected mortality cleaves to another in animation—so thoroughly, so desperately has the opposition of Satan to God's rule preoccupied and possessed our natural being. 3. Further, it is mentioned that "the house of David waxed stronger and stronger." It must be so with the Christian. The condition of the believer is a

growing one: he is perfectly born in Christ at once, but his powers and faculties are matured in action, and his progress is decided. (*C. M. Fleury, A.M.*)

Ver. 10. To translate the kingdom from the house of Saul.—*The translation of life*:—The kingdom was to pass from the house of Saul to the house of David, and David was to be king "over Israel and over Judah, from Dan even to Beersheba." The thought is that kingdoms of an earthly kind change hands, and therefore they are to be regarded as belonging to things temporary and mutable, and not to things eternal and unchangeable. What hast thou that thou hast not received? By long use men come to entertain the idea of sole proprietorship, and thus the sense of monopoly increases. Our children are not ours, they are God's; our lives are not our own, they belong to the Creator; we have nothing, except in the sense of stewardship and in the sense of involving responsibility for the use we make of it. It is well that men can only reign for a certain time; it would be well if royalty could change its point of origin, so that human vanity might be checked and human ambition might be baffled in many a course. We are not to think of earthly kingdoms alone as meaning political sovereignties; we are to think of personal influence, institutional functions, and all arrangements made to meet the necessity of the present day; all these things must be changed in order to be purified; the direction may be altered in order that attention may be awakened; those who imagine themselves secure for ever must be shaken out of their security, that they may learn that there is no permanence but in God. The Lord reigneth. All men reign under Him, and are subject to His will. They only are happy who use the world as not abusing it, and who hold it with so light a hand that at any moment they can lay it down again. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *God in history*:—Someone has pithily said: "There are three kinds of histories. There is that which makes the king the centre of the story. The tale is mainly one of wars and their causes. It speaks glowingly of the king's victories, and explains away his defeats. It has been dubbed, 'The Drum and Trumpet History.' Then there is that which traces the growth of the people—their morals, customs, politics, and religion. This is the 'Bread and Success' history. But, last of all, there is the history like that of the chosen nation, where the guide and ruler is God. This is true history, for it reckons in the mightiest fact and force of all. It is the 'Sane and Sublime History,' and no other is worth the name."

Ver. 18. Now then do it.—*Now then do it*:—I. REMIND UNDECIDED PERSONS OF FORMER IMPULSES. 1. The character and frequency of those impulses have varied greatly in different individuals. 2. These impulses have been usual in you at certain times, and these find a parallel in the case of Israel. These Israelites, perhaps, in their hearts sought for David to be king when they saw the joy upon the face of David's men. His troopers often had spoil to share, and they always spake well of their captain, and whenever a David's man was seen anywhere about Judah or Israel, the people said, "Those warriors have a goodly heritage in being under such a noble leader," and they wished they had such a king themselves. I do not doubt but sometimes when you hear Christ preached in all His sweetness, your mouths begin to water after him. "Is he so good, is he so pleasant? Oh, that we knew Him!" And when you see Christians so happy, and especially when you see them in times of trouble so cheerful and joyous under all their trials, I know you have had an inward wish that you knew their secret and could share their peace. 3. These seekings after David were sometimes with the Israelites vivid and strong; and so, too, impulses with undecided people are occasionally very powerful. 4. Nothing has come of all the seekings of your youth and your after days. II. RECOMMEND DECIDED ACTION. "Ye sought for David in times past to be king over you, now then do it." 1. Note the business on hand—it is that Jesus should be king over you. 2. Next notice that if Christ is to be your king, it must be by your own act and deed. So saith the text concerning king David "Now then do it." 3. And here is the point, if Jesus is to reign the old king must go down. It is of no use trying to have Ishbosheth and David on the throne at the same time. It is impossible to serve sin and to serve Christ. Dream not of believing to-morrow or next year, nor even in half-an-hour's time; but cast your guilty soul on Christ at once. Now then do it. II. REASON WITH STRONG ARGUMENTS. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) "To-day"—John Ruskin took for his great life-motto the simple word "To-day." He had it engraved on his

watch, and before him in his library, so that he could always see it as he sat at his desk, the text, "Work, while it is yet called to-day." To-day let us repent, believe, love, pray, toil, so that to-day we may bring the kingdom to pass, by doing His will as it is done in heaven. (*H. O. Mackey.*) Now:—Perhaps there is now a "shy, solitary serious thought" in your heart about becoming a Christian. If you let it alone, it may fly away like a bird through a cage-door left open, and may never come back. Or else a crowd of business cares and plans, or perhaps a host of social invitations will flock in, and the good thought be smothered to death. You have smothered just such blessed thoughts before. The thought in your heart is to become a Christian now, and the great bells ring out, "Now is the accepted time: behold, now is the day of salvation." No soul was ever yet saved, and no good deed was ever done to-morrow. Be careful lest to-morrow shall find you beyond the world of probation! (*Theodore L. Cuyler, D.D.*) *The duty lying nearest*:—Soon after the death of Carlyle two friends met. "And so Carlyle is dead," said one. "Yes," said the other, "he is gone; but he did me a very good turn once." "How was that?" asked the first speaker. "Did you ever see him or hear him?" "No," came the answer, "I never saw him nor heard him. But when I was beginning life, almost through my apprenticeship, I lost all interest in everything and everyone. I felt as if I had no duty of importance to discharge; that it did not matter whether I lived or not; that the world would do as well without me as with me. This condition continued more than a year. I should have been glad to die. One gloomy night, feeling that I could stand my darkness no longer, I went into a library, and lifting a book I found lying upon a table, I opened it. It was 'Sartor Resartus,' by Thomas Carlyle. My eye fell upon one sentence, marked in italics, 'Do the duty which lies nearest to thee, which thou knowest to be a duty! The second duty will already have become clearer.' That sentence," continued the speaker, "was a flash of lightning striking into my dark soul. It gave me a new glimpse of human existence. It made a changed man of me. Carlyle, under God, saved me. He put content and purpose and power into my life."

Ver. 33. Died Abner as a fool dieth?—*The fool's death*:—There are two or three different renderings of our text. Some take it thus—"Died Abner as a wicked man?" And then the answer is, "No, he did not. He fell by the foul hand of deliberate and deceitful murder." Others render the text—"Shall Abner die like a fool?" That is, "Shall he be unpitied? Shall his fall be unsung? Shall his murder be unrevenged?" There is a good deal to show for this rendering; because David, directly afterward, pronounces an awful imprecation on the house of Joab. But the third rendering, which we prefer, and which we shall take, is the one which we have here in our text: "Died Abner as a fool dieth?" That is, "Can it be true that such a man as Abner, with all his mental power and all his martial prowess—can it be true that Abner, of all men, died like a fool?" The next verse, you will see, explains the reference. His hands free, his feet unfettered, and yet Abner the warrior falls down before the spear of Joab. "Died Abner as a fool dieth?" I think we may generally take for granted that in young manhood there is always a love of honest dealing. In fact, if any one who calls himself a man objects to plain, straightforward dealing, the sooner he changes his name the better. Surely no young man in his senses here will differ from us in the statement that no matter how successful a man may be in many aspects, yet his life is an utter failure if at the end he dies a fool's death. We recognize the fact that die we must. And I take it that a true young man would far sooner face a fact like this, and would far sooner hear the preacher boldly deal with it, than attempt the foolish task of escaping an unpleasant subject by not referring to it. What was the mark of folly about Abner's death? I. HIS STRANGE SIMPLICITY AND WONDERFUL CREDULITY. I do marvel at Abner—certainly David did—that he, of all men, should have been so easily "gulled," for we know no other word that so exactly conveys the thought of our mind. Abner had been continually by the king's side. He must have known, therefore, that the art of political speaking is to conceal your thoughts, and that nature only gives courtiers' tongues to shroud by language the intentions of the heart. Strange that a man like Abner, who had passed through such a school as two courts, should have so readily believed the message which Joab sent him. Now, is it not marvellous how unsuspecting men are of sin's designs? They are shrewd enough in other things.

I have no doubt that many of you are sharp, keen, acute men of business. Your books will testify that you do not make very many bad debts. You can see through a man as quickly as most; yet how strange it is that often those who are shrewdest in other things are most deluded as to the nature of sin's designs! As Homer describes in his *Odyssey*, there are the sirens on the rocks, who sing so sweetly that, if a Ulysses is to be kept from running his craft right on their rugged brows, the men must lash him to the mast and ply their oars with desperate earnestness, for the music of the sirens makes a deadly calm, and leaves no breath of air to fill the sails and take the vessel from her danger. And so sin seems to sing like an enchantress; and the shrewdest and the cleverest men are irresistibly, almost imperceptibly, drawn toward it; and they who would see through a deception of another sort in a moment seem, like Abner, utterly blinded in this respect. What Satan raves to accomplish is to be revenged on God through God's creatures. Is it likely, then, that such a Joab as this can have any good intent when he says to thee by some sin, "Come, let us talk quietly in the gate?" And yet how willingly a man will turn aside with any sin! "A man is both ruined and saved through faith." I confess that when first I heard that statement I was rather startled. I did not at first see its force, and I said, "Stay! There is a mistake. You mean that a man is saved through faith and is ruined by unbelief." The answer I received was: "That is true; so also is it that a man is either saved or lost by faith. If the faith be in God, through Christ, then that faith saves; but, on the other hand, if it is the faith which a man places in the representations made by Satan and sin, that faith damns him." It was our first parents' faith in the words of the serpent that spread ruin over God's new-made world. And so I doubt not that there are many here concerning whom it may be said, as it was of Abner: "Shall that man die as the fool dieth? So keen in everything else, shall he be credulous enough to be led by so simple a snare as that set by the enemy?" Yet so it is. II. NOW NOTE THE NEXT THING IN HIS FOLLY—HIS UNUSUAL ADVANTAGES. I think David specially thought of these when he burst out into the cry, "Died Abner as a fool dieth?" You glean this from the 34th verse, "Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters." Abner was a prisoner to nobody but himself. No cord bound those mighty arms of his; no iron fetters were upon his feet; and yet he might as well have been born without hands or feet for all the good they were to him. Hands unused, feet unemployed, he stands still like a fool to be killed. Oh! is it not so with many? I ask you, have not your advantages been unused? Let me ask thee, if thou wert to die and be lost wouldst thou not have to acknowledge that, in this respect, thou hast certainly played the fool, for thy hands are not bound nor thy feet in fetters? You are not bound with ignorance. It may be that there are some of you here who know the story of the gospel as well as the preacher. It may be that there are others of you here who could stand on this platform and run through all the main doctrines of the Word. What, and will you, with all this knowledge of the truth, yet die as the fool dieth—with unfettered feet and hands at liberty? I know not your history, but it would be a strange thing if there are not hundreds here who have been armed by holy precept. Your Bible may be at the bottom of your box now, just as it was thrown in three years ago, when you left your home in the country. Not a few of you have been armed by noble examples. Have you not had a holy, noble, heavenly example in her who gave you birth, and who, perhaps, is at this moment before the throne? Then let me ask you, why die as a fool? If your hands be not bound, and you know the difference between right and wrong, if you have been armed by holy precept, and if you have been blessed with a heavenly example, why shall it ever be said of you, "Died Abner as a fool dieth?" As Cæsar Borgia lay dying fast he looked up, and, with clenched hands, muttered through his teeth the words, "I have provided for everything throughout life except death." And, doubtless, there are many here who can take up Cæsar Borgia's words as describing their own mad folly. Then, I ask you, if you die without hope, may it not be said as a requiem over you, "Died Abner as a fool dieth?" III. Now note, next, that HIS VERY POSITION MADE THE FOLLY OF HIS DEATH THE GREATER. Oh, Abner, if you had refused to speak to Joab outside the city gates and insisted on entering them first, even Joab would not have dared to violate the sanctity of that citadel. Thou wouldst have been safe. I may be mistaken, but I think I am not. As far as my own feelings are concerned, the nearer a person is to safety when he dies the sadder is his death. It is sad

enough for the sailor to go down in mid-Atlantic, when there are only the winds to howl his requiem, and when no eye looks down upon his struggles but that of the seagull whirling round and round upon the wings of the hurricane. It is sad enough to sink down with only the shriek of the sea-bird in your ear; but, I think, it is sadder far to go down just outside the harbour's mouth, with a thousand eyes upon you and a thousand hands ready to help if they can. Sad enough for the traveller in the desert, parched with thirst and pinched with hunger, to lay him down in the burning dust to die, with only the vulture hovering over him in air which quivers with intensity of heat. But when we read some time back of one being literally starved to death in the great metropolis, when there were wealth all round, food in abundance and a thousand persons ready to vie with each other as to who should go to his rescue first, it seemed to me the climax of horror to die in the midst of plenty. "Died Abner as a fool dieth"—credulous, with advantages unused, and on the very threshold of safety? God save us from such folly. Shall yonder Abner, who has been the child of prayer for thirty years, die a fool's death? Said a godly mother to a son who used to worship in this place, and is at the present time at the other end of the world, "Ah, my boy, if ever you get into perdition, it will be over ten thousand mother's prayers that she places in front of you as barriers." It may be that there are some here who, though most deeply sunk in sin, yet know full well that there is no night nor morning but the cry goes up to heaven, "Lord, save my boy!" And shall Abner, the child of so many prayers, die the fool's death? (A. G. Brown.)

Ver. 34. Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters.—
*The moral of affliction:—*I. WHAT THERE IS IN THE TEXT EXPRESSIVE OF AFFLICTIVE SCENES. 1. Let us observe, that the text contains the speech, which was made at the grave of a very respectable person. 2. The next thing observable in the text, is the manner of describing a death, that was brought about by the most execrable villany. 3. The text concludes with assuring us, that the concern for such a death, of such a person, was deep and universal. II. WHAT USEFUL LESSONS SUCH A SCENE OF AFFLICTION HATH A MORE PECULIAR TENDENCY TO INCULCATE UPON US. 1. It should more deeply convince us, that sin is the worst and greatest of all evils. 2. This scene of affliction may lead us to reflect on the vanity, which attends human life, even in its most prosperous state. Let us, on this occasion, thankfully acknowledge our obligations to Divine Providence, for the continuance of our lives and comforts. (B. Fawcett, M.A.)

Ver. 36. Whatsoever the king did pleased all the people.—"*The king can do no wrong*":—I. First, then, wherever it is the case that whatsoever the king doeth pleases all the people, THIS IS THE OUTFLOW OF LOVE; and as it is the case with our King, that whatsoever He does pleases all His people, we can truly say that this is the outflow of our love to Him. 1. True love banishes suspicion. No dark suspicions come across the soul that is once enamoured of the Lord Jesus Christ. 2. It also inspires implicit confidence. We are willing to let His will be like the apocalyptic book, sealed with seven seals if necessary, and we unhesitatingly say, "Let His will be done." 3. Love also suggests unquestioning reverence. 4. It creates sympathetic feeling. When our nature gets to be like His nature—oh, what a blessed consummation that is!—when our wishes and His wishes travel the same road, though not with equal footsteps; when that which He aims at is that which we aim at after our poor fashion; when we can say that it is more delight to us that He should be delighted than that we should be delighted ourselves, and that it is a greater honour to us to see Him honoured than it would be to be honoured ourselves; when we sink ourselves in Him, even as two divided streams at last dissolve into one—as I have seen a tiny silver brook come down to Father Thames, and pour its whole self into him, so as to be no longer anything but part of the great river—so, when our soul yields itself up in perfect love to Christ, to think His thoughts, and live and move in Him so that it is no longer we who live but Christ Who liveth in us; oh, then it is that whatsoever the King doeth pleaseth all His people! When the believer comes to be what He should be in the fulness of his love, his will is lost in the will of Christ, his very life is hidden away with Christ in God, and then he realises how true it is that whatsoever the King doeth pleaseth all His people. II. The love that manifests itself thus IS THE CONSEQUENCE OF KNOWLEDGE. Human love is

blind; but the love which is wrought in us by the Spirit of God is as full of eyes as are the great wheels of Divine Providence. There is the best of reasons why everything that Jesus does should please all His people, because everything He does is right, and we shall feel this in proportion as we combine knowledge with love, or our love is based on knowledge. 1. We know the character of Christ. 2. We know something of His designs, and we know that He designs the glory of the Father through the salvation of those the Father gave him. 3. We know something of His modes of operation. We have learned that it is His habit often to disguise Himself; His way is in the sea, and His path in the great waters, and His footsteps are not known except to those who are familiar with Him. 4. We know something of our Lord's rights, and therefore we can never venture to interfere with His actions. III. **THIS IS THE SECRET OF REST:** "Whatsoever the king did pleased all the people." To know that the King has done it, and to see His Divine hand in anything, is more than half the battle which ends in sweet content. When you have seen God's hand, then say, "I would not have it otherwise than it is." I know several persons who are always in trouble and unhappy because there is a dispute between them and God. I remember one to whom I solemnly spoke, years ago, and not long after he passed away. I went to see his dying child, the only one he had left, and he said to me, "Do not talk to my daughter about death, do not mention it to her." "Well, then," I said, "if I may not mention death, I will not go upstairs." The father said to me, "God could not take that child away." He had lost several before, and he said that, if his daughter died, he should call God a tyrant, and I know not what. At last I stood before him, and I said, "You are making for yourself a rod that is much heavier than God Himself lays upon you. I fear that you will yourself die if you act in this way." As he could not be brought to reason, and kicked and rebelled against God's dealings with him, I was not surprised to learn that, soon after his child died, he himself also died. It does not do to quarrel with God; let the potsherd of the earth strive with other potsherd if they will, but woe to him who contendeth with his Maker! Instead of that, bow before him, not only because you must, but because you delight to acknowledge him as your Lord. IV. **LASTLY, THIS WILL BE A LESSON IN Obedience.** 1. Whatever service the King requires of you will please you. 2. Oftentimes, we are permitted to work hard, and yet to meet with great discouragement. It was a pretty remark I read, the other day, of a Christian man who said, "I used to have many disappointments, until I changed one letter of the word, and chopped it into two, so that instead of 'disappointments,' I read it 'His appointments.'" That was a wonderful change, for "disappointments" break your heart, but "His appointments" you accept right cheerily. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 38. Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?—*A great man:*—As we review the history of the world, we see it dividing itself into three stages. In the first stage, power is magnified, force is deified, the great man is represented as a sort of Hercules, with his lion skin and club, in a world of insects. In that era Nimrod is the hero of the world's heart. Then strength received the homage of men. In the second stage, power is pushed back a step or two, and intellect comes to the front. The great man is the intellectual man, the man of letters, the man who swayed his sceptre over the dominion of thought. In that era Homer is the favoured idol before whom the populace delights to bow. Then genius received the homage of men. But Christianity inaugurated a new era. It pointed the world not to a Nimrod or a Homer, but to a "Child"; not to power or genius, but to goodness. The great man of the future will be a good man. The day is fast coming when a good man like William Guthrie or Norman Macleod shall be more honoured and esteemed than the hero of a hundred battles, or the mightiest unsanctified genius that has flashed its lurid light across the centuries. There is an old proverb which says: "Some men are born great, some men achieve greatness, but others have greatness thrust upon them." Sir Titus Salt, of Saltaire, and Crow Nest, near Halifax, was one of those who achieved greatness. He was not born great, nor had he greatness thrust upon him, but he achieved it. A man of iron will, he made everything with which he had to do bend to it. 1 True goodness alone is true greatness. Greatness no longer depends upon rentals—the world is too rich. Greatness no longer depends upon pedigree—the world is too knowing. Nothing is great now but the personal.

“Howe'er it be, it seems to me
 'Tis only noble to be good;
 Kind hearts are more than coronets,
 And simple faith than Norman blood.”

No amount of material wealth, no portion of worldly grandeur, no height of intellectual superiority can invest the soul of a bad man with one spark of true dignity and glory. Miss salvation, and I care not what you are—I care not what wealth you have—I care not whom you call father;—miss salvation, and you are in a wretchedly low estate. But be saved—be born again—have faith in God—love to Christ, and you are at once elevated. You are rich, noble, high-born, because God-born. You have a patent of nobility from the skies. You belong to the moral aristocracy of the universe. You are a member of God's House of Lords. (*W. Francis.*) *Greatness*:—When I speak of greatness I do not refer to the greatness which depends upon worldly fortune or favour—the dignities and distinctions which are the product of a royal smile—the mere accidentals of rank and riches—the greatness that glitters in the gay saloon, and is encompassed by the flatteries of courteous and captivated satellites. I refer to the greatness which consists in the possession of a grand, cultivated, disciplined intellect—in the resolution to do, and doing, what other men have shunned. Cousin makes a distinction between the man and the great man. He says—“There are two parts in a great man—the part of the great man and the part of the man; the first belongs to history, the second should be abandoned to memoirs and biography. History should be a classic drama—it should bring together all the details and individual traits into a unity; it should place in clear light the idea which a great man represents. The philosophy of history does not know individuals; it omits, it ignores the purely individual and biographical side of man, for this very simple reason—that this is not what humanity has seen in him; that it has not adored him nor followed him on account of this, but notwithstanding this. The fundamental rule of the philosophy of history in regard to great men is to do as humanity does, to judge them by what they have done—by what they have wished to do; to neglect the description of weaknesses inherent in their individuality, and which have perished with it, and to fasten itself upon the great things which they have done, which have served humanity, and which still endure in the memory of men; in short, to search out and establish what constitutes them historical personages, what has given them power and glory—namely, the idea which they represent, and their intimate relation with the spirit of their times and of their nation.” I. *ACHIEVE GREATNESS*. It is possible for you each to attain a position of usefulness and honour, such as at present you do not dream of reaching. Do not suppose that all the great and good men have sprung from the ranks of the leisured aristocracy. As a rule the foremost men in all branches have risen from the industrial classes. Esop was a slave. Homer a beggar. Demosthenes was the son of a cutler. Virgil was the son of a baker. Socrates was a statuary. Raffaele was the son of a peasant. Luther the son of a miner. The Scotch poet, Ferguson, the son of a humble labourer. Burns was a farm rustic. Ben Jonson was a bricklayer. Blackstone was the son of a draper. Butler was the son of a farmer. Stephenson was a collier. Faraday a bookbinder. Arkwright a barber. Davy a druggist. Milton a schoolmaster. Caxton, Willis, Horace Greely, Dickens, Douglas Jerrold and Benjamin Franklin were all printers. Morrison, the great Chinese scholar and missionary, was a bootmaker. Carlyle was the son of a stonemason. Benjamin Disraeli, who became a peer of the realm, and made his Queen an Empress, was a solicitor's clerk. Such lives remind you that energy, perseverance, and integrity in the use of your God-given abilities may place you in the foremost rank of those who are benefactors of your race. Up! up! select the calling which is congenial to your taste, which is honourable before men, and approved of God, and then be resolute, undaunted, persevering! If now and again defeated, remember that, though cast down, you are not utterly destroyed. There is, however, a nobler greatness yet—a greatness of the soul—a greatness that springs from relationship to and frequent communion with the King of kings; a greatness which is displayed in growing conformity to the likeness of Christ and increasing usefulness in His vineyard; a greatness much more to be desired than a mighty intellect, social grandeur, or worldly fame. II. *RETAIN GREATNESS*. It is often easier to rise than to keep the place procured. Many a time an army

has stormed and carried a citadel which it was powerless to hold. So not infrequently men have stepped up to vantage ground from which by some lamentable moral declination, or culpable negligence, they have most ingloriously slipped. We have read of many men who have risen to a position of honour and influence, from which sunny altitude they have fallen for ever, like a bright exhalation in the evening." You think of Saul the son of Kish, chosen of God, anointed by Samuel, and made the first king of Israel; and you remember how he disobeyed the Lord, was defeated in battle, craved death at the hand of a fellow-man, and then, by his own deed, terminated his career. You think of Wolsey, the son of a butcher, rising to be Cardinal and Lord-Chancellor, then stripped of his dignities and arrested for treason. Hear his words, as our great dramatic poet has given them:—

"Farewell, a long farewell to all my greatness!

I have ventured

Like little wanton boys that swim on bladders

This many summers, in a sea of glory;

But far beyond my depth, my high-blown pride

At length broke under me, and now has left me,

Weary and old with service, to the mercy

Of a rude stream, that must for ever hide me."

Look at Thomas Cromwell, the son of a blacksmith at Putney, rising to be Earl of Essex and Lord High Chamberlain, yet arrested for treason, committed to the Tower for seven weeks, and then conducted to the scaffold and beheaded. Look at Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, becoming the special favourite of Queen Elizabeth, falling into disgrace and imprudence which led to his being arraigned for trial at Westminster, conveyed to the Tower, and a week afterwards beheaded. In each of these cases we may use the text, and say, "A great man has fallen." But theirs was a fall into shame, loss, sorrow, and irretrievable ruin. Theirs was a moral fall, a fall in social esteem, a fall in national honour. If we have realised any of our fond hopes, achieved any of our cherished plans, let us not be unduly elated or incautious. Let not the man who girdeth himself with the robes of official dignity boast himself as he who putteth them off. There is a legitimate fear that all who have risen, or are rising, will do well to foster. There is a holy fear of falling which the noblest, the purest, and the most perfect cannot afford to disdain. It is that which is recommended by the inspired writers in the words, "Happy is the man that feareth always, but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief." "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." Happy is the man who perseveres to the end, and is faithful unto death. III. THE GREAT DIE. (*J. H. Hitchens, D.D.*) *The warrior's grave*:—I. Our first lesson has reference to the dealings of God's Providence, and is one of encouragement. We are not sufficiently accustomed to recognize the hand of Providence in the ordinary arrangements of Society, and are too prone to think and act as though we regarded the affairs of nations as lying, if not beyond the range of Divine power, at least beyond the pale of Divine sympathy and interest. Yet to an observant and pious mind, there can be few studies more interesting than to trace the indications of the presence of God amid all the affairs of men, and to educe that testimony which all history bears to his goodness, his wisdom, and his power. How manifest does this appear in the history of the Jewish people. God designed them to occupy a special position and to do an important work, and all his dispensations towards them were designed to discipline and prepare them for that work. And it is scarcely too much to infer from the eminence to which our country has been raised, and the influence which she wields, that there is a special mission entrusted to her—that it is from her, directly or indirectly, that the instrumentality is to go forth by which the universal conquests of the cross are to be achieved, and that all God's dispensations towards her have been designed to fit her for this glorious enterprise. Again and again has God raised up the men suited for the peculiar crisis through which she has been called to pass—an Alfred, a Cromwell, a William of Orange, and a Wellington—men, each of whom was fitted for his times and for his work. But we have partially profited by the lesson thus conveyed, if our only sentiment be one of gratitude for the past. All the experience of Divine goodness in the past

is calculated to awaken our hope and give us strong confidence for the future. Surely we are warranted, nay, we are bound to trust in Him who has thus abundantly blessed us in past times, and to cherish the assurance that, as in the past, so in the future He will raise men eminently qualified for any periods of peculiar peril and difficulty which may await the church and the world. It teaches us that this world is not abandoned to the sport of conflicting elements and agencies, to be the mere plaything of chance, or the creature of a blind and irresistible destiny, but that there is a God who watches over its course, controls all the influences by which it is affected, draws good out of that which might seem to be only evil, overrules the counsels of its potentates and princes, and makes everything tend to the furtherance of His own glory and the promotion of human happiness. 2. Our second lesson is one of anticipation and hope. There is no brighter feature in the prophetic predictions relative to the coming Millennium of Messiah's reign, than that in which it is represented as a period of universal peace. But how is this great change to be effected? Rationalism will not do it. Philanthropy will not do it. Art cannot do it. Commerce will not do it. But the great work to which none of these influences is equal, the Gospel of Christ will accomplish. That Gospel is destined to achieve universal power, and one glorious result of its victory will be to bind men of all countries, climes and colours, in one holy chain of friendship and love, which nothing shall be able to disturb or dissolve. 3. Our third lesson is one of example. There are three great qualities which the Christian soldier should aim to copy. 1. And first, vigilance. Thou art in the presence of a foe who is ever wakeful and ever active—who will not fail to improve every opportunity which thy negligence, ignorance, or slumber may present, to secure the victory and accomplish thy destruction—who never sounds a trumpet of truce, but to deceive the unwary soul, and to lure it on to its eternal ruin. 2. A second conspicuous and notable quality is determination to conquer. In the carnal warfare, every precaution may prove unavailing, every effort useless—the resources of genius and the daring of valour may be called into requisition in vain, and after man has done all, he may find that the race is not always to the swift nor the battle to the strong. But it cannot be so in the spiritual struggles. Here victory is promised to thee by One whose word cannot be false, and whose power cannot prove insufficient to accomplish the great designs of His love. Thine, then, must be the holy resolve to conquer in this war—thy course must be ever onward—upward—heavenward—continually winning fresh laurels and rearing new trophies—overcoming every varied form of temptation and sin, until the last enemy be vanquished, and the weapons of warfare exchanged for the meeds of victory. 3. Unbending loyalty. Christian! let this loyalty be thine. Be thou true and faithful and devoted to that God to whose service thou hast consecrated thyself. 4. Our last lesson is one of warning as to the vanity of human glory. "Vanity of vanities—all is vanity." And so must it be with you. Whatever your course, in its extent or in its character—be it long protracted, or speedily closed—be it brightened with continual joys, or darkened with successive griefs—the end of all must be in death. This sentence is universal—from this issue there is no escape—and you, who are striving most earnestly after the things of the present world, must know that you cannot retain them, for the day comes when you must die. (*J. G. Rogers, B.A.*) *Grief at the loss of a great statesman*:—When Mirabeau, the great French statesman, died the Assembly voted that he should be buried in the Pantheon. On the day of his funeral an immense multitude gathered together. The streets were filled by a huge procession, which followed his remains to the grave. A lady, who was greatly annoyed by the dust, complained of the municipality for neglecting to water the boulevards. "Madam," said a poor fishwoman who was standing beside her, "they reckoned on our tears!" It was a wonderful token of the affection in which this strange and violent man was held. (*H. Aspden.*) *The death of a great man*:—Canning exclaimed, after the death of Edmund Burke: "There is but one event, but it is the event of the world—Burke is dead."

Ver. 39. I am this day weak, though anointed king.—*Balancings in life*:—David utters the words which hint at something concerning the balancings in life. **I. SOME DISAPPOINTMENT IS SURE TO FOLLOW UPON THE ATTAINMENT OF OUR HOPES AND TO INTERMINGLE WITH OUR JOYS.** Men struggle for riches all life long, and when they have gained them, oft have no power of enjoyment left. The argosy of food is just coming into port, but somehow is caught by the tide, driven

behind the pier, and wrecked on the rugged rocks outside. The topmost step of the throne is reached, the sceptre grasped, the crown placed on the head, when the thorn is felt pressing into the tender brow and the psalm of joy is toned by the minor note of sorrow. This is not the invariable experience, but general. One might say that the exceptions establish the rule. II. **THESE BALANCINGS IN LIFE ARE INTENDED BY THE AUTHOR OF ALL LIFE.** God has not promised that ease shall always follow on effort, nor full peace come immediately a victory is won. It is of the Divine appointment that those who have wealth, powers, or high position shall often have also strong jealousies, bitter annoyances, severe domestic troubles, great losses, unfulfilled expectations, and harsh regrets over unrealized ideas. That man of genteel manners and calm exterior has a very Vesuvius in his breast. You see not the throes that disturb his soul. So poverty and weakness, sickness and solitude, as well as strength and riches, have their balancings. Power can grow out of privation, and strength out of suffering, while *ennui* may be the offspring of pleasurable ease and satiety of constant satisfaction. All happiness has its alloy and all sorrow its surcease. This is by Divine arrangement. These thoughts should teach us—1. To find all our joy and strength in God. 2. To be thankful for any balancings that may develop being and life. 3. To see to it that we so live that no painful counterbalancing may follow upon this life in the future; to be careful lest the very greatness of the glory and richness of the reward should only make us feel how meagre was our earth-life and unpardonable our spiritual coldness. 4. That we should never let despondency seize us, remembering these balancings in life. 5. Many are weak and know it not. They are anointed heirs of God, kings and priests, but through sin they are weak every day. David knew what he had lost when Abner was taken; but many so live that they ignore the loss they suffer by their wilful ignorance of Christ, through whom alone any can be really strong and kingly in spirit. (*Frederick Hastings.*) *Man's weakness and God's anointing*:—I. **WE MAY BE ANOINTED, AND YET WEAK.** Every believer is an anointed king. He was really anointed in the covenant of election before the world was. When Jesus Christ was set up from everlasting, His people were really set up in Him. Every child of God also was actually anointed when Jesus Christ ascended up on high, and led captivity captive and received gifts for men. But in our souls, our anointing time comes in that hour when, being called by grace and washed from sin, we begin to reign over sin, self, the world, death, and hell, by virtue of our union with Christ. Every believer is a king to-day. And yet it is quite possible that he may be groaning out, "I am weak;" for weakness and Divine Anointing may stand together. God's children are often very weak in faith: they stagger at the promise through unbelief. It is not always in their power to "set to their seal that God is true." Christians have ebbs of faith as well as floods; they have winters as well as summers; they have times of drought, and years of famine. The weakness of a Christian's faith may also affect all his other graces. It must do so; for when faith is strong, every other grace is strong; when that is weak, all things else decline. It may be to-day that your hope has become very dim; you are in bondage through fear of death, and see not the mansions in the skies. You have forgotten that you are in Christ, and now you no more look for His appearing. Your hope declines, and all your comfort dies. 1. Let me remark that David at this special time felt his weakness, more particularly because he was in a new position. He has come into a new place—nations are at his feet—men bow before him; it is a new position, and he says, "I am this day weak, though anointed king." Whenever you make a change in life; whenever God calls you to another set of duties, you will surely find out what perhaps you do not now believe—that you are weak, though anointed king. 2. Here, too, David had come into new temptation. The arrows had been shot at him before, from one direction alone, now the storm caes on one side, and begins on the other. If men knew that the storm would always come to one side of the house they would repair and strengthen it, and then they would not fear the blast; but if on a sudden it whirled round and took the other corner, how would they be prepared for that? Where there is the honey of royalty, there will surely be the wasps of temptations. High places and God's praise do seldom well agree; a full cup is not easily carried without spilling, and he that stands on a pinnacle needs a clear head and much grace. 3. And then further, David had now come into new duties. It was his duty to have taken Joab and have made him suffer the full penalty of the law for having killed Abner. A king must defend the oppressed and avenge the murdered, but David fails to

perform the new duty, for he feels that he is too weak. II. IT WAS BUT LITTLE WONDERFUL THAT DAVID'S KINGDOM WAS WEAK, FOR IT WAS BUT NEWLY GAINED; and it is but little marvel if we also are very weak in the beginning of our spiritual life. When a king has had time to set himself down upon his throne, and to sweep away before him this party and that, either by politics or by the power of the sword, and so to put down every rival, then his throne becomes confirmed. Young Christian, it is no wonder that you are weak, when the good work has only lately begun with you. See the lambs in the fold: it is well that they have been shorn in good weather, for what would become of the shorn lamb in the untempered wind? Shall we suppose that the young sapling shall stand as firmly as the oak with its gnarled roots and its hoary branches, which have been twisted together by many a storm? What! Shall a babe fight a battle? Shall a new-born infant go forth to war? Do you wonder because the new creature is weak? Wonder rather at its power than at its weakness. III. DAVID WAS WEAK ONLY IN THE FLESH, and that the Christian truly is only weak there. Why was David weak? "Because," said he, "the sons of Zeruiah are too hard for me. I cannot subdue them; I cannot keep them under; I cannot manage any kingdom whilst such turbulent spirits as these interfere and intermeddle with everything." IV. IT IS WHERE THE FLESH IS STRONG THAT WE ARE WEAK. Why was not David strong? Why, because of the sons of Zeruiah, yet these sons of Zeruiah were his greatest strength. What could be have done without Joab and Abishai—Joab the man who smote the garrison of Jebus, and Abishai who slew three hundred men in single-handed fight. What could he do without these? These were David's mighty men, those who always led the van, and with a tremendous shout dashed among the Philistines, and scattered the uncircumcised. So it is with us. Whatever is our strength in the flesh is sure to be our weakness in the spirit. Remember that your sons of Zeruiah will be hard to manage. I believe the strength of God's ministers generally lies in the points where they are the weakest, and their weakness usually lies in their strength. That is to say, natural strength will be toned down by a spiritual weakness, and a natural weakness will be exalted and be made the vehicle and channel for spiritual strength. It has often been so. The very physical appearance of Paul, his personal presence which was said to be weak and contemptible, becomes to him the subject of glorying. He glories in his infirmity, for it is the means of giving honour to God. "This is strange logic," says one. It is; God's logic is strange. Gideon fears the Midianites because of the slender number of his soldiers, but the Lord says, "the people are yet too many for me." The king of Judah on another occasion hires for himself with so many hundred thousand talents a number of mercenary troops from the king of Israel. "Now," says he, "I shall win the battle"; but before the battle begins the prophet bids him send these men back. God can do better without means than he can with means that are audacious enough to think themselves necessary. The Lord will always throw the sword away from his hand when that sword begins to boast itself. Assyria is his axe to cut down the cedars, but if you set down any good thing you have ever done to yourself, God will bring you down. V. OUR WEAKNESS SHALL NOT PREVENT OUR REIGNING BY-AND-BY. David's kingdom did not shake, even when his heart failed him; and it would have stood just as fast if he had knocked away Joab and Abishai, who seemed to be the props that supported it. It was David's business to believe that come what may God's purpose must stand, and God will do all His pleasure. It is just the same with you, Christian, to-day. However weak you may be, and whatever means may have failed you, remember God hath said it—you shall be saved; He has promised that you shall be glorified with Christ; and so you must be, come fair, come foul. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Strong yet weak*:—I. MUCH OF OUR WEAKNESS ARISES FROM WANT OF FAITH IN THE LOVINGKINDNESS OF GOD. Now, many of us think that unless we have money and health and friends, God does not trouble about us. And this want of faith in His love and care makes us weak in every step of life. Instead of being cheerful, we are full of anxiety, and instead of being joyous as a lark we mope like a chained dog that has no dinner. 1. Let us have sincere faith in God. 2. Hold on to faith in another world. Let no man wrest that faith from you. 3. Hold on to this faith, and it will make you strong to bear burdens, to resist temptations, to endure sufferings, and to die in peace. II. Another thing that weakens us is WHEN WE PERMIT OURSELVES TO BE SOURED IN TEMPER BECAUSE OF DEFEAT OR OPPOSITION IN LIFE. We ought to feel ashamed of ourselves when we complain of our surroundings. Be cheerful in heart, trusting God. Don't be

goured by the so-called "evils" of life; but sing joyfully as you go along.

III. Another cause of our weakness is that WHILE SOME OF US PUT OFF THE DEVIL'S REGIMENTALS, WE OMIT TO PUT ON CHRISTIAN ARMOUR. The Lord Jesus tells of a man who cleansed his house. He turned out the big devils and made his house beautiful. After awhile, one of the devils returned, and seeing the house garished but empty—not filled with angels in place of the devils—he entered and brought with him ten other devils worse than himself. It is so, alas! with many professors. They turn out the big, ugly devils, but they forget to take in the angels. If your heart be empty of a great and powerful love for God and mankind, sin will enter in, and show itself very soon in your life. (IV. Birch.)

Folly of being powerless:—If an electric car stands motionless on the tracks, it is nothing against the power of electricity. If an invalid has no appetite, and cannot go out of doors at night, it is no argument against things good to eat and the joy of starlit air. If a man does not know a flower by name, nor a poem by heart, it is no indictment of the beauty of a rose or the charm of some poem. If we bear the name of Christ, but give no other sign of Him, if we go through the forms of godliness but live powerless lives, it is a thousand reproaches to us. To be powerless when Christ has all power, and we can have all we want, is an arraignment to which we can make no answer that is not self-incriminating. (Christian Weekly.)

The limits of human supremacy:—To his confidential servants David speaks his whole mind freely. He feels that some apology is needed for leaving the authors of this heinous crime unpunished. As an excuse for doing so he pleads his youth and weakness. Though he had been anointed king, his kingdom was as yet far from being securely established. He could not dispense with his warlike nephews' help. He dared not order the execution of his best general. Probably the army would have interfered to prevent it. But he protests against their hardness and cruelty, and declares that Joab will not escape the Divine judgment for his crime. "It was one of those movements in which a king, even with the best intentions, must feel to his own heavy cost the weakness of everything human and the limits of human supremacy." Ewald's Hist. of Israel. (A. F. Kirkpatrick, M.A.)

The assassin spared:—"It is worse than a crime," says an astute politician, "it is a blunder." And though it was a clear enough crime in David to pass by Joab's murder of Abner, it came out afterwards to be a most terrible blunder. All David's after life might well have been different but for that blunder. There might have been no "matter of Uriah," and no rebellion of Absalom, and none of the other miseries that so desolated David's house, had he not committed this fatal blunder of letting Joab live. David knew his duty quite well. "The Lord shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness," David proclaimed over Abner's mangled body. Yes; but David held the sword for no other purpose than to be the Lord's right hand in rewarding all the evil that was done in Israel in his day. But, then, Joab was the most powerful and the most necessary man in Israel, and Abner had no friends, and David contented himself with pronouncing an eloquent requiem over Abner, and leaving his murderer to go free in all his offices and all his honours. Joab was deep enough to understand quite well why his life was spared. He knew quite well that it was fear and not love that had moved David to let him live. It was a diplomatic act of David to spare Joab, but David was playing with a far deeper diplomatist than himself. Very soon we shall see this respite assassin ordering David about and dictating to him till we shall pity David as well as blame him. Joab's impunity speedily shot up into an increased contempt for David, till secret contempt became open insolence, and open insolence open and unavenged rebellion. Was it not a blunder?

"In the corrupted currents of this world,
 Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice.
 And oft 'tis seen, the wicked prize itself
 Buys out the law: but 'tis not so above;
 There is no shuffling, there the action lies
 In his true nature; and we ourselves compell'd,
 Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
 To give in evidence."

(Alc.c. Whyte, D.D.)

CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 1. **His hands were feeble.**—*Men without co-operation weak*:—The man spoken of was Saul's son, and as the son of a king what reason had he to have enfeebled hands? The reason is that Abner was dead. But could not a king's son do without Abner? Have not king's sons abundant resources in themselves, without being dependent upon outsiders, however distinguished? All history replies in the negative. Men belong to one another. The king's son was nothing without Abner, but much with him. The unit one is but a singular number, but the moment a cipher is added to it it becomes ten, and another cipher turns the ten into a hundred.—The integer is little by itself, the cipher is nothing at all when it stands alone, but when they are brought together they begin to make themselves felt. It is precisely so in our social relations. What is the husband without the wife? What is the son without the father? What is the scholar without the teacher? What is the flock without the shepherd? It is of no account to reason that there is a variety of value in men, some being worth much, and others being worth little; the fact is that they must all be brought into co-operation. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 5—12. **And the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab, and Baanah.**—*The death of Ishbosheth*:—I. THE MOTIVES THAT INDUCED those two traitors to murder Ishbosheth were: 1. Abner's death had disabled him for any royal duty. 2. All the tribes were in a confusion to hear their peacemaker was slain; hereupon they now doubted of obtaining David's favour. 3. None of Saul's house (beside concubine sons incapable of the crown) were alive to revenge Ishbosheth's murder, save only Mephibosheth. 4. These two traitors, therefore, thought that by their removing useless Ishbosheth out of David's way the Crown of the whole kingdom must needs come to him without any contradiction. II. **WHAT RECEPTION THESE TWO TRAITORS FOUND WITH DAVID WHEN THEY PRESENTED ISHBOSHETH'S HEAD TO HIM.** 1. David abhors the villainy, and resolves with an oath to execute the villains. 2. Hereupon David justly commanded their execution, and cut off their hands that had done the deed, and their feet that carried them away with this present. (*C. Ness.*) *Assassination of Ishbosheth*:—The Septuagint has the following entirely different rendering, which is found also in some MSS. of the Vulgate, in addition to the rendering of the present Heb. text, but apparently was not retained by Jerome himself. "And behold the portress of the house was cleaning wheat, and she slumbered and slept; and the brothers Rechab and Baanah came unobserved into the house. Now Ishbosheth was sleeping on the bed in his chamber: and they smote him," etc. This also explains how the murderers entered unobserved. The female slave who watched the door (*John xviii. 16. Acts xii. 13*) had fallen asleep over her task of sifting the wheat, and there was no one to give the alarm. (*A. F. Kirkpatrick, M.A.*) *The end of a weakling*:—Here lies what was once a bar of iron, but the joint action of air and water has reduced it to a bar of rust. It has now no strength, and consequently no value. To how many varied and useful purposes it might have been put some years ago, and in its work have found its strength, beauty and preservation; but it is too late now; it will soon be blended with the earth upon which it passively lies, a striking emblem of the man who refuses to face the hammer and anvil of active life and honest work; who flies from the purifying fire of life's adversities, and who will fight no battle for truth and the higher interests of his soul. Gifted only with powers which properly cultivated and employed would have blessed myriads, and opportunities for good which an angel might have envied, he allows the former to run waste and the latter to pass unheeded away, until corroded and worn down by his own inanition he sinks by degrees into that grave of mental and physical imbecility which has swallowed up its myriads, and which is too frequently but the dark passage to a more terrible death.

Vers. 9—12. **And David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother.**—*Nobleness and selfishness*:—We praise Cæsar for slaying the man who brought intelligence of Pompey's death; let us have some reverent regard for this passion in the heart of David—this loyalty and all hut adoration for the man who was king of Israel. 1. Those who did not understand David, or took narrow and partial views of his character, imagined that they could always please him by

relating some misfortune that had befallen the house of Saul. King Saul had a son who was of weak mind and of weak body, inanimate, dependent largely upon others for all that he was and did, especially dependent upon his uncle Abner. This man was accustomed to take a mid-day sleep. He went up into his room one mid-day to slumber, and there went in upon him two young men, Baanah and Rechab by name, and they made as though they would have fetched wheat from the royal residence, and when they found Ish-bosheth asleep they smote him under the fifth rib and beheaded him, and ran through the plain all night until they reached Hebron, and when they found David they said, "The Lord hath avenged His servant; here is the head of the son of king Saul." David seems to have taken the large and true view of these men who brought him tidings which they thought would have pleased him. He said, "They are essentially mean men; their meanness in this case counts for me, but I will none of them—hang them, drown them, burn them—they only want an opportunity to thrust the dagger under my fifth rib that they have drawn from the life of Ish-bosheth." We would teach this lesson especially to the young, and make it very clear to them, and write it upon their hearts and upon their minds, that they who would do a mean trick for us would not hesitate to do a mean trick against us.

2. It is not enough to be clever in life—we must always be right. There is nothing more contemptible than cleverness when it is dissociated from integrity. Always endeavour to avoid a merely clever person. Cleverness is a two-edged instrument, cleverness is a word you may apply to a thimble-rigger. Keep the word "cleverness" for very small occasions and for very small persons. Associate it with moral sensibility, associate it with the moral virtues, and it becomes proportionately dignified. The first thing you have to make out in all life is, what is right. "That ye may be sincere." What does that word sincere mean? It is two Latin words in one, and it means without wax, a term employed in describing the quality of honey, without wax. Or it is a Greek word, which refers to porcelain, and the meaning of it is that if the china be held up between the eye and the sun, it is sincere, without speck or flaw or breach. What should we look like if Christ were to take us up and look at us as we look critically at porcelain? That is the only true view to take of ourselves. Judging ourselves by ourselves we become fools; by social standards we are all respectable and good and fair and decent and honourable, but the grand test is the law of Divine rectitude, the standard and the balance of the sanctuary of heaven.

3. The real test of success is at the end. We never know what an action is, as to its real value, until we reach the end. Things may look tolerably well in the process—there is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is death. What talk Baanah and Rechab had that night as they hurried across the plain, what pictures they drew how David would receive them, how he would house them in the royal palace, how he would show them to the military and to the populace, and call for loud huzzas, how they would be the brothers whom the king would delight to honour, riding upon his noblest steeds, and for the time being sit at the front of his ranks and crowned with glory and honour. They went to Hebron, and never left it. The men were to be promoted—were promoted to the gallows. The clever men died as the fool dieth, and the earth was not allowed to have their bones. Let us be instructed by the narrative, for it may be even so with some of our own purposes and schemes. A thing is only everlasting in its consolations and honours in proportion as it is genuinely right. Is our trade, is our purpose, is our programme, is our policy, is our set in life right. If so, we have succeeded even before we have begun.

4. Behold the contrast between nobleness and selfishness, as seen in David and in those who brought him tidings concerning the fate of Saul, and the ill-luck of his child. There are moments when a man is almost God; and it was so with David in this case. He had his moments of fretfulness about Saul, and his moments of supreme fear, but in his heart he loved the grand old king of Israel; and where there is a supreme love it rises above everything, and sacrifices everything that would oppose its sovereign sway. Have we any supreme love? Is our heart ever washed by a great tide of loving emotion about any man, woman, or little child? Then blessed are we; that river rises sometimes and submerges the whole life, and bears away all the ill-thinking and ill-behaviour of many days. Let us not allow our emotions to be talked down, nor allow the fountain of our tears to be sealed up so that it cannot be broken on any occasion. Sometimes it is good for the heart to sink under its own tears; it comes up out of that baptism

sweeter and fresher than ever. 5. Beware of taking narrow views of life, then. The young Amalekite and Baarah and Rechab were men who saw only little points in a case. They were wanting in mental apprehensiveness and in moral expansion. There are many such men in the world, keen as a hawk in seeing little points, blind as a mole in beholding the measure of a circumference. Let us pray for that enlargement of mind which sees every aspect of a question. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

CHAPTER V.

Vers. 1—12. **Then came all the tribes of Israel to David unto Hebron, and spake saying, Behold we are thy bone and thy flesh.**—*David king over all Israel*:—It was probably very soon after the death of Ishbosheth that this visit of the tribes of Israel to Hebron occurred. Now, in this request the elders urged three reasons why David should be their king. 1. Blood-relationship: "We are thy bone and thy flesh." It was with these words that Laban welcomed his nephew Jacob to Haran (Gen. 29. 14); with these words also Abimelech sought the allegiance of the men of Shechem (Judg. 9. 2). 2. David had been, under Saul, their leader in war, and as he had been a victorious leader they are ready to acknowledge him as their king. 3. He had been called of God to be a shepherd and a prince over Israel. As the representatives of the tribes the elders came to Hebron with this petition, and a covenant is entered into "before the Lord." 1. All the tribes of Israel were now united and the family circle was one under David. 2. There was peace in Israel, instead of the long, bitter strife of so many years. 3. Their anointed king was he whom God had selected, so that, instead of fighting against the Divine purpose, they were now in harmony with that purpose, and the smile of Jehovah rested on their union. 4. The future was bright before them. So long as they were contending with one another they had no strength to overcome the enemies of God, and the Jebusites could not be driven out of Jerusalem. But now, the tribes united, led by such a prince as David and with God on their side, they were strong to conquer all their enemies. There are two profound thoughts in this closing verse: 1. The recognition by David of the hand of God in his position as king over Israel. 2. The recognition of the truth that the purpose of this providence was for the temporal and spiritual interests of the people of God. The people are not created for the king, but the king for the people. (*A. E. Kittredge, D.D.*) **David king over Israel**:—I. LOOK AT ISRAEL IN THOSE YEARS OF WAITING FOR THEIR KING. Near five centuries before the founding of the kingdom, the rule which was to govern the conduct of their coming king had been lodged in the archives of their nation. He had been seen at the helm of human affairs, of whom it was written: "He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." The steppings of God are not swift enough for us. Time spent waiting for deliverance or advancement seems lost time. We forget that preparation is demanded for all promotions, all changes that are radical. Because Israel would not wait for God to choose for them a king in his own time, he gave them Saul, of their own choosing. They, however, found little comfort in him. His life was "one long tragedy." Human wisdom is often folly. That which we judge will be for our large advantage often proves our peril. There is no safety but in waiting for God to go before and lead. II. NOTICE GOD'S CHOICE OF DAVID AS KING. In the midst of the commotion and desolation of Israel, Samuel was commanded to go to Bethlehem, and there anoint one of the sons of Jesse. No explanation was given of the meaning of that anointing. Neither Jesse nor David understood it, though both must have had conception of some great honour indicated. The choice was of God. Mighty changes were to take place in the rule of Israel: a mighty man was required. He was found. God always has instruments at hand for use. III. NOTICE DAVID'S PREPARATION FOR THE KINGSHIP. God was preparing him, through the persecutions of enemies and the treachery of friends, by a long and painful discipline, for the kingship of Judah, at Hebron. There he reigned seven and a half years, when the throne of Israel became vacant. Purified in the furnace of affliction and humiliations, grown strong in faith through wonderful deliverances and exaltations, he was ready for the place which

God had made ready for him. IV. NOTICE DAVID'S EXALTATION TO THE THRONE. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *David a type of Christ*:—David is made fully king. He has been, so to say, partially king; now his kingship is to be completed. It is legitimate to inquire into the typology of the whole case. Being the father of Christ according to the flesh, it will be to our edification to ask where the lines coincide, where they become parallels, and where they again touch one another. The study will be at once interesting and profitable. 1. "David was thirty years old when he began to reign" (v. 4). How old was Christ when he entered his public ministry? Was he not thirty years old? The full meaning of this it is impossible to find out; nevertheless the coincidence itself is a lesson: we stop, and wonder, and think. Providence thus reveals itself little by little, and we are permitted to take up the separate parts, bring them together, and shape them into significance. 2. "And they anointed David king over Israel" (v. 3.). Is that the word which is used when men are made kings? Is there not another word which is employed usually? Do we not say, And they crowned the king? The word here used is anointed—a better word, a word with more spiritual meaning in it, and more duration. The oil penetrated; the oil signified consecration, purity, moral royalty. There was a crown, but that was spectacular, and might be lost. Was not Jesus Christ anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows? Have not we who follow Him and share His kingship, an unction, or anointing, from the Holy One, through whom we know all things? 3. David reigned forty years. Forty is a perfect number. There are many numerals which represent perfectness, and forty—the four tens—is one of them. Or making the whole life seventy years we come again upon another aspect of perfectness: perfectness in the life and in the royalty: perfectness in both senses and in both aspects. And is not Jesus Christ to come to a perfect reign? Has He not His own forty and His own seventy—His own secret number, which represents to Him mysteriously the perfectness of His reign? He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet. 4. The Jebusites mocked David when he would go and reign in Jerusalem; they said, "Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither" (v. 6). In other words: If you can overcome the lame and the blind, you may enter into Jerusalem, but other soldiery we will not interpose: even they will be strong enough to break the arms of David. Has no defiance been hurled at the Messiah? Has He not been excluded from the metropolis of the world? Are there not those who have mocked Him and wagged their heads at Him? Are there not those who have spat upon His name, and said, We will not have this man to reign over us? Let history testify, and let our own conscience speak. 5. David advanced more and more. The tenth verse has a beautiful expression: "And David went on, and grew great." The words are short, but the meaning is boundless. David was a persistent man—he "went on." It is the man who steadfastly goes on, who enters the city and clears a space for himself, in all departments and outlooks of life. And is not Jesus Christ going forth from conquering to conquer? Is He not moving from land to land, from position to position. "And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords." "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ." Go on thou mighty Son of God! 6. Then we read in the eleventh verse, "And they built David a house." Even those who were averse to Him came to this at the last. And is no house being built for Christ? Once He said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." Is it to be always so? or is not the whole earth to be the house of the living Christ, the sanctuary of the crowned Lord? This is the voice of prophecy; this is the testimony of all history: in this inspiration we pray our bolder prayer and utter our grander hope. Jesus shall reign, and a house shall be built for Him, and it shall be called the house of God. 7. "But when the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel, all the Philistines came up to seek David; and David heard of it, and went down to the hold" (v. 17). Christ has enemies to-day. There are Philistines who are banded against Him: they want to deplete His name of all spiritual meaning, to take away from Him all the glory of His miracles, to deny even His incarnation, to treat Him as a myth, a vision, or a dream; but still He goes down to the hold, and still He advances His position. 8. Having overthrown the Philistines in one conflict, we read in the twenty-second verse, "And the Philistines came up yet again." These words have modern meaning—namely, the words "yet again." The enemy is not easily foiled. One

repulse is not enough. The victory is not secured until the enemy is under foot—no truce, no compromise, no modification, no temporising, no living by mutual concession. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *King David a type of Christ*:—David, as king, was an illustrious type of Christ. "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." (*Ps. ii. 6.*) "All Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the deliverer." (*Rom. xi. 26.*) Jesus was recognised as "The Son of David"; He is "King of the Jews"; "King of kings," and "of His kingdom there shall be no end." This passage suggests several analogies between King David and King Jesus. 1. David was king by Divine ordination (*v. 2, 12.*) And so Christ was elected from eternity to be the Monarch of mankind, was predicted of old. "His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom." (*Dan. iv. 3, 34.*) It was asserted by Himself, "My kingdom is not of this world." He claimed kingship of Divine origin and authority. 2. David was ordained to be king for two purposes: "Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel." It is the function of a shepherd to feed; of a captain to guide and protect. So Christ is the good Shepherd and the Captain of Salvation. He supplies the need of His people, and leads them to victory. 3. David was qualified by kindred relationship. "We are thy bone and thy flesh." So Jesus took our nature, "in all things was made like unto His brethren." "He is not ashamed to call us brethren." His humanity, linked with His deity, qualified Him to be the "Mediator between God and men"; THE Shepherd-King of His people; "the Man Christ Jesus." 4. David was king by mutual covenant. The Son of David is proclaimed from heaven as King of men; and He engages to rule in equity, and to guard His people from harm. We, on our part, accept Him as our Lord: we declare that we desire Him to rule over us; there is a mutual covenant. He says, "Ye are My people"; and we say, "Thou art our King." 5. David assailed the strong fortress of his foes. David's greater Son lays siege to the human heart, fortified against Him by unbelief and sin. He summons it to surrender; brings the battery of truth against its walls; promises pardon if it will open its gates. 6. David conquered the fortress and dwelt in it. So Jesus has entered many a heart by its opened doors, and has proved His power to subdue the most determined resistance. He then makes it His abode. 7. David enlarged the captured city. "He built round about." Thus the kingdom of David's Son is constantly being enlarged. Faith in the soul grows as seeds. The heaven leavens the whole lump. Every part of our nature progressively owns the sway of its Lord. 8. The King of Tyre sent cedar-trees and carpenters to help to build David's house. So the Gentiles built up the Church of Christ. Earthly wealth is consecrated to His service. Not Tyre alone, but every people and clime shall help in raising up Jerusalem, and making Zion a praise throughout the earth. 9. David reigned in Hebron and Jerusalem forty years. David's Son reigns everywhere, and His kingdom shall have no end. "He shall reign for ever and ever." 10. David had the joy of being assured that God had exalted His throne. "He perceived that the Lord had established him king over Israel." And David's Son "shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied." LESSONS:—Let us individually enter into covenant with Christ as our King. Let us open our hearts for Him to dwell in. Though "blind and lame," He will heal us, and help us to fight His battles and share His triumph. (*N. Hall, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. Thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel.—*Divine appointment and man's doing*:—There are both sides of the great division in evangelical theology—Arminianism and Calvinism: man's doing, and God's planning. The Lord said that David should lead Israel; and David did lead Israel. And the people of Israel gave a fair prominence to both sides of the question. They saw that David could do what the Lord had said he should do; and they knew that the Lord had said that David should do what they saw he could do. As a practical matter, these two sides of the truth have to be considered by all of the Lord's people, in all their doing and in all their judging. If a man is called of God to a special work, the man must show by his doing that he is the very man whom God has called, and who was the man to be called of God. And in judging of another's fitness for his work, it is right for us to consider the call of God to that man, as well as that man's apparent success in his work. If the man is clearly out of the place to which he was called of God, all his ability and apparent fitness for this other place must be counted insufficient to inspire confidence in him for permanent success here. It has been well said, as to a Chris-

tian's personal duty in God's service, that he ought to work in his appointed sphere as if everything depended on his own exertions, while he ought to trust as if everything depended on God's strength as given to him in that sphere. (*H. Clay Trumbull.*)

Ver. 3. And King David made a league with them.—*Making a league*:—For one born into the family, no formal covenant is necessary, in order to bind to his support all who are of the same blood with himself. But when one is taken in from outside, to be closer than a brother, or when a number of persons who are not of one blood would bind themselves together in mutual fellowship, a specific league must be made in ratification of the new relation. The form of the league is different in different cases. The simplest form, and one which has always had a binding force in the East, is that of eating together, of breaking bread in common, in token of mutual fidelity. Dr. Cyrus Hamlin, in his *Among the Turks*, gives various illustrations of this truth. As he sat on the floor, at dinner, in a Turkish governor's residence, the bey gave him in his fingers a piece of roast mutton, to be taken by the guest's fingers and then eaten. "Now, do you know what I have done?" asked the bey. "Perfectly well," answered Dr. Hamlin. "You have given me a delicious piece of roast meat, and I have eaten it." "You have gone far from it," responded the bey. "By that act, I have pledged you every drop of my blood, that while you are in my territory no evil shall come to you. For that space of time we are brothers." Coming from Smyrna, at one time, Dr. Hamlin was on a vessel containing a large number of raw recruits for the Turkish army. "Just before reaching port, some fifteen or so of these recruits threw off their look of stolid resignation, cleared a place on the deck, as I supposed, for a country dance; and I looked on with interest. I could see, by their costumes, that they were all from the same village, or villages closely associated. . . . They stood in a ring, each man's right hand upon his neighbour's left shoulder. Soon one came to take a vacant place, with a semeet, a ring of bread, in his hand. He broke it into bits, and they all ate of it, saying a few words of prayer, probably the first chapter of the Koran. It was a religious act, plainly. About to separate, and be dispersed into the army, they bound themselves to be faithful in memory, and in aid, should it ever become possible. It was to them a kind of sacrament, an oath of brotherhood." And so they "made a league" with one another. (*The Sunday School Times.*)

Ver. 5. In Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years.—*Jerusalem, the Holy City*:—It was highly desirable that the capital should be accessible to the whole country, and should possess the necessary features that rendered it fit to become the heart and brain of the national life. It must be capable of being strongly fortified, so as to preserve the sacred treasures of the kingdom inviolate. All these features blended in Jerusalem, and commended it to David's Divinely-guided judgment. In this he greatly differed from Saul, who had made his own city, Gibeah, his capital—an altogether insignificant place, and the scene of an atrocious crime, the infamy of which could not be obliterated. To have made Hebron the capital would have excited the jealousy of the rest of Israel; and Bethlehem, his birthplace, would have struck too low a keynote. None were to be compared with the site of Jerusalem, on the frontier between Judah and Benjamin, surrounded on three sides by valleys, and on the other side, the north, strongly fortified. I. **ITS PREVIOUS HISTORY.** To the Jew there was no city like Jerusalem. It was the city of his God, situate in His holy mountain: "Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth." The high hills of Bashan were represented as jealous of the lowlier hill of Zion, because God had chosen it for His abode. The mountains that stood around her seemed to symbolize the envying presence of Jehovah. The exile in his banishment opened his windows towards Jerusalem as he knelt in prayer, and wished that his right hand might forget its cunning sooner than his heart fail to prefer Jerusalem above its chief joy. The charm of the yearly pilgrimage to the sacred feasts was that the feet of the pilgrim should stand within her gates; and when at a distance from her walls and palaces, pious hearts were wont to pray that peace and prosperity might be within them for the sake of those brethren and companions who were favoured to live within her precincts. But it had not always been so. Her birth and nativity were of the land of the Canaanite. An Amorite was her father, and her mother a Hittite. In the day that she was born she was cast out as a deserted

child on the open field, weltering in her blood. For a brief spell the priest-king Melchizedek reigned over her, and during his life her future glory must have been presaged: the thin spiral columns of smoke that arose from his altars, anticipating the stately worship of the Temple; his priesthood foreshadowing a long succession of priests. Thereafter a long spell of darkness befell her; and for years after the rest of the country was in occupation of Israel, Jerusalem was still held by the Jebusites. Joshua, indeed, nominally subdued the city in his first occupation of the land, and slew its king; but his tenure of it was very brief and slight, and the city speedily relapsed under the sway of its ancient occupants.

II. THE CAPTURE. Making a levy of all Israel, David went up to Jerusalem. For the first time after seven years, he took the lead of his army in person. Passive, when he was called to wait for the gift of God, he was intensely active and energetic when he discerned the Divine summons. David's first act was to extend the fortifications; "He built round about from Millo and inward;" whilst Joab seems to have repaired and beautified the buildings in the city itself. This first success laid the foundation of David's greatness. "He waxed greater and greater: for the Lord, the God of Hosts, was with him." Indeed, neighbouring nations appear to have become impressed with the growing strength of his kingdom, and hastened to seek his alliance. (1 Chron. xi. 7-9; 2 Sam. v. 11).

III. A FAIR DAWN. It has been suggested that we owe psalm ci. to this hour in David's life. He finds himself suddenly called to conduct the internal administration of a great nation, that had, so to speak, been born in a day, and was beginning to throb with the intensity of a long-suspended animation. The new needs were demanding new expression. Departments of law and justice, of finance, and of military organization, were rapidly being called into existence, and becoming localized at the capital. (F. B. Meyer, B.A.)

Ver. 6. Except thou take away the blind.—*Security not safety*:—A graphic picture of the haughty security of the Jebusites and of their consequent weakness is given in Stanley's *Sinai and Palestine*. The late Dean wrote: "When David appeared under the walls of Jebus the 'old inhabitants of the land,' the last remnant of their race that clung to that mountain home, exulting in the strength of these ancient 'everlasting gates' looked proudly down on the army below and said, 'Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in thither; thinking David cannot come in thither.' The blind and the lame they thought were sufficient to defend what nature had so strongly defended. It was the often-repeated story of the capture of fortresses through what seemed their strongest and therefore became their weakest point. 'Precipitous, and therefore neglected.' Such was the fate of Sardis, and of Rome, and such was the fate of Jebus. (*Sunday School Times*.) *Jeering as a war-weapon*:—Long before the origin of the comic-caricature as a political war-weapon, scoffs and jeers were a favourite projectile in Oriental warfare—as they are, in the East, at the present time. The jeer of Tobiah, against the Jews who were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem under Nehemiah, was: "Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall." This was, in spirit, much like the Jebusite jeer at David. Our blind and lame can keep your host at bay. "Come on, thou rider of a kadesh!" (a hack-horse) was the cry of one shaykh to another in a combat in Palestine, as reported by Mrs. Finn. And the response of the other was: "At least I am not the son of a gypsy!" Arab warfare is so far not unlike Chinese warfare; and so far the present is much like the days of David, in the East. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 8. Whosoever getteth up to the gutter.—*The assault upon Zion*:—"Some far-seeing Hittite or Amorite had designed from the inside of the city that a subterraneous passage should be cut through the rock to the spring below, so that in troublous times when the daughters of Zion could no longer venture outside the gates to draw water from the fountain, the needful supply should be obtainable without the knowledge of the besiegers, and without risk to the besieged." (Harper.) There is strong presumption that David obtained information of this secret way through a citizen—Araunah the Jebusite. At all events whoever disclosed to him the singular viaduct—"gutter" of our Bibles—he issued forthwith the proclamation that an attack through it was feasible. This has received the amplest confirmation from two other well-known Palestine explorers by having themselves accomplished the feat. They worked their way up through

this same covered passage. (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) *Storming the citadel*:—Joab stormed the stronghold of Zion, which the Jebusites thought impregnable. Jonathan and his armour-bearer were scornfully despised by the Philistine garrison (2 Sam. 5.) So General Wolfe won the great victory which has made his name famous, by leading his men up the Heights of Abraham above Quebec, his French opponents not dreaming that such a feat was practicable. *Storming the fortress*:—The whole incident recalled a kiudred adventure in Scottish history; when during the wars of the Douglas, Dumbarton Rock—550 feet in height, crowned with its fortress and castle, had its precipices of ballast scaled by a few daring men, with the aid of ladders and grappling irons and misty midnight. An ash tree growing in a crevice near the top served as an equivalent for what, in the water-course of Jebus, helped materially to crown the feat with success. (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*)

Ver. 10. David went on, and grew great, and the Lord God of Hosts was with him.—*Greatness by gentleness*:—"Thy gentleness hath made me great." So wrote David when he rehearsed the history that had culminated in his advancement to the throne of all Israel. He admits, therefore, that he was a "made" man, but not a "self-made" man. Here in the narrative of his prosperity he confesses that it had been the Lord who established him king, who also exalted his kingdom; and then in a Psalm of devotion he ascribes all his glory to Divine grace. **I. WE CONSIDER THE GREATNESS DAVID HAD JUST REACHED.** Six successive steps, at the least, had the eternal God taken in his behalf on the way to his advancement. 1. He caused that a full and loyal call should come from the realm over which he was now to rule as the second king (ver. 1.) 2. The Lord trained David for the position he was to occupy by a long and intricate process of providential discipline (ver. 2.) 3. Moreover, God had chosen David intelligently, years before, and announced him as the man who should come after Saul (ver. 3.) 4. Then, too, God helped on David's greatness by providing for the stability of his government a capital and a royal abode (ver. 7.) 5. God's gentleness made David great in that a perpetual presence was vouchsafed to him for his entire life (ver. 10.) 6. Then, also, God had made this monarch great by opening his intelligence so that he should understand the meaning of Divine Providence, past and future, and admit its special reach (ver. 12.) **II. THE GENTLENESS IN THE DIVINE DEALING WITH HIM** from his first recognition as a shepherd-boy to this final establishment of him in the throne of Israel; is that in particular among the attributes of God which he acknowledges just now. The poet Goethe has left behind him, in his autobiography, this somewhat curious sentence as a revelation of personal fact: "I was especially troubled by a giddiness which came over me every time that I looked down from a height." Many people, since his day and before it, have had the same characteristic disturbance; but it has more often been a height of ambition than merely a height of tower or precipice. But there is no symptom of giddiness in the quiet ascription of his gratitude: "Thy gentleness has made me great." 1. God's gentleness had borne with David's want of memory. 2. Then, also, there was David's want of faith, with which the Almighty bore in a like spirit of gentleness. 3. To this we may add that God's gentleness is disclosed in his patiently bearing with David's want of courage. (*C. S. Robinson, D.D.*) *David's prosperity*:—**I. WHAT DAVID DID.** "He went on." 1. He "went on" with his appointed work. David was not alone in this. Every man has a work given him by God. David was, above all things, a servant of God, and every man may be that if he will! 2. He "went on" in the face of opposition. He was opposed by the Jebusites, and later by the Philistines. If we are in the path of duty, let us go forward! 'Tis patient going on that wins! In school and college, in workshop and office, perseverance triumphs. Even so is it in the godly life. "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." "To patient faith the prize is sure," etc. **II. WHAT DAVID BECAME.** He "grew great." David "grew great" in his kingly power, and honours, and victories, great in the eyes of his foes, and great in the estimation of his subjects. The large majority have to be content with mediocrity. Most natures possess a spark of wholesome ambition, but in many cases it has become smothered and buried! Many throw away splendid opportunities of becoming at any rate greater than they are. The idler, the spendthrift, the drunkard, etc. Ambition may be worthy or unworthy. He who aspires to be great in an honourable calling by honourable means, to push his way by dint of hard work to the front, is surely to be com-

mended! Let us grow great without sacrificing our integrity, or not at all! If we may not rise on the wings of righteousness let us be content to keep on the ground! Above all, let it be our aim to grow great morally and spiritually. But moral ennoblement comes from a higher source. Tennyson's Arthur, speaking of the Knights of the Round Table, says:—

“I made them lay their hands in mine and swear
To reverence the king as if he were
Their conscience, and their conscience as their king,
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
To honour his own word as if his God's,
To live sweet lives in purest chastity.”

Write “Christ” instead of Arthur and you have the patent of a higher nobility than earthly sovereign ever bestowed. III. **THE SECRET OF DAVID'S PROSPERITY.** “The Lord God of Hosts was with him.” The secret of all real greatness is in having the Lord on our side. How can we secure His presence and help? How did David secure these? 1. He trusted God. 2. He acknowledged and consulted Him. 3. He obeyed God. The same method of ensuring the Divine help is open to all. If we would go on and grow great, if we would prosper in all right ways we must begin to walk in those ways. Have we made the great commencement? He calls us now! (*J. Sellicks.*) **Prosperity:—I. THE TIDE OF PROSPERITY.** 1. David as sole ruler over Israel. Every tide has a turning, and at last the ebb-tide of David's misfortunes began to flow. Judah had for seven and a half years been subject to David's sway, and now all Israel was anxious to array itself under his banner. The account given in our lesson is very meagre, but a fuller account in (1 Chronicles xii. 23-40) will prove that the whole proceeding was full of pomp. Adding up the military escorts there mentioned, we find that they reached the grand total of three hundred and forty thousand eight hundred. For three days there was universal rejoicing and festivity. Thus with ceremonies of appropriate dignity, the former shepherd was at last recognized as sovereign over all God's chosen people. 2. As military conqueror. Soon after his installation as king over all Israel, David began to cast wistful glances at Jerusalem. It was really the Gibraltar of Canaan. But thus far, by reason of its impregnable situation, it had defied the efforts of the Israelites to capture it, though on one occasion they had been partially successful. David therefore laid plans for its complete subjugation. Thus David gained a kingdom, a capital, and a religious centre from which to rule his people. 3. As king among nations. Prosperity at home was followed by the recognition of the sovereigns of other nations. Among them was Hiram, king of ancient Tyre. Distant rulers sought alliance with the king of Israel, and courted his favour. So he advanced, and became great. The tide of prosperity swept far up on the sands of David's life, and the promise of happiness and usefulness was golden. II. **THE CAUSE OF PROSPERITY.** 1. David recognized that it was not for his own individual sake that God had thus prospered him, but that it was “for his people Israel's sake.” If he had stopped to think, he would have recognized that he was no more talented a man than Saul had been. Saul began well, when raised to the throne. In some respects, indeed, Saul had the advantage over David. At this time in his life David probably recognized all this, and ascribed the glory to Him to whom it belonged. Had he only always borne this in mind, he would have made fewer mistakes and committed fewer sins than he did. So long as his thought ran God-ward he was safe; but as soon as his mind began to say, “by mine own might,” he lost power and fell. These first few years of David's reign were among the happiest of his whole life. His hardships as an exile were at an end. He no longer lay down and rose up in fear of his implacable enemy. He was no longer separated from family and friends, and driven from post to pillar like a wild beast. His heart was not tried by the apparent contradiction between God's promise and God's performance. The promise of the kingdom had been made good, and David felt that “all's well that ends well.” Moreover, the people had not yet become alienated from this ruler. The enthusiasm of a united and prosperous nation, led by a wise and talented military chieftain, still pervaded all classes. The great and overwhelming temptations of royalty had not yet enfeebled the moral character of the king.

Enlarged life, filled with unusual opportunities for usefulness, spread out before him, and filled him with the enthusiasm of full manhood. This was David's "golden age." He stood at the beginning of a career which might be almost perfect in its achievements. So stands many a young man and woman. Life stretches out before them, and is full of grand possibilities. The restraints incident to childhood and the years of tutelage are over. Powers of body and mind are in full vigour, and hope stands with face erect and confidence on its brow. Friends applaud, and predict great success in future days. Well is it for such persons to remember that God is the source of all their talents and of the conditions of their future success. (*A. F. Schauffler.*) *The nature of true progress* :—It is slow. Ewald would translate this phrase, "And David gradually became greater and greater." It was not a sudden and unexplained outburst of prosperity, but a gradual growth. God's greatest results are the slowest of accomplishment. Haste is a sign of feebleness, but that which is to abide must be slowly achieved. The lower forms of life quickly reach maturity, and quickly decay. Man alone spends years of helpless childhood. The building up of a kingdom and the formation of character are alike works that cannot be hurried. The setting up of the Kingdom of God on the earth is a task more difficult of accomplishment than was the establishment of David's kingdom. We must not be impatient. God has eternity in which to work. (*R. C. Ford, M.A.*) *Growing great* :—There are men who go on and grow great, among or above their fellows, while the Lord is not with them. Such growth and greatness are neither to be desired nor to be admired. Again, there are men with whom the Lord is, who do not go on, as they might go: and there are yet more of them who do not grow great by their doings, or by the Lord's planning. Having the Lord with us, is the chief thing. Going on is the thing of next importance; that is, going on, while the Lord is with us. Growing great, is of least importance; but if a man is to grow great, let him see to it that he does not grow away from the Lord, and that he has the Lord with him in all his going and in all his growing. (*H. Clay Trumbull.*) *Improvement a duty* :—Progress and improvement are every man's duty. It is not right to remain as we were, or as we are. We ought to be all the time gaining and growing in experience and attainment and grace. It may be to our shame that we are just where God put us, and that we have just what God gave to us. A man whose looks were spoken of contemptuously, said in rejoinder, "You've no right to find fault with my looks; I'm just as God made me." "I know it, and that's what I'm blaming you for," said his critic; "you've never made any improvement on yourself." That answer made a fair point. If God puts us at the bottom of a hill, or at the beginning of a road, it may be for us to mount or to proceed, and not to stop where we are. It was the man who retained just what his Lord gave him, and who was ready to give back that at the day of reckoning, who not only lost his possessions, but was cast out into outer darkness as an unprofitable servant. Remaining just as God made us may be the cause of our condemnation. (*Great Thoughts.*) *The laws of vigorous growth* :—Dr. Hugh Macmillan tells us that the motto on the crest of John Spreull, of Glasgow, who, for his defence of religious liberty in the times of Claverhouse, was imprisoned on the Bass Rock, in the Firth of Forth, was "Sub pondere cresco"—I grow under a weight. His crest was a palm tree, with two weights hanging on each side of it from the fronds, and yet maintaining, in spite of this heavy down-dragging force, its upright position, carrying its graceful crown of foliage up into the serene air. So the very things that threatened to hinder the growth of the early Church became helps to its progress. "The stumbling-block became the stepping-stone"; the weights became wings. *Going and growing great* :—David went on growing. His activities were not fruitless. There are some people who do a deal of the going, but all too little of the growing. We want both of these. There must not merely be the signs of activity, but there must really be actual improvement and development. A mill-wheel is always going, but it never gets any further forward; no blame to the mill-wheel, for it is doing its business by simply going round. A door is constantly moving on its hinges, creaking, perhaps, as well, but it makes no progress. Still, there it stands, day after day. This is all right for the door, but all wrong for you. Keep on going, but see to it that the growing is not neglected either. (*Thomas Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 11—22. **And Hiram, king of Tyre, sent messengers to David.—**

The kingdom established:—1. Now the tide fairly turned in David's history, and that, instead of a sad chronicle of hardship and disappointment, the record of his reign becomes one of unmingled success and prosperity. The fact is far from an unusual one in the history of men's lives. How often, even in the case of men who have become eminent, has the first stage of life been one of disappointment and sorrow, and the last part one of prosperity so great as to exceed the fondest dreams of youth. Effort after effort has been made by a young man to get a footing in the literary world, but his books have proved comparative failures. At last he issues one which catches in a remarkable degree the popular taste, and thereafter fame and fortune attend him, and lay their richest offerings at his feet. A similar tale is to be told of many an artist and professional man. And even persons of more ordinary gifts, who have found the battle of life awfully difficult in its earlier stages, have gradually, through diligence and perseverance, acquired an excellent position, more than fulfilling every reasonable desire for success. But it is an encouraging thing for those who begin life under hard conditions, but with a brave heart and a resolute purpose to do their best, that, as a general rule, the sky clears as the day advances, and the troubles and struggles of the morning yield to success and enjoyment later in the day. David's prosperity and enlargement in every quarter were due to the gracious presence and favour of God. Unlike many successful men, who ascribe their success so largely to their personal talents and ways of working, he felt that the great factor in his success was God. There is what the world calls "luck," that is to say those conditions of success which are quite out of our control; as, for instance, in business the unexpected rise or fall of markets, the occurrence of favourable openings, the honesty or dishonesty of partners and connections, the stability or the vicissitudes of investments. The difference between the successful man of the world and the successful godly man in these respects is that the one speaks only of his luck, the other sees the hand of God in ordering all such things for his benefit. This last was David's case. But is this way of claiming to be specially favoured and blessed by God not objectionable? Is it not what the world calls "cant"? Is it not highly offensive in any man to claim to be a favourite of Heaven? This may be a plausible way of reasoning, but one thing is certain—it has not the support of Scripture. If it be an offence publicly to recognise the special favour and blessing with which it has pleased God to visit us, David himself was the greatest offender in this respect the world has ever known. What is the great burden of his psalms of thanksgiving? Is it not an acknowledgment of the special mercies and favours that God bestowed on him, especially in his times of great necessity? What the world is so ready to believe is that this cannot be done save in the spirit of the Pharisee who thanked God that he was not as other men. And whenever a worldly man falls foul of one who owns the distinguishing spiritual mercies that God has bestowed on him, it is this accusation he is sure to hurl at his head. The truth is, the world cannot or will not distinguish between the Pharisee and the humble saint, conscious that in him dwelleth no good thing. The one is as unlike the other as light is to darkness. What good men need to bear in mind is that when they do make mention of the special goodness of God to them they should be most careful to do so in no boastful mood, but in the spirit of a most real, and not an assumed or formal, humility.

2. Midway between the two statements before us on the greatness and prosperity which God conferred on David, mention is made of his friendly relations with the king of Tyre (ver. 11.) The Phœnicians were not included among the seven nations of Palestine whom the Israelites were to extirpate, so that a friendly alliance with them was not forbidden. Tyre had a great genius for commerce; and the spirit of commerce is alien from the spirit of war. That it is always a nobler spirit cannot be said; for while commerce ought to rest on the idea of mutual benefit, and many of its sons honourably fulfil this condition, it often degenerates into the most atrocious selfishness, and heeds not what havoc it may inflict on others provided it derives personal gain from its undertakings. But we have no reason to believe that there was anything specially hurtful in the traffic which Tyre now began with Israel, although the intercourse of the two countries afterwards led to other results pernicious to the latter—the introduction of Phœnician idolatry and the overthrow of pure worship in the greater part of the tribes of Israel. Meanwhile what Hiram does is to send to David cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons, by means of whom a more civilized style of dwelling is introduced; and the new city which David has commenced to build, and especially the house which is to be his own, present features of skill

and beauty hitherto unknown in Israel. For, amid all his zeal for higher things, the young king of Israel does not disdain to advance his kingdom in material comforts. 3. Two campaigns against these inveterate enemies of Israel are recorded, and the decisive encounter in both cases took place in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem. The narrative is so brief that we have difficulty in apprehending all the circumstances. The first invasion of the Philistines took place soon after David was anointed king over all Israel. It is not said whether this occurred before David possessed himself of Mount Zion, nor, considering the structure common in Hebrew narrative, does the circumstance that in the history it follows that event prove that it was subsequent to it in the order of time. We see that the campaign was very serious, and David's difficulties very great. David attacked the Philistines and smote them at a place called Baal-perazim, somewhere most likely between Adullam and Jerusalem. Considering the superior position of the Philistines, and the great advantage they seem to have had over David in numbers also, this was a signal victory, even though it did not reduce the foe to helplessness. For when the Philistines had got time to recover, they again came up, pitched again in the plain of Rephaim, and appeared to render unavailing the signal achievement of David at Baal-perazim. Again David inquired what he should do. The reply was somewhat different from before. David was not to go straight up to face the enemy, as he had done before. He was to "fetch a compass behind them," that is, as we understand it, to make a circuit, so as to get in the enemy's rear over against a grove of mulberry trees. That tree has not yet disappeared from the neighbourhood of Jerusalem; a mulberry tree still marks the spot in the valley of Jehoshaphat, where, according to tradition, Isaiah was sawn asunder. When he should hear "the sound of a going" (R.V., "the sound of a march") in the tops of the mulberry trees, then he was to bestir himself. It is probable that the presence of David and his troop in the rear of the Philistines was not suspected, the mulberry trees forming a screen between them. When David got his opportunity, he availed himself of it to great advantage. (IV. G. Blaikie, D.D.)

Vers. 23—25. **When thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself.**—*The special meaning of common things*:—What a different world this would be if we believed that God governed it—that He was in it—that He was at work in it—that His footsteps were still on its mountains—that He walked amidst its trees, and rode on the wings of the winds—if we realised His presence, and ascertained and saw in the ordinary things of everyday life the indications of His will. We believe there was a time when God was in the world, but it seems to us now like a forsaken world—like a world without God; for we act as if God had nothing to do in it or with it. What a different Church there would be if we recognised spiritual influences, recognised them in all their variety and modes of manifestation. Divine interpositions do not interfere with human agency. Some men are always waiting—always looking for signs and wonders, for the sign of the Son of Man in the heavens—looking for outpourings, for baptisms of the Holy Ghost, for Pentecostal seasons. They do not see the meaning of common and ordinary things, they do not avail themselves of the means at their disposal. I. **THE SAME THINGS ARE TO BE DONE DIFFERENTLY AT DIFFERENT TIMES.** Men have sometimes to do the same things in different ways—in ways prescribed by Divine intimations. David had to contend with the Philistines. He had beaten them once, but they had come up again in undiminished strength, in battle array. He is to adopt new tactics. He is not to "go up," but to "fetch a compass behind them." In every age the Philistines are coming up against the Israel of God. Our mode of warfare must be regulated by providential intimations. II. **THE PRESENCE OF DIVINE INDICATIONS WILL BE TO US THE REVELATIONS OF THE DIVINE WILL.** If a man desires to do the Divine will, he will have a Divine revelation. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." An earnest man—that is, a man in earnest to do the Divine will—is never left in utter ignorance of that will. The difficulty is not so much to find out the will of God, but to reconcile our wills to it, so that we may be willing to do it. III. **DIVINE INTIMATIONS MAY COME THROUGH ANY CHANNEL GOD PLEASES.** We have no ephod, no priest with Urim and Thummim, no response from the oracle, no audible voice like that which fell on the ear of David. To us, however, have been committed the books containing the successive revelations God

has made of His will to men. In all that pertains to the way of salvation, the revelation is clear, distinct, and definite. I hear a little bird singing on the branches of a tree, pouring forth its song with the infinite heavens above and the wide world around, singing in a world where there is winter as well as summer, and I learn a lesson no words of mine can express. There are Divine intimations still in suggestions and impressions. I am in perplexity. I want to know what to do, or how to do what I have to do. There come sudden suggestions like revelations. How am I to determine their source? If they lead me, in dependence on the strength which God gives, to follow a course involving self-sacrifice, and having a tendency to promote the Divine glory, may I not conclude that they came from God? May not the Father of my spirit speak to me? May not the soul hear His voice? There are Divine intimations in circumstances.

IV. THE PRESENCE OR ABSENCE OF DIVINE INTIMATIONS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE SAME OBJECTS TO DIFFERENT MEN. The mulberry trees were seen by the whole army, but the difference between David and his soldiers was the difference between a revelation and no revelation. They merely heard a sound, the wind moving the tops of the trees; there was nothing strange, nothing unusual in this, but David had received an intimation as to the special meaning of this sound. They heard only the movement caused by the wind, but David recognised the presence of the Lord, who was going before them to smite the host of the Philistines. So with Saul of Tarsus. The men who were with him on his way to Damascus saw only the brightness of the light that shone round about him, but Saul saw Christ. They heard only a sound, but he heard a voice. Be thankful for revelations in spiritual matters. You must yourself be spiritual to understand spiritual revelations. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him." (*H. J. Bevis.*) *Waiting for a sign*:—Our victory was not sufficient to establish the security of the newly-founded city;—the enemy returned and threatened a renewed attack. The devout king has not lost faith in God, and again inquires of the Lord. Before dismissing the history, it will be well for us to profit by the example of the godly monarch, and to adopt the rule of his life as the rule of our own. That no enterprises shall be commenced—no plans or projects carried into execution—no movements made—without first consulting the will of God: seeking His approval, and placing ourselves under His guidance. "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass." I. THE SIGN VOUCHSAFED. The motives by which David was influenced in seeking a sign were laudable in the highest degree. He sought information as to the best means of encountering his enemies. Perhaps we may be disposed to think that a mode of communication with heaven, which secured so distinct a declaration of God's will, was far superior to any means which we possess of obtaining a knowledge of the path of duty. But herein we err—for each successive dispensation of God's dealing with man has been in advance of that which preceded it. And yet how often like Gideon we would lay the fleece upon the ground and ask that it may be both wet and dry;—we want to stand with Moses in the cleft of the rock while the Lord of Glory passes by and audibly proclaims His mercy;—with Elijah, on the solitudes of Horeb, we would have mighty winds and the terrors of earthquake and fire mingled with the still small voice;—with David. we could wish that the mysterious movement on the tops of the mulberry trees should remove our doubts and tell in bodily image, or visible sign, or audible voice, that God is with us. It will be profitable for us to inquire what advantages we possess under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, which are comparable with these Divine communications made to the ancient Church. "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom" (1 Cor. i. 22). They exalted the material above the spiritual. A morbid love of the wonderful as it appealed to their senses, so occupied them, that the wonder-words of Christ found no room within them. It was not evidence that they sought, but the gratification of mere idle curiosity. They were wrong at heart—and there can be no surer path to the perversion of the intellect in relation to sacred truth. The Bible deals very extensively with this tendency of men to amalgamate the spiritual and the material. In such instances as the teraphim,—which were the objects of so much solicitude on the part of Rachel,—and those kings of Judah who destroyed the idols, but did not cut down the high places and the groves,—we have indications of the cleaving of the human heart to a bodily image,—and the fear of men to commit themselves entirely to the spiritual and

the unseen. The Church of God is now under the special direction of the Holy Spirit. 1. Special manifestations God makes by means of His written Word. No logic can argue away the force of impressions made upon the mind by the words of Divine truth. Only he who has experienced the surprise caused by the unexpected adaptation to his circumstances of the "word in season" can appreciate the moral power of such occurrences as these. They lift up the depressed,—strengthen the weak,—confirm those who were wavering in the path of duty,—and strengthen the foundations of trust in God and His mercy. It is no cabalistic use of Scripture of which we speak, but a calm, deliberate, faithful employment of one of the Divinely-appointed ends of the Word. Revelation is given to us to be our guide,—our light,—our food,—and to serve countless offices of mercy in our lives. 2. Conscience is another of the means of Divine communication with men. A faculty which rightly employed brings us very near to God. All its worth, however, is to be determined by the measure of its subordination to the truth of God. A conscientious man is not a man who is infallibly right, but one who acts faithfully in accordance with his views of that which is right. Those views may be utterly distorted by a false belief, or completely enfeebled by reason of ignorance. While, then, on the one hand we may not undervalue the great importance of this vicegerent of God in man, on the other hand let us not be led astray by the pernicious belief—so popular in the present day—that conscientiousness is all that God requires of man. It is subjection to Divine truth that is the demand of the Eternal, and where this is found all the powers of the soul are brought into harmony with each other. "I must have a good conscience," said William Wilberforce. A necessity which every true Christian will value as above all earthly acquisitions. It is not indispensable to my happiness that I become rich or powerful,—much that is the object of human ambition I could surrender and feel little loss,—but a conscience void of offence is essential to my existence. A happy man is he, who knows the power of the blood of sprinkling to cleanse this mighty agency from all defilement. The astronomer should not be so solicitous to preserve his bright, clear lenses from dust,—nor the telegraphist so anxious to guard his delicate machinery from injury, as a godly man to enshrine his conscience securely from even the minutest disturbing influence. A little grit on the bearings of the locomotive will disturb the progress and safety of the hundreds of tons weight, which otherwise would be borne swiftly in the desired direction. Little causes often disturb the peace and arrest the progress of the godly. It is worthy of all the care a Christian can bestow on any object;—the cultivation of a tender conscience. A friend, the last to forsake us and the most valuable in the hour of need,—or a foe the hardest to propitiate and the most relentless in his assaults—deserves much consideration. In determining the path to be pursued, a conscience under the influence of Divine teaching will impart counsels quite as distinct as those which David gathered from "the sound of a going in the top of the mulberry trees." 3. But our Divine Lord and Master has indicated to us and promised us a source of instruction even more complete than that afforded by the Word of God or conscience,—it is the Holy Spirit. "He shall guide you into all truth." II. THE VIGILANCE ENJOINED. Perhaps like the zephyr which, oft at eventide without previous warning, seems to rise out of the thick serried ranks of ripening corn, and then laps their curled heads in its onward but gentle course, till the whole field bows gracefully, as if paying homage to the sweet breeze. Or, as when the lake, embosomed amidst the Alpine mountains, suddenly changes its glassy surface and ripple after ripple rises and spreads,—but none can tell of the wind that has ruffled its breast, whence it cometh, or whither it goeth. Thus unexpected opportunities steal over us, and say, "Bestir thyself." Whosoever the feeling of desire to draw near to God thus takes possession of the heart,—away to thy secret chamber and fan the flame till the soul is all aglow. To defer the exercise may be—probably will be—to confiscate a blessing. At what time soever an open door presents itself for usefulness to man, or for bringing glory to God—enter in,—pass on,—and do the thing to which the finger of God points, and reap the blessing He bestows. When some spiritual Philistine is in thy grasp, thou shouldest smite six or seven times: for a feeble opposition to evil only provokes its more severe hostility. No command was more frequently uttered by the Saviour than this,—"Watch." In every well-managed ship the men in the forepart are those of keenest vision and most experience; night and day

they pace the deck, one face always looking ahead, the other abaft. All around we need to keep our guard—lest coming good be missed, and coming evil takes us unawares. III. **THE PROMISE GIVEN.** "Then shall the Lord go out before thee." In like manner He went before Israel in their wanderings through the desert. He gave them not only the assurance of His protection, but the blessing also of His guidance. They had but to follow the movements of the pillar of cloud, and the waste, howling wilderness yielded them a security greater than that of thick-walled cities. Each night saw the fiery defence lighted up which shot its friendly rays round all the tents of Jacob,—but only intensified the darkness beyond the sacred enclosure. Many a feeble heart became strong by a glance at the symbol of the Divine presence. This was the explanation of their surprising victories over superior armies, and of their defeat and expulsion of the Canaanitish kings. (W. G. Lewis.) *The moment of opportunity*:—I. "**WHEN,**" OR **THE DIVINE INTIMATION.** "When thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry-trees." 1. They were to wait for God's leading. 2. They were promised an intimation of God's leading. The trees were to be moved at the top. They could only be reached from above. It was to be God's signal. The whole scene is quite within the scope of imagination. They are concealed in the thicket. They are waiting for the sign. What different tempers! What need of patience! How slowly dragged the minutes. Zeal longed to break from concealment and dash upon the foe. Unbelief wondered if the leaves would ever stir at all. Fear imagined they might be discovered by the enemy before the intimation of God's presence was given. Presumption thought a favourable opportunity had come, and that it was a mistake not to seize it. Faith counselled patience continually, while Hope cheered them with bright songs—until at last the promised token was given, the trees whispered musically of the Divine presence, and bursting from their ambush they swept as a torrent on the foe. God is giving constantly intimations of His presence. We are looking for a revival. Have we any token of the Lord's will in the matter? The Divine breath of the Spirit already seems stirring the leaves. The sense of quivering expectancy which one finds abroad. The unity of desire for a more abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The increased spirit of prayer which has been manifested. II. "**THEN!**" OR **HUMAN ACTIVITY.** "Then shalt thou bestir thyself." 1. God expects man to do his part. There is always a human element in these movements. God uses instrumentalities, not because He is obliged to, but because He desires and chooses to do so. He would teach us the need of effort. 2. God expects man to do his part at the right moment. "When . . . then." When God gives the signal, when the trees sway in the heavenly gale—strike then—that is the moment of destiny.

"There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows, and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat;
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures."

3. God expects man to do his part with utmost vigour. "Then bestir thyself." This effort must be whole hearted and heavy handed. Because God promised His help they were not to stint their labour. To the fullest of their powers they were to exert themselves. III. "**FOR,**" OR **THE ASSURED VICTORY.** "For then shall the Lord go out before thee to smite the Philistines." The certain result is victory. This must be the result, for all the conditions necessary to secure it are fulfilled. God is leading, man is working: natural conclusion—victory. It must come! (W. L. Mackenzie.) *The Lord leading; David following*:—I. **A PRIME NECESSITY PROMISED.** "Then shall the Lord go out before thee." This was a necessity to David, for he had long ago learned that all his dependence must be upon God. It is also a necessity to us. What we want just now especially is for the Lord to go before us in our contemplated mission. In what way? 1. The Holy Spirit must go before us to prepare the minds of the people. When our Lord came into the world, the world was prepared for His coming. There had been certain things done, all over the globe, that made the time of His coming the best time at which He could come. But

it has also been noticed by our missionaries, especially in the South Sea islands, that before they arrived there, certain changes had taken place, and certain movements in the minds of the people, that made the missionaries feel that they had come just in the nick of time. God had gone before them in providence and in grace, making ready a people prepared for the Word. You cannot tell how much the conversion of sinners is due to antecedent action on the part of God before the saving moment came. There is a fire, and you say that the fire was made when the match was struck, and applied to the wood. Well, that is true; but long before that moment, he who split the wood and he who made the match had something to do with preparing the fire, had they not? Where had been your fire if the wood had not been dried, and ready for the kindling, and deftly laid in its place? And where had been your light if it had not been for the phosphorus, and all else that was used to make the match? So does the Lord prepare for the fire of holy service. God is at work in London as well as elsewhere. God is at work in providence, and with tender touches here and there He is making men thoughtful, constraining them to feel, in a word, making them ready before the time of the preaching comes. 2. And then the Holy Spirit must go before us to prepare the preacher. Preachers may think themselves thoroughly prepared for their work; but the smallest thing may put them out,—some little disarrangement of their dress, something in the pulpit not quite right, or somebody dropping an umbrella in the aisle, or some one person in the congregation who does not seem in the least impressed. Oh, shame upon us that we, who have such a message to deliver, should be affected by such very little things! Yet preachers are so affected, and often they cannot help it. II. A CONSEQUENT ACTION COMMANDED: "Then thou shalt bestir thyself: for then shall the Lord go out before thee." 1. God could do without us if he chose to do so; but God is pleased not to do without us. What a mercy it is that God deigns to use us! 2. When will some of our brethren learn the fact that God's working is not a reason for our sitting still? It is not written, "The Lord will go before thee, and then thou shalt rest," or, "The Lord shall go before thee, and then thou shalt sit still, and be grateful." No, no; "Then thou shalt bestir thyself." Our forefathers, of the olden time, who went everywhere preaching the Word, the Calvinists of France who, in the Desert and wherever they went, hazarded their lives unto the death, the Huguenots, who could bravely do and dare and die for Christ, were, to a man, believers in these principles, which are supposed by some to send men to sleep. The most energetic Christianity that ever was upon the face of the earth has been just this form of Christianity; and therefore it cannot possibly be that the doctrine rightly used will encourage idleness or sloth. How can it? If you yourself were told to-night, "Proceed on such an errand, and your God will go with you," would that be a reason why you should not go? If you were bidden to fight a battle, and you were told, "God will be with you in the battle," would the fact that God would be with you, and would win the victory, be a reason why you should not fight? You must be made of strange material if that were to be the result of the promise of victory and the assurance of the Divine presence. Nothing makes men labour so energetically as the expectation of success; and the certainty of succeeding, because God is with them, nerves their arm, and makes them do what otherwise would be impossible. III. A HOPEFUL SIGN AFFORDED. Whether these were mulberry trees or balsams, I do not know; it is very difficult to discover what trees they were. It does not matter much, but David was to get round to the back of the Philistines instead of attacking them in front, and he was to lie quietly in ambush till he heard a rustling in the tops of the trees when there was no wind, as though they were trodden by the feet of angels, and God's host was hurrying to the fray. Perhaps this sign, whilst it was intended to encourage David and his people, was meant to intimidate the Philistines. They would say one to another, "What is that noise? What is that rustling? There is a sound of something travelling along the tops of yonder trees. There is not a breath of wind, but you can hear the leaves moving. Listen to the rustling; something strange is happening." The Philistines were most superstitious, and would be ready very speedily to take to their heels. However, whatever it was to them, to David it was to be the signal for attacking them. Christians should always be smiting the Philistines of sin; but there are certain times that call us to unusual action. And what are they? 1. To me they are when we see earnestness among God's

people. 2. Again, it is a hopeful sign, when God gives us useful preachers. Oh, what a blessing a true gospel minister is! There was no better proof of the Reformation having begun than when Luther began to speak out against the abominations of Rome, and Zwingli lifted up his voice, and Farel proclaimed the old faith, and Calvin came forth to declare the truth of God, and Beza and multitudes of others gave their testimony. These were the birds that sang because the sun was rising; and when God gives us useful preachers, they are among the signs that he is coming near us to bless the people. 3. Well, when the preachers are there, with a praying people at their back, then, when you see crowds come together to hear the Word, do you not think that there is the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees? "That is right, Mr. Spurgeon," says one; "stir them up." I did not say "them." I said, and my text says, "Then thou shalt bestir thyself." It is all very well to say, "I like to see an earnest church." So do I; but it is better to have every member zealously seeking the souls of others, for that is the way to have an earnest church, and that is the way the blessing comes. David, you must bestir yourself; then the soldiers who are with you will catch the fire from their leader, and they will bestir themselves. IV. A SOME RESULT FOLLOWING. The result was all that David could have expected, and more. Obedient action secured it. David simply "did so, as the Lord had commanded him." You do not hear much more about the Philistines after this. That final stroke had crushed them down. But David did so, not merely thought about it. He probably thought; but he also "did so." He came to the practical point. If I habitually look after others, and speak individually to them about their souls, and if I bring the gospel before them, either in a printed form or viva voce, if I keep on testifying of Christ to everybody who will give me a hearing, I shall have conversions as surely as I am a living man; it cannot be otherwise. If you continue looking to God to go before you, and follow after Him with that part of the work which He has put into your hands, and which is a great privilege to be engaged in, you shall not labour in vain, nor spend your strength for nought. "Paul planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Signal for advance*.—I. THAT THE CAUSE OF GOD HATH NOT MADE UNOPPOSED PROGRESS IN THE WORLD. Here we have a pattern and parable of the conflict. The powers of darkness may change their name and front, but their antipathy remains undiminished to this hour. The Christian, like the Hebrew Church, is militant in its character, needs ever to be on the alert, and fully equipped to repulse attacks made upon the city of God, and make aggressions upon the city of Satan. The Philistines are upon us. II. THAT GOD ALWAYS HAS MORE FORCES ON HIS SIDE AND AT HIS COMMAND THAN APPEAR VISIBLE TO HUMAN SIGHT. The flowing tide of Divine energy is with the Church of God, and "if God be for us who can be against?" III. THAT GOD EXPECTS THE CO-OPERATION OF HUMAN AGENCY WITH HIS UNSEEN FORCES IN THE VICTORIES AND PROGRESS OF HIS KINGDOM. Those who are in close and conscious touch with God will hear sounds unheard by the ears of the world, and will feel that more is with them than all who can be against them. Conclusion: 1. Enlist under the banner of the cross. 2. Equip for the battle of the Lord. 3. Look for the signal to advance. 4. March in the strength of God. 5. Continue to the end. Then the palm of victory and the fadeless crown. (F. W. Brown.) *The sound in the mulberry trees*.—Let us learn from David to take no steps without God. The last time you moved, or went into another business, or changed your situation in life, you asked God's help, and then did it, and you were blessed in the doing of it. You have been up to this time a successful man, you have always sought God, but do not think that the stream of providence necessarily runs in a continuous current; remember, you may to-morrow without seeking God's advice venture upon a step which you will regret but once, and that will be until you die. There are certain signs which ought to be indications to us of certain duties. I shall use the verse in this way. First, there are certain special duties, which are not duties to everybody, but only to some people. If we wish to know whether we are to perform these duties, we must seek signs concerning them, and not go and rush into a duty to which we are not called, unless we get a sign, even as David got the rustling among the mulberry leaves. And then I should use it, in the second place, thus. There are certain duties which are common to all of us; but when we see some signs of God's Holy Spirit being in motion, or some other signs, these are seasons when

we ought to be more than ever active, and more than ever earnest in the service of our Master. I. First, then, in regard to SPECIAL DUTIES. I shall confine myself to one. The office of the ministry is a special duty. I believe the office of the ministry, though not like that of the priesthood, as to any particular sanctity, or any particular power that we possess, is yet like the priesthood in this—that no man ought to take it to himself, save he that is called thereunto, as WAS ARDRI. II. But now I come to something more practical to many of you; you do not profess to be called to preach; THERE ARE CERTAIN DUTIES BELONGING TO ALL CHRISTIANS WHICH ARE TO BE SPECIALLY PRACTISED AT SPECIAL SEASONS. 1. Concerning the Christian church at large. The whole of the Christian church should be very prayerful, always seeking the unction of the Holy One to rest upon their hearts, that the kingdom of Christ may come and that His will be done on earth even as it is in heaven; but there are times when God seems to favour Zion, when there are great movements made in the church, when revivals are commenced, when men are raised up whom God blesses; that ought to be to you like "a sound of going in the tops of the mulberry trees." 2. The same truth holds good of any particular congregation. One Sabbath-day the minister preached with great unction; God clothed him with power, he seemed like John the Baptist in the wilderness, crying, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." He spake with all the earnestness of a man who was about to die; he so spake that the people trembled, a visible thrill passed through the audience. Men and women rose up from the sermon, saying, "Surely, God was in this place, and we have felt His presence." What ought a Christian man to say, as he retires from the house of God? He should say, "I have heard this day the sound of the leaves of the mulberry trees." I saw the people earnest; I marked the minister speaking mightily, God having touched his lips with a live coal from off the altar. I saw the tear in every eye; I saw the deep, wrapt attention, of many who were careless. There were some young people there who looked as though they had been impressed; their countenances seemed to show that there was a work doing. Now, what should I do? The first thing I will do is, I will bestir myself. But how shall I do it? Why, I will go home this day, and I will wrestle in prayer more earnestly than I have been wont to do that God will bless the minister and multiply the church. The same I might say of any time of general sickness, or any time of plague or cholera, or sudden death. There are times when the cholera is raging through our streets: the people are all trembling, they are afraid to die; mark, that is the "sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees." It is the business of you and me to bestir ourselves, when people are by any means led to serious thought. "Now," said the Puritans, during the great plague of London, when the hiring parish priests had fled from their churches—"now is our time to preach." And all through that terrible time, when the carts, filled with the dead, went through the streets overgrown with grass, these strong-minded Puritans occupied the pulpits, and boldly preached the word of God. That is what we should do whenever we see a time more favourable than another for telling sinners of the wrath to come. Let us seize it, just as the merchant looks out for every turn of the market, for every rise and every fall; just as the farmer looks out for a good season for sowing or planting or mowing. Let us look out for the best times for seeking to do good. Let us plough deep while sluggards sleep, and let us labour as much as possible in the best season, to make hay while the sun is shining, and serve our God when we hear the "sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees." 3. Keep the same idea in view in regard to every individual you meet with. 4. I must expressly make an appeal to you in regard to your own children. The tender plant, if it be of God, it is sure to grow; but let me take care to be the instrument of fostering it, and let me take my boy aside, and say unto him, "Well, my son, have you learnt something of the evil of sin?" And if he says yes, and I find he has a little hope and faith, though it may be rather a superficial work let me not despise it, but let me remember, I was once grass in the blade, and though grass in the ear now, I would never have been grass in the ear if I had not been grass in the blade. I must not despise the blade, because they are not ears: I must not kill the lambs, because they are not sheep; for where would my sheep come from, if I killed all the lambs? I must not despise the weakest of the saints, for where should I get the advanced saints from, if I put weak ones out of the covenant,

CHAPTER VI.

Vers. 1—23. **And David arose and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah to bring up from thence the Ark of God.**—*The Ark brought to Zion:*—In order to understand the full meaning of this transaction, it will be necessary to recall what the Ark was, and what was the occasion due the significance of its removal from Shiloh, and its long-continued absence from the sanctuary from that time forward. Immediately after the formal ratification of the covenant between Jehovah and Israel at Mount Sinai (Exod. 24), by sacrifice and the sacred meal partaken of by the representatives of the people in God's immediate presence, Moses was directed to come up into the mountain, and receive God's covenants. And the first direction given was for the preparation of a sanctuary that Jehovah might dwell among them (25. 8); and the first thing appointed to be made for this purpose was the Ark (v. 10) with its mercy-seat (v. 17), of which the Lord said to Moses (v. 22), "There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat, from between the two cherubim, which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel." Nothing had as yet been said about the tabernacle, or the altar, or sacrifices, or the priesthood. All this was secondary and subordinate to the first essential matter, which was the presence of God Himself as represented and pledged in the Ark. The tabernacle was to contain the Ark, and it was the house of God, not merely because it was dedicated to sacred uses, but because He who had graciously linked his presence with the Ark dwelt in it. When, therefore, the ungodliness of Israel and the gross iniquity of Eli's sons, the priests, was punished by suffering the Ark of God to be captured by the Philistines, this was an event of the direst significance. It was not merely that in the adverse fortunes of war a precious and highly valued treasure had been lost, an ancient and sacred relic which was devoutly prized, and had hitherto been sacredly guarded. It was an absolutely irreparable loss. When the Ark was taken away, Jehovah himself was gone. The tabernacle was thenceforward an empty shell; the priests ministered before a vacant shrine. No new ark was made to take the place of the old. This was impossible. Another chest might have been made of the same pattern and dimensions, and it could have been similarly overlaid with gold. Like figures of golden cherubim could not have been set above it. It might have been exactly reproduced in material and form; but this newly framed model would not have been **THE ARK**. What the Ark was in Israel's esteem, and what the sacred historian believed it to be, is sufficiently apparent from his narrative. God's presence is represented to be as firmly linked with it by the statements of the history as by the enactments of the law. This long neglect of the Ark from the time of Eli to that of David, from its removal from Shiloh to its transportation to Zion, is utterly unaccountable but upon one hypothesis, and that is the explanation afforded by the sacred writers themselves, namely, that the Lord had for the time withdrawn the visible manifestation from Israel. The breach between Jehovah and his people, created by their transgressions, had not yet been healed. And until this was done, He would not again establish His dwelling in the midst of them. It cannot be because Samuel was ignorant of the existence of the Ark, or of its sacred significance. For he was brought up in the temple at Shiloh, where the Ark of God was, and there it was within its hallowed precincts that Jehovah had first revealed Himself to him, and foretold the desolation of the sanctuary because of the iniquity practised there by the degenerate priests. It cannot be because the Levitical law was not yet in existence, and the sacredness with which it surrounded the Ark was not yet popularly ascribed to it. For the facts already above recited demonstrate the contrary. It is not because the Ark was slightly regarded, that it was for so long a time suffered to slumber in silence, but for precisely the opposite reason. Now, however, the long term of the Lord's displeasure is ended, and the way is prepared for Him to return with His power and grace to His people, to renew the symbol of His presence, and to fix His residence again in the midst of them. The alienation of Jehovah was removed. And David's first care, upon his being established as king over all Israel, in which he was most heartily seconded by the people at large, was to have the Ark brought

and tell them they are not the children of God? Christian, in regard to yourself there is a great truth here. Be sure you have the sail up. Do not miss the gale, for want of preparation for it. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *God's signals*:—God signals to His people to take certain steps at certain times. Then it is their duty to bestir themselves. When the Deluge was about to descend upon a guilty world, Noah was commanded to bestir himself and prepare an ark for the saving of his household. When the fire-shower was coming upon Sodom, Lot was laid hold of by God's angels and urged to escape for his life. When the children of Israel were in peril of being overwhelmed by the Egyptians, God signalled to them the order to advance, and by a majestic pillar of cloud led them through the parted sea. All sacred history is studded with illustrations of this truth. Martin Luther, discovering the "open secret" in the convent Bible at Erfurth, and hammering his theses on the church door of Wittenburg; the young Wesleys, awakened at Oxford and sent out to awaken slumbering Britain, were simply God's agents bestirring themselves at the Divine signal. (*T. L. Cuyler, D.D.*)

Ver. 25. And David did so.—*Marching orders*:—Each day read your chapter or passage with the idea that you are receiving your marching orders; that there is some new service to render, some new duty to perform, some new virtue to acquire. Let the attitude of your soul be indicated by Samuel's words, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." When you hear, do! (*F. B. Meyer.*) *Do present duty*:—Procrastination is reckoned among the most venial of our faults, and sits so lightly on our minds that we scarcely apologise for it. But who can assure us that had not the assistance we had resolved to give to one friend in distress, or the advice to another under temptation to-day been delayed, and from mere sloth and indolence put off till to-morrow, it might not have preserved the fortune of the one, or saved the soul of the other? It is not enough that we perform duties; we must perform them at the right time. We must do the duty of every day in its own season. Every day has its own imperious duties; we must not depend upon to-day for fulfilling those which we neglected yesterday, for to-day might not have been granted to us. To-morrow will be equally peremptory in its demands, and the succeeding day, if we live to see it, will be ready with its proper duties. (*Hannah More.*) *The grasp of opportunity*:—Writing an article on Social Economy especially in reference to wages and industrial progress, Professor Atkinson says: "The man who had the shrewdness and capacity to seize the opportunity afforded by recent science and invention had made progress, wealth, success. While from him who had not the foresight or mental aptitude to adjust himself to the new conditions, had been taken away even the opportunity for common labour which he enjoyed before." *Individual activity*:—Whatever noble work on earth is to be done you must do it yourself. If you leave it to others it will never be done. Do it yourself. Put away that poorest of poor spirits which would treat good wishes or benedictions, or even prayers, as substitutes for personal service. (*Bishop Welldon.*) *Doing your duty*:—There is one lesson which all agree that the Duke of Wellington taught, and which we are specially desirous of pointing out, viz., that throughout life, he made it a rule to do whatever he saw to be his duty at the time—a more rare and valuable quality than many suppose, unless they remember that it was a rule which he applied to small things as well as great, to the answering of a letter, and to the movement of an entire army. While he notoriously confined himself strictly to his own duties, anything and everything was regarded as a duty when laid upon him by legitimate and competent authority. It was no question for him whether the thing were too small for his powers or his dignity; he was required to do it, he could do it, and he did it—did it with all his might, whatever it was. Great as he was, he has in this left an example to the least, as well as to the greatest—to the young as well as to the old. (*Great Thoughts.*)

to his capital, and set up there in an appropriate sanctuary, so that he might reign under the shadow of the Almighty: Jehovah the real king of Israel, and David ruling simply as his vicegerent. Jehovah thus returns once more to Israel, and takes up his abode in the midst of his people. The return of the Ark is not merely the bringing forth into notice of a long-neglected and sacred vessel belonging to the sanctuary: it is the coming back of God Himself to a people whom he had temporarily forsaken. (H. H. Green, D.D., LL.D.) *The ark brought up to Jerusalem*:—1. In bringing up the ark to Jerusalem, the king showed a commendable desire to interest the whole nation, as far as possible, in the solemn service. A handful might have sufficed for all the actual labour that was required; but thousands of the chief people were summoned to be present, and that on the principle both of rendering due honour to God, and of conferring a benefit on the people. It is not a handful of professional men only that should be called to take a part in the service of religion; Christian people generally should have an interest in the ark of God; and other things being equal, that church which interests the greatest number of people and attracts them to active work will not only do most for advancing God's kingdom, but will enjoy most of inward life and prosperity. 2. The joyful spirit in which this service was performed by David and his people is another interesting feature of the transaction. God enthroned on Zion, God in the midst of Jerusalem—what happier or more thrilling thought was it possible to cherish? God, the sun and shield of the nation, occupying for His residence the one fitting place in all the land, and sending over Jerusalem and over all the country emanations of love and grace, full of blessing for all that feared His name. 3. But the best of services may be gone about in a faulty way. There may be some criminal neglect of God's will that, like the dead fly in the apothecary's pot of ointment, causes the perfume to send forth a stinking savour. And so it was on this occasion. What induced them to follow the example of the Philistines rather than the directions of Moses, we do not know, and can hardly conjecture. It does not appear to have been a mere oversight. It has something of a deliberate plan about it, as if the law given in the wilderness were now obsolete, and in so small a matter any method might be chosen that the people liked. It may have been an error of inadvertence. But that somewhere there was a serious offence is evident from the punishment with which it was visited (1 Chron. xv. 13). The great lesson for all time is to beware of following our own devices in the worship of God when we have clear instructions in His word how we are to worship Him. This lamentable event put a sudden end to the joyful service. It may happen to you that some Christian undertaking on which you have entered with great zeal and ardour, and without any sunrise that you are not doing right, is not blessed, but meets with some rough shock, that places you in a very painful position. You are attacked with unexampled rudeness, sinister aims are laid to your charge, and the purpose of your undertaking is declared to be to hurt and discourage those whom you were bound to aid. The shock is so violent and so rude that for a time you cannot understand it. But when you go into your closet, and think of the matter as permitted by God, you wonder still more why God should thwart you in your desire to do good. Rebellious feelings hover about your heart that if God is to treat you in this way, it were better to abandon His service altogether. But surely no such feeling is ever to find a settled place in your heart. You may be sure that the rebuff which God has permitted you to encounter is meant as a trial of your faith and humility. 4. The Lord does not forsake His people, nor leave them for ever under a cloud. It was not long before the downcast heart of David was reassured. When the ark had been left at the house of Obed-edom, Obed-edom was not afraid to take it in. Its presence in other places had hitherto been the signal for disaster and death. It is not so much God's ark in our time and country that needs a lodging, but God's servants, God's poor, sometimes persecuted fugitives flying from an oppressor, very often pious men in foreign countries labouring under infinite discouragements to serve God. The Obed-edom who takes them in will not suffer. Again, then, King David, encouraged by the experience of Obed-edom, goes forth in royal state to bring up the ark to Jerusalem. The error that had proved so fatal was now rectified. The check he had sustained three months before had only dammed up his feelings, and they rolled out now with all the greater volume. His soul was stirred by the thought that the symbol of God-

head was now to be placed in his own city, close to his own dwelling; that it was to find an abiding place of rest in the heart of the kingdom, on the heights where Melchizedek had reigned, close to where he had blessed Abraham, and which God had destined as His own dwelling from the foundations of the world. He sacrificed, he played, he sang, he leapt and danced before the Lord, with all his might; he made a display of enthusiasm which the cold-hearted Michal, as she could not understand it nor sympathise with it, had the folly to despise and the cruelty to ridicule. 5. A few other circumstances are briefly noticed in connection with the close of the service, when the ark had been solemnly enshrined within the tabernacle that David had reared for it on Mount Zion. (1) The first is that "David offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings before the Lord." The burnt-offering was a fresh memorial of sin, and therefore a fresh confession that even in connection with that very holy service there were sins to be confessed, atoned for, and forgiven. (2) Again, we find David after the offering of the burnt-offerings and the peace-offerings "blessing the people in the name of the Lord of hosts." This was something more than merely expressing a wish or offering a prayer for their welfare. It was like the benediction with which we close our public services. The benediction is more than a prayer. The servant of the Lord appears in the attitude of dropping on the heads of the people the blessing which he invokes. Not that he or any man can convey heavenly blessings to a people that do not by faith appropriate them and rejoice in them. But the act of benediction implies this: These blessings are yours if you will only have them. The last act of public worship is a great encouragement to faith. When the peace of God that passeth all understanding, or the blessing of God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, or the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost are invoked over your heads, it is to assure you that if you will but accept of them through Jesus Christ, these great blessings are actually yours. (3) The third thing David did was to deal to every one of Israel, both man and woman, a loaf of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine. It was a characteristic act, worthy of a bountiful and generous nature like David's. Yet Jesus did not abstain on some rare occasions from feeding the multitude, though the act was liable to abuse. The example both of David and of Jesus may show us that though not habitually, yet occasionally, it is both right and fitting that religious service should be associated with a simple repast. 4. The last thing recorded of David is that he returned to bless his house. The cares of the State and the public duties of the day were not allowed to interfere with his domestic duty. It is plain from this that, amid all the imperfections of his motley household, he could not allow his children to grow up ignorant of God, thus dealing a rebuke to all who, outdoing the very heathen in heathenism, have houses without an altar and without a God. (W. G. Blaikie, D.D.) *The return of the ark*:—1. THE REMOVAL OF THE ARK FROM BAALÉ TO JERUSALEM. This period was the very prime of David's life, and power, and glory, and in it he undertakes the great business of confirming the worship of God. We can easily see that this forwardness to promote religion was his duty, as he was king of a religious state; yet it is in that very form and light that his conduct speaks to us with the highest authority. To rulers and magistrates, kings and ministers, what a lesson does it afford, what a salutary counsel! Men are religious beings, endowed with the faculty of religion, which other inferior animals possess not; their duty is, in every relation in life, religion. In authority, the main object should be to legislate for the true welfare of the subject, which is connected with religion alone. If rulers and legislators, on any pretext whatever, uphold and pension idolatry in a state, or indulge the tendency of the multitude to idolatry, they decidedly labour the ruin of the subject, here and hereafter, as well as their own. II. DAVID'S GRIEVOUS OFFENCES. The prescribed mode of transportation was wholly neglected. Men there are well disposed to serve God, and give Him the best of all their property, of life, and love, and reason, and substance, who hasten indiscreetly and illegitimately to the call of religion. Some will serve God, provided one article of the faith may be omitted. Others provided one favourite sin be allowed. Others, provided that their own fancy, their own wild conceptions of religion, their poetical deism, and poetical philanthropy, be taken for religion. And they fail! How could it be otherwise, when God did never call any man to a defective creed, or defective morality, or to despise His own rule of religion. And they are offended when some judgment has fallen in the

very highway of their service, and declared it void and rejected! Such a judgment as distress, or death, or spiritual weakness, or ignominy, and the increase of folly rather than of religion. By these things God may declare our service dishonoured and unacceptable. The temporary sojourn of the ark brought numerous blessings on the house of Obed Edom. Religion—scriptural religion—is the means of solid prosperity. The time was short which was here allowed for the proof of a special providence in behalf of those who kept the ark of God within their walls, yet it was enough to confer blessings of health, and wealth, and honour. And if our time be limited but to one hour from this moment forth, and if we can carry with us, not the ark of the law, but the ark of mercy—the covenant salvation of Jesus Christ, by faith, who can set a limit to the blessings which shall accrue to us? Loved of Christ, what can harm us? cherished of God, what can hurt our peace, or damage our fortunes? We are all candidates for earthly welfare; believe it, then, the only and true secret of success, is in the sincere worship of the Saviour, as God of Gods, and Lord of all Lords. III. During the progress of the successful attempt to set up the ark of the Lord at Jerusalem, DAVID TOOK A PROMINENT PART, as on the former occasion, in the whole proceeding. To all men this public homage speaks alike: it calls on us to do personal service. We may not transfer to any fellow-creature the performance of religious duties. As ordinary men, we do too little, when we transfer to others the conveyance of our patronage or bounty. We should with our own hands, when possible, feed the hungry, and refresh the weary, and clothe the naked; we should with our own voices, and present souls, and present sympathy, soothe the afflicted. IV. THE KING'S RETURN TO BLESS HIS HOUSEHOLD. The king of Israel, it is true, forsakes the public scene, but it is only "to return and bless his household," to rehearse the ceremony of the day, explain its importance, impress the value of religion on all his dependants, and seal the blessings of public worship upon his family, by domestic piety. In this act we recognise these three particulars—1. The personal maintenance of God's honour before His family. 2. His anxiety to communicate the blessings of religion to all the souls within His influence. 3. The solemn dedication of those souls to the honour and worship of the Supreme Being. V. THE BOLDNESS, THE NOBLENES AND DIGNITY OF DAVID'S CONDUCT throughout the events of that great day, when the ark rested within the walls of the holy city. A man shall find his foe ever in his own household; or if not, his religion will be arraigned, and his conduct reprehended with the keenest censures, by his associates, and his very piety denounced as mean and grovelling, dishonourable and injurious. (C. M. Fleury, A.M.) *Care of the ark*:—In the second verse we read "David arose." A new passion seized him; a sudden enthusiasm stirred him like a great wind from heaven. We cannot account for these inspirations, excitements, new consecrations, and purposes in life. Sometimes we say, Why did not men rise before? The answer is, They could not: the rising of men is not in themselves. There is a centre, there is a Throne, there is a living King, and in connection with these great central sovereignties and dominions there is a mysterious ever-operating Spirit that will not fall under our calculations and laws and predictions as to his operations in the human mind and on the human heart. 2. David arose to bring the ark to the metropolis. This idea is not without sublimity, and not without practical bearing upon our own nationality and own religious civilization. Be strong in the high places; see that the throne is within the operation of the mysterious influence of the altar; let there be no great distance between royalty of an earthly kind and service of a spiritual sort. Let every metropolis be the best city in the whole land. It ought to be. 3. How is the ark to be moved? We read, in the third verse, that "they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah." There is a touch of veneration about this arrangement. The cart was "new." In the olden times and in eastern cities great store was set by new things: the colt upon which Jesus rode was to be one whereon never man sat; the tomb in which he was laid was a tomb in which never man was laid before. There used to be a kind of pagan veneration for new things. Samson said, If you bind me with new withs—they must be new—then I shall be weak as other men. That experiment having failed, he added, If you bind me with new ropes—they must be new—"never occupied" is the old English word—never occupied before, then my strength will be as the strength of other men. So we find here that the cart on which the ark was to be carried is a new cart. Where was the law? A dead

letter. We can outlive our laws. We can forget the Bible. We can so accuse ourselves to policies and moralities of our own invention and construction as to forget the law of Sinai, the commandments of the living God. Oxen and waggons they were to have none. When the ark was to be carried it was to be carried by living men, and they were to be proud of the crowning honour of having part or lot in bearing the ark of the Lord. Let us not look at such details as little things, and suppose that it matters nothing whether the ark is carried in one way or another, provided that it is brought to its proper destination. There is nothing trifling in the kingdom of Heaven; there is nothing trifling in human life, when we really understand it. 4. "And when they came to Nachon's threshing-floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it" (v. 6.) Did the oxen turn aside naturally because of the threshing-floor? Had not they, too, come home? Did they not betray natural impatience when they approached the place where food was kept? The ark shaking under the movement of the oxen, Uzzah, who was undoubtedly a Levite, put forth his hand and took hold of the ark in well-meant purpose. But he was killed (v. 7). The ark is never in danger. That throne needs no buttress of our building. What share have we in keeping the stars in their places? How much of the security of the constellations is owing to our pre-arrangement, forethought, and devotion? God will take care of His own ark, and His own kingdom and truth in the world. 5. David got a new view of Divine Providence. He did not know that God was so careful, so critically particular. Such fear has a great place in spiritual education. The culture of the soul is not to be perfected by instruments of music, but by a holy fear. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The ark brought to Zion:—I. DAVID'S GOOD WORK HINDERED BY WAR.* Manifold are the evils of war. What an arrest on industry! What wrecked homes! What ruined harvests! What slaughtered lives! What a legacy of oppressive taxation, and the worse legacy of revengeful feeling! Manifold evils! This, too, among them: good works, national reformation, widened freedom, education, religion arrested. Neglected is the tabernacle of God when the war-tents are pitched, and drowned in battle-cries are the songs of Zion. We know nothing of this; but it is well to think of it. The calm Sabbath air is unvexed by the war trumpet. The church doors are open to us, and the bells peal out their invitation to worship. Wars, rumours of wars, are not shocking the sweet, refreshing rest out of our Sabbath hours. Peace is ours. Not always so in this land. Churches were closed, or turned into barracks or military hospitals. And though this has been unknown in recent England, it has been known in recent days in other lands. Here—let us recognise it thankfully—God has blessed His people with peace. David's conflicts were triumphs; for he carefully "enquired of the Lord." He went not forth till bidden, and did as bidden. What battles had never been fought if men, statesmen, kings, had done as David did. Voice of seer, mystic oracle we need not. "We have the word of prophecy made more sure; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place." This will guide men out of their self-seekings and ambitions and incipient quarrels into peace. Let us, each of us, be guided by it in our dealings one with another, and then, though un-influential seem our place in the great world's life, we shall yet be helping to make war one of the barbarisms of the past—one of the happily-unknown horrors of the golden year that appears so far away, but is to come. II. *DAVID'S GOOD WORK, WHEN BEGUN, ARRESTED BY IRREVERENCE.* The glories of the ark had largely passed into history. Still, it was God's symbol;—still to be treated with reverence; still—the command not having been abrogated—to be untouched by human hand. Let all this day, then, beware. Amid this tumultuous gladness let there be reverence. The monetary instruction of that death is for us as well as for David and his people. It is for all, and especially for those who bear a prominent part in Divine work and worship. "We mock God when we do not fear." Irreverence! I speak not of the irreverence of the age; parents to children; subjects to governors; literature to religion; science to revelation. Think of irreverence in the Church! We need not go beyond ourselves. The preacher needs to watch. He may not "handle the Word of God deceitfully," but he may lightly; so familiar with it as to lose sight of Whose Word it is. In any department of Christian labour we must watch lest as preacher, teacher, visitor, we forget to whom we are speaking. Humble folk, it may be, poor children, dull, impatient patients. But who are these? For them, the most repellent of them, Christ died. Each dowered with the transcendent possession

of a soul outvaluing the world though it were "one entire and perfect chrysolite." Each through all the obscurity, and toil, and weariness of the life here, a pilgrim to eternity. So in Divine worship. As we enter the sanctuary, let it be to us "none other but the house of God," not by our wandering, grasping thoughts degraded into tent of folly or den of thieves. As we open the Bible, familiar to us as was the ark to Uzzah, let us treat it with reverence, and "hear with meekness" the messages of this "Book of God, this God of Books." As we sing, let us "make melody in our hearts to the Lord," or the sweetest music will be sin. As we pray, let us only utter the heart—our words "the expiration of the thing inspired." Amid all the exercises of public worship and the worship of the home, "let more of reverence in us dwell." Uzzah "being dead yet speaketh."

III. DAVID'S GOOD WORK JOYFULLY ACCOMPLISHED. For three months the ark continued in the house of Obed-Edom bringing in unrecorded but manifest ways much blessing on the household of its careful and pious keeper. By this David was encouraged to prepare for its final removal to Jerusalem. He has learnt some lessons from Uzzah's death. Everything must be done with circumspection, "after the due order" (1 Chron. xv. 2—13), which had been strangely overlooked before. It was a transcendent hour. We can know little all it meant to David—how many hopes were being crowned: all it meant to Israel, with whom was opening a new epoch in their great history. They had been long falling from God—the very symbol of His presence neglected. But now had come times of peace; a God-chosen, God-approved man was their king. He would remind them that they were God's people, that ark the centre of their worship in their new capital would check that local idolatry to which they were so prone; would, gathering them together to one place for their holy feasts, bind them into a national and, infinitely more important, a religious unity. That ark, shrined in the sanctuary of their sanctuary, no idol in it, witnessed to the spirituality of God. We can rejoice in One whose Name is Immanuel, "God with us." Round Him Christian people gather for worship, and through Him have access with boldness to the Father. By Him God is declared to us, declared in a life of human suffering, yet Divine purity; in a life that "went about doing good," in a death that was died for the sins of the world. More than even ark with its shekinah glory could be to Israel, is Christ to us. A glory seen to-day not in material temple; not in any "house made with hands," but in the transformation, ennobling of human spirit and life. In every saved man behold the glory of God in Jesus Christ. We know that God is among us for such work is Divine. (*G. F. Coster.*) *David restoring the ark:*—1. At last God accomplished the long cherished desire of His servant's heart—and David became the head and governor of Israel. The capture of the citadel of Zion, which till then had never been wrested from the foe, made him the virtual founder of Jerusalem; and undisputed supremacy began for the first time to attach to the people of God. But of what value is strength, unless thoroughly subjected to God, and made the servant of His order, and of His truth? David well knew that Israel could only regulate others for blessing, in proportion as they themselves were regulated by God. To be legislated for by God was the distinctive privilege of Israel: it was theirs to say of Him, "my King as well as my God." What, then, was the condition in which David found the order of Israel? Was Israel really subject to the arrangements of God? The condition of Israel's order was mainly determined by their relation to the Tabernacle and its vessels, especially their relation to the Ark of the Covenant. When Israel were in their journeys in the wilderness, the Ark preceded them. When the Ark rested, its proper place was the Tabernacle. It is true, indeed, that the presence of the Ark anywhere in Israel was an evidence of God being near them, and His care over them: but His presence could not be duly recognised, nor the order of His truth maintained, unless the Ark was in the sanctuary, and the appointed services performed by the Levites and Priests, according to the manner. The fallen Tabernacle—the scattered vessels of ministration—the isolation of the Ark in an unknown dwelling—were sufficient indications that Truth and the order thereof had indeed fallen. Can we trace in these things no typical likeness to the days in which we live? Are we living at an hour when the truths of God are maintained in their completeness, and in their right connections; or are they held partially, confusedly, and out of their right relations to each other—many despised—many lost. And yet, who cares for these things? Men say, Is not God yet amongst us? Are not souls still saved by His grace? Why, then, should we concern ourselves about

His order, or the more minute knowledge of His truth? 2. Throughout the reign of Saul the Ark was not only kept in separation from all the other vessels of the Tabernacle, but even in its isolation, it was neglected and dishonoured. It was the sense of this that chiefly acted on the soul of David. He does not appear to have considered so much the absence of right relation between the Ark and the other vessels of the Tabernacle, as to have been struck by the more palpable and astounding fact of the want of all right relation between the Ark and Israel. To bring back, therefore, the Ark from the place of its dishonour; to make it once more that which Israel should seek unto and inquire of; and above all, to establish it in the citadel of Zion, the place of sovereign supremacy and strength; these were the immediate objects of David's desires. Herein he was fulfilling his office of king, in giving supremacy to God and to His truth. 3. But the servants of God have not unfrequently to learn that the pursuit of a right end does not necessarily imply the employment of right means. This David proved. It seemed easy to him, and to the elders of Israel to move the ark of God to its new habitation. The desire was holy—the object right—and they fully reckoned on the instant and unobstructed blessing of God. A cart was prepared: oxen were yoked to it; the ark of God was placed thereon; and one whom they appointed amongst themselves, drove the oxen. The ordinance of God was express, that none but Priests and Levites should handle the vessels of the sanctuary: and although God, when the sin of Israel had brought the ark into the land of the Philistines, where there were no Levites—no Priests—was at liberty to supersede His own ordinances, yet David was not God. David, indeed, might well humble himself because of his error; for what error could be greater than recklessly to transgress the solemn ordinance of God, who had said that none but Priests and Levites should touch the things of His sanctuary? Yet, has Christianity afforded no instances of similar transgression? David infringed the typical order of God, and was punished; but how much sorer punishment do we deserve if we subvert the anti-typical reality—if we call the unsanctified and the unbelieving—those who fear not God and know not Christ, into functions which belong only to those who have truly the grace of His Spirit. 4. There was no visible glory; no manifestation of the Divine Presence, whilst David was restoring to Israel the long-banished Ark of the Covenant of their God. If it had been a day in which God was visibly manifesting His own glory, there would have been no danger of David's being regarded unduly, even if all the splendour of Israel's glory had been gathered around his person. But it was otherwise when that glory was hidden, and when the solitary Ark, long exiled from the Tabernacle of God, was the lowly emblem of God's presence in the midst of His repentant people. The eye of faith could discern the blessedness of that hour; but the heart of the daughter of Saul, true to her lineage, saw no excellency in it. She beheld the joy of David—understood it not—despised and upbraided him, and found in the day of Israel's blessing, a day of sorrow and lasting chastisement to herself. We have authority from Scripture for saying that the things which happened to Israel happened unto them for ensamples, and are written for our admonition (1 Cor. x.) They who read the Old Testament Scriptures, remembering this, will be able to trace many a feature in the general aspect of Christianity, that too closely resembles the condition of Israel at the time of which we have been speaking. How often do Christians seek to deaden their apprehension of the disorder and dereliction of truth that prevails around them, by the reflection that God has not forsaken, and never will forsake His own people; just as Israel might have said, in the days of Saul, "Is not the Ark yet amongst us?" It is, indeed, most true that God will not forsake His people; but is preservation from final ruin, and deliverance from the extreme effects of disobedience, the only thing that is to be desired by the Church of God? Have they no distinctive testimony to maintain—no banner to display, because of God's truth? Is there no directive efficacy in His principles—nothing that forms the character, and determines the path of those who are subject to their power? If His principles be amongst us, and we regard them not, what can we expect, but that it should be said of us, as it was said of Israel, "that truth has fallen in the streets, and equity cannot enter." When we read of the triumph and exceeding joy with which David and all Israel with him, brought up the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord to Zion, "with shouting, and with sound of the cornet, and with trumpets, and with cymbals, making a noise with psalteries and harps," if we ask ourselves what these things indicate, we are obliged to look on to a yet future hour, when a greater than David—One

whom David feebly typified, will, as one of the results of His own conflicts, give rest, and establishment, and supremacy, to the long scorned and persecuted Truth. The time is drawing nigh when that typical hour of David's joy is to be accomplished in that final day of triumph, when the Psalms of Israel on earth shall unite with the halleluiahs of the redeemed above, in saying, "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth." For that hour we wait, as those who have been alike made Levites—Priests—Kings; able therefore to serve, to worship, and to contend for Him, during the time of His people's weakness, and of His truth's dishonour, yet expecting no triumph until that day. (*B. W. Newton.*) *The Ark brought back*:—In this lesson there are sharp contrasts. Here is the ark of God, dreaded by some, by others desired; by some treated with rashness and irreverence, by others with holy care. To the first it becomes the occasion of awful punishment and fear; to the last, of unmingled blessing. Like the Gospel, it is a savour of death to some; to others, of life. 1. David, now victorious over all enemies, and firmly settled on the throne, resolves to bring up the long-neglected ark of God from Kirjath-jearim to Jerusalem. Disregarded, almost forgotten, through the reigns of Saul and Ishbosheth, it shall now be honoured in the sight of all the nation, brought to the capital, and made again the centre of Israel's religious services. Immense preparations are made by the king for celebrating its removal with suitable impressiveness and splendour. The whole nation is, as it were, taken into his plans. The men of renown, the leaders of the tribes, are summoned from all portions of the land. The priests and Levites assemble from their widely-scattered cities. Kirjath-jearim is reached; the vast procession is formed, the ark in its midst. Suddenly a cry of terror is heard, and now another, and still another. Disorder and confusion are spreading from rank to rank. David himself is seen lifting up his hands in horror as at some dreadful sight. What is the cause of this sudden tumult? Uzzah has been struck dead beside the ark! It shook because of the stumbling oxen, and, reaching forth his hand to hold it, instantly he fell dead upon the road. What could have been the meaning of this startling catastrophe? Undoubtedly, to many readers of the Bible, it has appeared a judgment of strange and disproportionate severity. If, however, we study the whole event, we shall find that there are circumstances which will do much to explain why Jehovah regarded this dreadful stroke as just and necessary. It was a part of this lesson of reverence for His Name and presence, and only in harmony with all the wonderful history of the ark, when Jehovah added special instructions as to the manner in which it should be cared for by its attendants, and in which the tabernacle and the ark itself should be transported from place to place. The Levites only were to be employed in this service (*Num. iv. 2, 15; 1 Chron. xv. 2*), and of these only one household, the sons of Kohath. There was no room for doubt that these directions had been thought by Jehovah of sufficient importance to be embodied in distinct and written commands; and these commands on that day were utterly disregarded. Uzzah's laying hold of the ark itself, was an act forbidden to the priests—and Uzzah was no priest—under any circumstances. It was at this point that Jehovah interposed. The nation, with the king at their head, were nominally honouring Him, but by the light and irreverent way in which they did it, by the negligent and half-heathenish manner in which, notwithstanding all their pomp, they entered upon this sacred business, they were dishonouring Him. If God were worthy of their worship, why did they take no sufficient pains to worship Him according to His Word? How did they dare in the very acts of His so-called service to break His most obvious command? As for Uzzah himself, who was the most conspicuous sufferer, it is possible that long familiarity with the ark had bred a special irreverence and presumption in him; but, however, that may be, his sin was shared by all who employed him in these forbidden services, and so occasioned his foolhardy and guilty deed. A feeling of mingled anger and despair now took possession of David's mind (*v. 8*). If he had been "displeased" with himself, we could have understood it. But it is indeed a mystery if his resentment was directed against God. It inclines us to fear that his own glory was in some measure his object in all these magnificent services. Was he angry because God had turned his great fete into a day of national disappointment and gloom, or because Jehovah had dishonoured him before the multitudes by this overwhelming rebuke? We cannot tell, but we wish that it could have been written that David was humbled and penitent rather than that he was displeased. And we can defend his despondency as little as his anger. He seems to have forgotten all his duty in a fit of

half sullenness, half unbelieving fear. He abandons on the spot the whole plan of restoring the ark to its true abode. Instead of inquiring for the sin which caused the trouble, he acts as if there were no hope of forgiveness, no hope of acceptable service—as though God were a being too dreadful to be approached, too capricious to be pleased. We are reminded of the slavish fears which the presence of God and the thought of His holy majesty still awaken in the hearts of sinful men, and of their readiness to be quit of all tokens of Him whom they cannot remember except with dread. 2. But now there appears another character upon the scene. He is a man hitherto unknown. The name of Obed-edom will always be honoured as that of the man who, while all others were filled with terror and dismay, shrinking in dread from the ark of God, held in his bosom the secret of a far different feeling—looking upon the ark indeed with all veneration, but without fear, opening the doors of his dwelling to welcome it, and finding it a source of unmingled good. He knew well how fearfully God had vindicated His holiness when the ark had been dishonoured; how by an unseen hand the massive idols had been thrown down upon their faces and broken before it; how the Philistines had been smitten with disease and slaughter; how the men of Beth-shemesh had been slain, and how Uzzah also had been struck with death beside it. He had heard the cry of terror from its heathen captors when they pleaded to have it sent away from their coasts. Beth-shemesh, the scene of the awful judgment because of the dishonoured ark, was scarcely a half-day's journey from his home, and now he sees all the frightened thousands of Israel, helpless with sudden fear, crowding the mountain-roads around his dwelling, even David himself afraid to meddle with this dreadful ark. He sees all this, and yet he does not fear to admit it to his house. A man humble and devout, he understands that, although to the irreverent and careless our God is a consuming fire, the obedient need not fear him. To the obedient and confiding soul He is always a God of love. Obed-edom expected to obey God—to obey Him scrupulously, reverently. Whatever rule God had prescribed for his observance he would never make bold to call a little thing. He was not under any such delusion as that God could be better honoured by a vast procession or by any services, however ravishing to human sense, than by a sober respect for his plain commands. In the house of Obed-edom there is peace. It rests not alone on the father. Here God's covenant is found to be a household covenant and to bring a blessing to all the home. And they were such as to be manifest. They were not confined to the secret souls of this favoured household. Either their unusual health and happiness and prosperity were such as were daily apparent to all their neighbours, or the inward blessings they enjoyed were freely mentioned by them to Jehovah's praise. Probably in both these ways the favour they received from God was known. And now we shall see that by having received a blessing they were made a blessing. The happiness and goodness of this one pious household extend their influence at length to all the nation. They make it evident to one and another of the multitudes who had fled from God at his stroke, that, although He is a holy God, he need not be dreaded by any humble, careful heart. Through the spreading story of Obed-edom's blessing all Israel learns anew the loving-kindness of the Lord. The skepticism which that day of gloom had rolled over the land begins to be dispelled. The scoffers are silenced, the disheartened take courage. They learn that although the highest kings must not trifle with the holiness of the Lord, the humblest worshipper, anxious only to obey completely His sacred will, shall find Him a Father full of smiles and tenderness. Obed-edom restores David's faith, and David at length leads the nation back to God. It is given to this unknown villager to instruct and reassure the dejected king. From the acceptance of Obed-edom's lowly worship, contrasted with the rejection of his own magnificent array, the monarch learns that to obey is better than sacrifice—that not all the eloquence of David's psalms, not all the minstrelsy of his choirs, not all the throngs of Israel's applauding tribes, could please Jehovah half so well as a serious and exact obedience to His written word. (*A. Mitchell, D.D.*) *The ark the centre of service and worship*:—King David had two great things set him to accomplish: to establish the worship of Jehovah in the place which he had chosen above all others for his abode, and to extend the kingdom to the bounds allotted to his people. He had just been acknowledged as king of all Israel. And now the place was ready to receive the ark of God, the most sacred of all the sacred things about which centred the worship of Jehovah. The ark, with its contents and its covering, came thus naturally to be the centre of the service and

worship of Israel. To bring back the ark, then, was to re-establish the worship of Jehovah, and to centre the nation about the recognition of His law and grace. The topic suggested by these events is the relation of the public acknowledgment of God to the welfare of the nation, the family, and the individual. I. **THE NEGLECT OF PUBLIC WORSHIP IS DISASTROUS TO ALL THESE INTERESTS.** Not always at first to material prosperity, and yet that condition of society which permits the increase of irreligion and a growing disregard for the institutions of worship is incompatible with the best prosperity of the state. No one can tell the evil that comes to a people by the disregard of its religious institutions, except as he sees it illustrated in the history of nations or in the fortunes of communities. Of two nations or neighbourhoods equal in other regards, one of which honours the Lord's house and the Lord's day, and the other treats them with neglect or more positive disregard, it is easy to prophesy their contrasted courses. When atheism took possession of the heart of the French people, it led in anarchy with its red right hand. Even a faith mingled with falsity is better for the morals and good order of a state than total lack of faith. It is almost as true in the family. It would be altogether so, except for those influences which surround the family so closely that it cannot be isolated from their power. Many a household is saved by the religious habits of the community around it, in which things it takes no part itself. The recognition of Divine law and grace are the best safeguards of society. Israel without the ark is Israel without wisdom or strength. Saul without the ark is a weak and wayward king. Samuel, whose heart was with the ark, was, next to God, the strength of Israel. II. **WE ARE TAUGHT A DUE REGARD FOR THE FORMS OF RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE.** The spirit of irreverence is one which grows rapidly. One neglect of that which is due or decorous easily leads to another, till at length it requires sharp rebuke or severe punishment to remind men of that which was once in every heart. Do we not need a caution here in our day and in regard to our services of public worship? In how many of our Christian congregations the upright posture and the open eyes in prayer are painfully suggestive of a lack of reverent devotion. No better lesson can be taught the young, and no better training given in our Sunday schools than the lesson of reverence in the heart toward holy things, of reverence in thought and tone when we read the word of His covenant, and of reverence in posture when we approach His mercy-seat. III. **THE SPIRIT OF OUR SERVICE IS WHAT GOD REGARDS, RATHER THAN THE FORM OF IT.** When in his false fear the king carried the ark into the house of Obed-edom, the Gittite, the Lord blessed all the household during the three months of its sojourn there. Is it not a clear indication to us that, after all, that which pleases God is not the exactness of our ritual, but the loving reverence of our hearts? All the outward forms were intended to promote this inward righteousness. If that were wanting, the empty forms could give God no pleasure, and they could do man no good. The Lord had appointed the tabernacle service and its feasts; but when the spirit was gone out of them, he would have them go out too. "God is a spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." This is the lesson—more important than all others—which comes to us from the open doors of the house of Obed-edom, from the prosperity which blessed them, and from the peace which ever attends the reverent though it be the informal service of the Lord. (*Mondau Club Sermons.*) *Bringing up the ark:*—1. David was now no sooner settled again in his kingdom (after this double defeat of the Philistines) but he resolves upon settling religion and the sincere service of God. "Seek first the Kingdom of God and all things else shall be added" (Matt. vi. 33.) 2. As David called this great assembly together, not only to put an honour upon the action, but also in defence of the ark in case the enemy should make any attempts to interrupt them for their passage. So this design was to redeem the ark of God's Presence from that sordid neglect all Saul's time. 3. The journey from Kiriath-Jearim to Jerusalem might be looked upon as too long a journey for the Levites to carry the Ark of God upon their shoulders according to God's command (Numb. iv. 14, 15, and 7, 9), therefore out of prudence (which often spoils true piety) they provide a new cart, and lay the Ark of God upon it. This mode of carriage they had learnt from the Philistines, a bad precedent, who had done so before this without damage or any token of Divine displeasure, they doing so at the direction of their diabolical diviners (1 Sam. vi. 2, 7.) No good patterns for Israel's practice: They did not so well consider that God would wink at this disorder in the Philistines because they were ignorant of God's Laws. But he would not brook it in His own people

to whom the oracles of God were committed (Rom. iii. 2.) And one would think the very staff-rings upon the Ark might have minded the Levites of their duty: But 'tis likely they loved their own ease too much at this time, so were too willing to spare their own shoulders (ver. 1, 2, 3, 4.) 4. The great joy that David and his thirty thousand nobles and all Israel celebrated the removal of the Ark from Kiriath-Jearim withal is expressed (v. 5), Ahio going before to lead the oxen, and Uzzah following behind to secure the Ark from tumbling off the cart. 'Tis supposed then David uttered those words, "Let God arise and let His enemies be scattered," etc. (Psalm 68, 1) at this time, which were the words constantly used when the Ark was removed (Numb. x. 35.) But alas, how soon was all this mirth marred and turned into mourning, all this singing into sighing, merely by the stumbling of the oxen (ver. 6, 7), Uzzah observing that the Ark was shaken thereby and in danger of falling, he thereupon puts forth his hand to stay it steady in the cart. (*C. Ness.*) *Seeking the ark of the covenant*:—For sixty-five or seventy years this ark of the covenant had been permitted to remain in almost total neglect and forgetfulness. At length the time had come for David to interpose and, in the exercise of his royal authority, bring it back into prominence and reverence in the worship of the people. I. QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE ARK ITSELF. 1. What was the so-called "Ark of the Covenant?" 2. Of what was it the symbol? Of the presence of Jehovah as the "covenant-keeping God" of His people Israel. 3. Of what is the Ark a sign now? (1.) An institution set apart for the Lord. (2.) An organization like the church. (3.) An ordinance, like the Lord's Supper. (4.) A duty: The family altar. (5.) A doctrine. 4. What does the absence of the Ark involve? The lonely heaviness of work done without a helper or a promise of success. That ancient Ark was only a symbol; Christ's presence is to us a wonderful fact. That was but a sign that Divine companionship was near; now we may be sure that Jesus, the Master, is really under our roofs and in our hearts. II. SOME SUGGESTIONS CONCERNING DIFFERENT METHODS OF TREATING THE PRESENCE OF GOD. 1. The ark of God must be treated with a becoming honour. True humility can be shown in forwardness; for there are occasions in which it costs more to go forth into necessary conspicuousness, and brave the criticisms of public opinion, than it would to remain in concealment, withdrawn into a quiet of deepest reserve. 2. The Ark of God can be treated with a culpable carelessness. It had been decreed in the beginning of its history that this singular chest should be carried on men's shoulders; for this purpose of handling it had been constructed with rings through which poles might be passed so that it could be borne by the priests. Here we observe that Abinadab mounted it in a cart; and in this he patterned not after Moses, but after the Philistines, who once did the same disrespectful thing. It is of no use to say this was of no consequence. It is always of much consequence that one obeys God, and pays respect to every one of His commandments exactly as He gives them. 3. The Ark of God can be treated with the highest exuberance of joy. The account in the chapter from which the text is taken must be supplemented by that which is added in the book of Chronicles: there we learn that a great school of training in music was set up at Jerusalem in patient preparation for this ceremony. There is nothing too good in poetry, in instruments, in singing, for God who is over all. 4. The Ark of God can be treated with a fatal presumption: "And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it." 5. The Ark of God might be treated with a half-hearted timidity. "And David was displeased," &c. (1.) He was "displeased:" the word means vexation akin to petulance; he was disappointed in all his plans. 2. He was "afraid." There was likewise a sense of penitence under the revelation of infinite holiness. (3.) He was inconsiderate: "So David would not remove the Ark of the Lord unto him into the city of David: but David carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite." He dared not take the Ark any further, but deposited it beside the way as quickly as his alarmed attendants could remove it from the wheels. 6. The Ark of God may be treated with an appropriate and affectionate devotion: "And the Ark of the Lord continued in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months: and the Lord blessed Obed-edom and all his household." Of course he received his reward; for God is good to the men whom he finds to be faithful to any trust. Josephus is quoted as saying that, whereas before Obed-edom was poor, on a sudden, in these three months, his estate increased, even to the envy of his neighbours. Matthew Henry says, with his usual brightness, that the Ark "paid well for its entertain-

ment; it is good living in a family that entertains the Ark, for all about it will fare the better for it." Household piety is always profitable. We can have God's actual presence with ourselves and our children, if we accept His Word for our guide and His love for our shelter evermore. (C. S. Robinson, D.D.)

Ver. 3. And they set the Ark of God upon a new cart.—*Novelties in religion and their end*:—The ark is taken from its resting place amid the reverent joy of the assembly, and placed upon a vehicle specially manufactured for the transit, while "Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drove the new cart." I. The fact that the ark was placed upon a new cart shows how, **IN THE DESIRE TO SERVE GOD, EVEN A GOOD MAN MAY ERR.** It is a fact substantiated by experience, and supported by the voice of history, that man at his best is but an erring creature. His folly is often exhibited in his best moments. At his highest point of wisdom—loftiest step of knowledge—his feebleness of judgment and folly are displayed. The claim to infallibility is but the ambition of the child—the blundering of the blind. Would it not be a wonderful improvement on the old style of things to have a new cart? Will it not harmonise with the new order established? Pay no attention to that worn-out, obsolete plan of carrying the ark; abandon the old poles and have a "new cart." It will save the shoulders of the Levites; it will be a new feature in its way; it will be admired for its construction, and commended for the use to which it will be devoted. And so we reason in our work for God. Antiquity gains no reverence from us. The old poles with which our fathers did their work are considered out of date and useless, and we drag out our "new cart" on every occasion when our labour is required. Starting some fresh thing, inventing some novelty, forgetting all the while that God's way is best. II. **SEE THE EXTENT TO WHICH NOVELTY IS TOLERATED IN RELIGION.** The old charge against the Athenians is still true of many in modern times. Novelty secures admiration wherever it is found. Have a new cart, and the world will stop and stare. Affect originality, even if it be a spurious thing, and you may speak to listening ears. Stop not to ask questions about propriety; pay no respect to the past; be extravagant and sensational, and you will gather a crowd. We have grown liberal all at once. God's commandments are without authority in this age; you may be religious in whatever way is most appropriate. By all means have a cart. If you find yourself in doubt as to the Saviour's Divinity, you can have an Unitarian cart; if you think the mode of Nonconformist worship too dull, and that more æsthetic beauty is desirable in the service, then have a Ritualistic cart; if you have any scruples about the immortality of your soul, then have the Annihilationist cart; if you admire religion being "done by attorney," then have a Roman Catholic cart; if you think the Church should be a club, where everything may be believed and everything denied, then have a Broad Church cart. Get rid of the old poles; "new carts" are the fashion of this novelty-loving age. Let all the old-fashioned things rot. Reform your plans, improve your methods, tax your inventive genius, produce a "new cart." Oh! how fond we are of novelties! The last new thing is the best. The last new creed; the latest criticism on "supernatural religion;" the last utterance of the scientist; the last sceptical theory from the professor; these are the things that win admiration. But give me religion without these inventions. Let it be pure and simple, without any man-made additions—the old ark borne by the consecrated poles. Take away those mocking substitutes. "For other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." III. **SEE THE RUINOUS CONSEQUENCES OF NOVELTIES IN RELIGION.** They set out with the cart, but soon disasters befel it on the road; and Uzzah, lifting his hand to steady the falling ark, was stricken dead at its wheels. That put an end to the "new cart" system with David. It taught him a lesson he never forgot. Never after that did he order another. He went back immediately to the forsaken poles. Let us keep to God's way in religion, and while the spirit of the age is clamorous for something new, let us stand by the old, and revere the ark. (W. J. Hall.)

Ver. 5. David and all the house of Israel played before the Lord.—*Joy in religion*:—The orchestra was probably as rustic and rude as the procession. "Instruments made of fir-wood" sounds strange, and probably the text should be emended from the account in 1 Chronicles, which reads, "with all their might, even with songs." The instruments specified are two-stringed, and three of percussion. "Castanets" should be "sistra," which were much used in religious

ceremonies, and consisted of rings hung on iron or other metal rods, which made a harsh noise when shaken. Like Eastern music in general, it would have struck our ears as being "a joyful noise," rather than a concord of sweet sounds. But it meant gladness and praise, and that was the main thing. His felt nearness should be, as the Psalmist says, "the gladness of my joy." Much of our modern religion is far too gloomy, and it is thought to be a sign of devotion and spiritual-mindedness to be sad and of a mortified countenance. Unquestionably, Christianity brings men into the continual presence of very solemn truths about themselves and the world which may well sober them, and make what the world calls mirth incongruous.

"There is no music in the life
That rings with idiot laughter solely."

But the Man of Sorrows said that His purpose for us was that His joy might remain in us, and that our joy might be full; and we but imperfectly apprehend the Gospel if we do not feel that its joys "much more abound" than its sorrows, and that they even burn brightest, like the lights on safety-buoys, when drenched by stormy seas. (A. Maclaren, D.D.)

Vers. 6, 7. **Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God.**—*Uzzah; or the danger of familiarity with sacred things:*—Some would have us believe that this was an accident; that Uzzah, in the effort to save the ark, dislocated his shoulder, or broke his arm, and died of hæmorrhage. We are told, however, that it was a Divine judgment. David so understood it, and "he was displeased." Now God intended by this terrible visitation to teach a lesson of great importance. It is one that needs to be uttered even at this day with emphasis, viz., the need that exists for the deepest reverence in all things connected with the Divine service, and the danger that arises from over-familiarity with sacred things. 1. Uzzah was a Levite, and he knew or ought to have known the commands of God with respect to the ark. In Numb. iv. 15, it is written that those who had to bear the ark were "not to touch any holy thing, lest they die." Not only so, but the ark was to be covered, and so kept from the gaze of the irreverent. This had been neglected. Again, that which was to be borne only on men's shoulders was put on a cart. This was a gross piece of neglect. 2. Then it is probable that the offence of Uzzah was aggravated by the fact that he had not sufficient reverence for the Divine command. The ark had been for seventy years under the care of his father and family. Eleazar, who had been set apart to take care of it, was probably dead. It may be that neither Uzzah nor Abio his brother had ever thought that it was important that they should be consecrated to the work. They, presuming on their Levitical descent, may have taken upon themselves informally the position of attendants. Constant familiarity with it may have led them to think of it with even somewhat of contempt. It was like a piece of useless furniture. They may have forgotten how interwoven that ark was with religious and national life. To them it may have seemed a sort of Nehushtan. Others regarded it with expectancy and reverence, but to them it was only so much wood and gold. And thus many regarded Christ's cross as so much wood, and His death as a martyrdom, forgetting that they are of infinite value as the sign and seal of the expiation of sin and salvation of the world. There was no virtue in the ark, any more than in the cross itself, apart from God's appointment. God's revealed will makes all the difference in respect to any act or observance. Doubtless Uzzah had touched the ark in an over-familiar way before, and it may have been passed over; now he does it publicly, and as evil would result from his example, judgment follows. (1.) Some would say, "But how trifling the sin, compared with the severity of the punishment." Sin is never a trifle. Disobedience to God is not a trifle. Peter's few words of denial were easily spoken, but they were no trifle in their consequences. A few drops of prussic acid taken into the system are trifling, so far as size and substance are concerned, but not as to results. To touch the ark irreverently was no trifle; it indicated a state of heart not in accord with the office filled. (2.) Besides, the attention of the people had to be arrested, and the need for reverence emphasized. Hence the sin was not passed by. Great benefit arose. As in the case of the men of Beth-shemesh, the exclamation was raised, "Who is able to stand before the Lord?" so here we find David saying, "How shall the ark of God come to me?" A deep impression of the need for purity on their part and of unswerving justice on God's part was

made. 3. Uzzah sinned with his eyes open. He knew the commands. He sinned with the warning of Beth-shemesh before him. He sinned publicly, and he perished suddenly and miserably. It was a sudden and severe judgment, but that was a stern age, and the people could only be influenced by such means. David saw the reason for the visitation, and so when he summoned courage to move on instead of going up to Jerusalem he turned aside to Obed-edom the Gittite, one who was not only a Levite but probably a Kohathite, to whom it rightly pertained to bear the ark. It may be objected that the punishment was needlessly severe, in that Uzzah's intentions were good. This is very plausible; but good intentions do not always justify wrong-doing. Many have been led astray by this sophistry. We may not do evil that good may come. God will not have His laws broken under pretence of serving Him. We may not bend to a course of expediency under the pretext of glorifying God. Whatever is really wrong must not be permitted, and it was wrong for Uzzah to break the Divine command and thereby perhaps lead others to similar irreverence. Uzzah died by the side of the ark of God. How terrible! Yet what a warning for the ages! Being engaged in religious services or connected with sacred things cannot ensure salvation. We should, therefore, watch any tendency to levity or lightness in Divine worship, or in treatment of sacred subjects. To use Scripture to point a witticism or to regard the Divine book as an ordinary book is not a good sign. There should be no listlessness in worship or in listening to God's truth. Is not such carelessness an indication of indifference to the presence of that Divine Spirit in which we believe? Can we be cold and heartless in the presence of the King of Heaven? (*F. Hastings.*) *Nature's penalties for disobedience*:—1. How many there are who, like Uzzah in our text, profane the ark of God by wilful disobedience to His laws; and, therefore, like him, have to suffer the certain consequences. Death seems a severe penalty for simply touching the ark, but we see just the same penalty inflicted for what seem very small offences against the laws of health almost every day of our lives. Thus for instance there are two great and important laws relating to our bodily health, disobedience to which inevitably brings its proper penalty—one the law that if we would be healthy we must be clean, clean both in body and in dwelling; the other the law that the air we breathe must be pure and fresh. And remember that we can all of us obey these laws if we like—it is not money or the want of money that makes the difference between a healthy and an unhealthy home. There are plenty of houses where the husband earns nothing more than ordinary weekly wages, and yet the cottage and its furniture are clean—the windows are regularly and properly opened, and the air is sweet and pure, and why? Because, while the husband is doing his work outside, the wife is also doing her duty inside, but unfortunately there are some houses where this is not so, and then, God's laws being broken, as surely as the penalty came on Uzzah, so surely does it come on that household. Often it comes in the form of bad health, fever sometimes, or more often that constant languidness and feebleness which makes work a weariness and even life itself a burden.

2. There are laws of worship, the first of which is given us by our Saviour Himself. God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. And the second law of worship, if not exactly given us by our Saviour, at any rate comes to us bearing the stamp of His approval. It is the law of a consistent worship, not a worship of the lips only while the heart is far off, but a worship in which heart and voice unite "to make one music." Is it so with us? If not, would it not be well to think of the lesson taught us by the fate of Uzzah? To come into God's house without reverence for the owner of the house; to come joining (or professing to join) with our lips in the confession of sin, while yet we feel no sorrow for sin; to come with the prayer for forgiveness on our lips, while yet we desire none in our hearts; to sing the psalms on the beauty of holiness, and hymns about the joys of heaven, when holiness is distasteful to us, and heaven a home where in heart and mind we never go; what is that but a profanation, and what other penalty can it bring than the penalty of spiritual death? For a cold, heartless, and indifferent service—what is it like but an unhealthy diseased life, a life without either energy or enthusiasm, a life which is really only a living death? What then shall we do? (1.) Two things; first we must amend our lives, and learn to obey that command of St. Paul's, "I beseech you, brethren," and (2) we must remember the lesson contained in the fact that while no blood might be sprinkled on the ark, the figure of this world where law and order reign, yet on the mercy seat, the figure of heaven, where God in mercy

is enthroned, the blood of the sacrifice was to be offered. And that sacrifice we must offer according as Christ has commanded. (*G. Bladon, B.A.*) *An error and its consequences*:—What said the law? Numb. iii. 29-32, iv. 4-15, vii. 6-9. 1. Man may forget, but not God. If God has made a thing clear at one time, we must not think (like Balaam) that He will change His mind about it. 2. Altered circumstances don't affect truth. I. **DEATH WAS UNDER THE LAW THE PUNISHMENT OF TRANSGRESSION.** Executed in single cases. (Numb. xv. 32-36; Josh. vii. 15-25; 1 Kings xiii. 21-25.) The principle of such punishment is doubtless brought out in 1 Cor. xi. 30-32. II. **REVERENCE BECOMES FINITE BEINGS IN APPROACHING THE INFINITE.** Love and zeal are not enough; there is danger of carelessness or lightness. We are to work out our salvation "with fear and trembling," to speak "with meekness and fear," to serve "with reverence and godly fear." III. **GOD DOES NOT NEED MAN'S HELP, THOUGH HE CONDESCENDS TO USE IT.** We put our hand to the ark when we defend God's cause with carnal weapons. (*R. E. Faulkner.*) *The fate of Uzzah*:—It should be remembered that many hands must have touched the ark that day in the process of lifting it on to the cart; that none of these helpers were smitten, and that therefore it was not the fact of touching, but the spirit in which he touched, that made Uzzah guilty. We shall probably be right if we ascribe to him rash irreverence, entire ignoring of the sanctity of the ark, a regarding of it as "an unholy (that is, a common) thing." He had no consciousness of the Divine presence in it. It had been a piece of furniture in Abinadab's house as long as he could remember, and though, no doubt, it had been guarded and set apart there from common uses, he had become used to its presence, and familiarity had worn off his awe. The same cause produces like effects in many of us in regard to holier things than an ark of shittim wood. And an irreverent hand thrust in among such sanctities, even with a design to help them, is sin. Nor must we forget that this incident stands at the beginning of a new epoch in the development of religion in Israel, and that, just as Ananias and Sapphira perished at the beginning of the Church's history, so Uzzah lay dead beside the ark, a lesson and a warning for a new age. (*A. MacLaren, D.D.*) *God's view of sin*:—Mr. Hervey thus illustrates the great truth of the different appearance of sin to the eye of God and the eye of man. He says that you may take a small insect, and with the tiniest needle make a puncture in it so minute that you can scarcely see it with the naked eye; but when you look at it through a microscope you see an enormous rent, out of which there flows a purple stream, making the creature seem to you as though it had been smitten with the axe that killeth an ox. It is but a defect of our vision that we cannot see things correctly; but the microscope reveals them as they really are. God's microscopic eye sees sin in its true aspects. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *A precise God*:—"Why are you so precise," said one to a Puritan. "Sir," said he, "I serve a very precise God."

Vers. 11, 12. **The Lord blessed Obed-edom, and all his household.**—*The ark in the house of Obed-edom*:—The wanderings of the ark and the opposite effects which its presence produced according to the manner of its reception, are symbols of a great truth which runs all through human life, and is most especially manifested in the message and the mission of Jesus Christ. All things have a double possibility in them—of blessing or of hurt. Everything that we lay hold of has two handles, and it depends upon ourselves which handle we grasp and whether we shall get a shock that slays or strength and blessing from the contact. Let us, then, just trace out two or three of the spheres in which we may see the application of this great principle, which makes life so solemn and so awful, which may make it so sad or so glad, so base or so noble. 1. **THE TWOFOLD OPERATION OF ALL GOD'S OUTWARD DEALINGS.** All the events are all meant to tell upon character, to make us better in sundry ways, to bring us closer to God, and to fill us more full of Him. And that one effect may be produced by the most opposite incidents just as the summer and the winter, with all their antithesis, have a single result in the abundant harvest. Here are two men tried by the same poverty. It beats the one down, makes him squalid, querulous, faithless, irreligious; and the other man it steadies and quiets and hardens, and teaches him to look beyond the things seen and temporal to the exceeding riches at God's right hand. Here are two men tried by wealth; the gold gets into the one man's veins and makes him yellow as with jaundice, destroying all that is noble, generous, impulsive, quenching his early dreams and enthusiasms, closing his

heart to sweet charity, puffing him up with a false sense of importance, and laying upon him the dreadful responsibility of misused and selfishly employed possessions. And the other man, tried in the same fashion, out of his wealth makes for himself friends that welcome him into everlasting habitations, and lays up for himself treasures in heaven. The one man is damned, and the other man is saved by his use of the same thing. Here are two men subjected to the same sorrows; the one is absorbed by his selfish regard to his own misery, blinded to all the blessings that still remain, made negligent of duty and oblivious to the plainest tasks. And he goes about saying, "Oh, if thou hadst been here;" or "if—if" something else had happened, then this would not have happened. And the other man, passing through the same circumstances, finds that, when the props are taken away, he flings himself on God, and, when the world becomes dark and all the paths dim about him, he looks up to a heaven that fills fuller of meek and swiftly-gathering stars as the night falls, and he says, "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good." Here are two men tried by the same temptation; it leads the one man away captive, the other man by God's grace overcomes it, and is the stronger and the sweeter and the gentler and the humbler because of the dreadful fight. Nothing is sure to do a man good; nothing necessarily does him hurt. All depends upon the man himself, and the use he makes of what God in His mercy sends. Two plants may grow in the same soil, be fed by the same dews and benediction from the heavens, be shone upon by the same sunshine, and the one of them will elaborate from all sweet juices and fragrance, and the other will elaborate a deadly poison. So life is what you and I will to make it, and the events which befall us are for our rising or our falling according as we determine they shall be, and according as we use them. II. **THE TWOFOLD OPERATION OF GOD'S CHARACTER AND PRESENCE.** The Ark was the symbol of a present God, and His presence is meant to be the life and joy of all creatures, and the revelation of Him is meant to be only for our good, giving strength, righteousness, and peace. But the same double possibility which I have been pointing out as inherent in all externals belongs here, too, and a man can determine to which aspect of the many-sided infinitude of the Divine nature he shall stand in relation. These bits of glass in our windows are so coloured as that some of them cut off and prevent from passing through certain rays of the pure white light. And men's moral natures, the inclination of their hearts, and set of their wills and energies, cut off, if I may say so, parts of the infinite, white light of the many-sided Divine character, and put them into relations only with some part and segment of that great whole which we call God. And thus the thought of God, the consciousness of His presence, may be like the Ark which was its symbol, either dreadful and to be put away, or to be welcomed and blessing to be drawn from it. Then, again, this same duality of aspect attaches to the character and presence of God in another view. Because, according to the variety of men's characters, God is obliged to treat them as in different relations, He must manifest His judgment, His justice, His punitive justice. The present God has to modify His dealings according to the character of the men. III. **THE TWOFOLD OPERATION OF GOD'S GOSPEL.** 1. That is seen in the permanent effects of the gospel upon a man's character. Received by simple faith in Jesus Christ, it brings to us the clear consciousness of pardon, the calm sense of communion, the joyful spirit of adoption, righteousness rooted in our hearts and to be manifested day by day in our lives; it brings all elevation and strengthening and ennobling for the whole nature, and is the first thing that makes us really men as God would have us all to be. Rejection strengthens all the evil motives for rejection, and adds to the insensibility of the man that has rejected. The ice on our pavements in the winter time that melts on the surface in the day and freezes again at night becomes dense and slippery beyond all other. And a heart that has been melted and then has frozen again is harder than ever it was before. Hammering that does not break solidifies and makes tougher the thing that is struck. There are no men so hard to get at as men and women, like multitudes that have been hammered at by preaching ever since you were children, and have not yielded your hearts to God. The ark has done you hurt if it has not done you good. Christ's gospel is never inert, one thing or other it does for every soul that it reaches. Either it softens or it hardens. Either it saves or it condemns. "This Child is set for the rise or for the fall of many." (A. Maclaren, D.D.) *The ark in the house of Obed-edom*:—1. David (considering first how ill the Philistines had fared for their miscarriage towards the ark, and after that, how fifty thousand

Bethshemites had lost their lives for their irreverent peeping into it, and now Uzzah was struck dead for touching it) "was afraid of the Lord" (ver. 9) lest God should proceed further in the way of His judgments, both upon Himself and upon His people, seeing he had been so severe already for the circumstantial error of a pious mind, and more such mistakes might easily be committed by him or others, if they proceed on in their journey to Jerusalem: So David was at a great stand, and durst deal no more in a matter so dangerous. 2. This deed of David some denominate as his humility, not presuming to proceed, but rather desist, seeing Divine displeasure seemed to say so to him, until God gave him new direction; but more probably David discovered in this deed great infirmity; for as Peter Martyr argueth excellently upon this point, if David did not know that it was the will of God the ark should be carried to David's City Sion, then he ought not to have begun its removal upon his own head, but if he had God's warrant for so doing, then he ought not to have desisted from it at this time upon this discouragement. That old sophister Satan put a fallacy upon David here, for the ark was not the cause of this calamity, but sin, which, being removed, he might have found God reconciled. David should have considered that the matter of this action was good, but there was some failure in the manner of acting, which he, finding out and reforming it, should have proceeded, having God's word to warrant him to carry the ark to Jerusalem, without fear of any further danger. 3. David's carrying the ark to Obed-edom's house (ver. 10, 11) wherein: (1.) Obed-edom was a Levite (1 Chron. 15, 18, 21, 24, and xvi. 5, and xxvi. 4) and certainly a good man, who finding David at a loss what to do with the ark, desired of him that his house might entertain it for the present, which was near Jerusalem, because Nachon's threshingfloor (where this disaster fell) is named here (ver. 6) "as Araunah's threshingfloor" (where the temple was afterwards built) is named (chapt xxiv. 18, 22.) This man is called a Gittite, not because a Philistine of Gath, for he was an Israelite of the tribe of Levi as above, but because he had sojourned in Gath, being (as Peter Martyr saith) banished thither with David by Saul, when he slew the Lord's priests; and we find that the Levites sometimes were forced to sojourn where they could find a place (Judg. xvii. 8) or he was of Gath-rimmon, a city of Levites (Josh. xxi. 24, 25.) 2. The ark brought a blessing to Obed-edom and all his household (v. 11). Some say, how durst David expose his neighbour to that danger from which he delivered himself. God took this act of faith well at Obed-edom's hands, and blessed him in his flocks, in his fruits, and in all his affairs and actions, and not only in his temporals, but also in his spirituals, to shew what a liberal paymaster God is unto all both small and great who favour his concerns, and further His Kingdom. They shall be no losers, but great gainers, who give either him or his servants due entertainment; as Laban was blest for entertaining Jacob, Potiphar and the chief gaoler for Joseph, the widow of Sarepta for Elias, the Shunamite for Elisha, Zacheus for Christ, as Obed-edom here for harbouring God's ark. The third part of this chapter is the carriage of the ark from Obed-edom's house to its proper place in David's City. Remarks upon it are: 1. The removal of the ark from hence upon the occasion of David's hearing how the ark had been entertained not only without any damage, but also with great advantage to Obed-edom. Though it had not been so (as we read) to Abinadab, who probably had not given it so noble and reverent an entertainment as Obed-edom did, and therefore was not blest like him: David hereupon begins to bethink himself of his own loss, that if the ark had been this half year in his own house (according to his first design) all those blessings upon Obed-edom had been bestowed upon himself and on his household; and 'tis a wonder David should neglect consulting with God by the Urim about this matter. Now those tidings flush David to renew his former design, when he saw the danger was over (v. 12). 2. David acknowledges his former fault committed in carrying the ark upon a cart, &c., but now it must be borne upon the shoulders of the Levites, according to God's own appointment as before, and finding his obedience to God herein (seeking God in due order) so far owned, as that the Lord helped the Levites by an invisible power so to bear it, as that it seemed light and no burden to them (1 Chron. xv. 2, 13, 26.) David upon this encouragement offers up a bullock and a ram every seventh station, as well as at the first stage (v. 13) in testimony of his thankfulness to God, for his making no breach upon them, as he had done in his former undertaking. (C. Ness.) *Why Obed-edom found the ark a blessing*:—But the ark of the Lord had been in the house of Abinadab forty years, and we do not read of any particular

benediction falling upon that house. That is quite possible. Men may have God in the house, and not know it. Men may have the Bible in the house, and never read it; or men may read the letter, and never enter into the spirit of the book. There is a difference between mere lodgment, and generous and appreciative hospitality. What a difference there is between a ceremony and a welcome—mere politeness almost amounting to mechanical veneration, and cordial sympathy, loving appreciation, a heart going out in great bursts of affection towards God for his compassion and love and manifold mercy! Abinadab and Obed-edom were in very deed not the same men. We do not all derive the same advantage from the Bible. One man reads it, and it is a letter—very stiff, formal, pedantic, reading like a royal proclamation, or like an ancient document out of which the meaning and immediate force have somehow become evacuated. Another man reads the Bible as if it had just been written—an immediate message from heaven—a comforting utterance from God's condescending heart, a speech made audibly, with all the fascination and persuasiveness of celestial music. We do not all get the same advantage from the Church. Attendance upon Divine worship may be a ceremony; or we may long for the opening of the gates of the house of the Lord; we may "prevent" the sun—be there before the light is there, waiting, longing, yearning to be admitted, and find in the place, itself speaking to us, comforting though invisible angels of God. Obed-edom is a word which signifies obedience. The word obedience is almost literally found in the word Obed-edom. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The cultivation of family worship*:—From particular occurrences we ascertain general principles. There is a uniformity in the administration of the moral government of God, not less certain than that which is demonstrated to exist in the laws of the physical universe. On this axiom all moral reasoning is suspended. If its truth be called in question we have no basis on which to rest our persuasions, when we would deter from the commission of sin, or encourage the practice of virtue. The Supreme Being is not accustomed to act by sudden impulses. His proceedings may indeed sometimes appear to the limited view of his creatures mere incidental circumstances, having no reference to general and ulterior principles; but that in reality they are not so, is known to us from the rectitude and immutability of his character. Since God blessed the house of Obed-edom, because it was willingly consecrated to his service, we infer that He will bless other families who act in a similar manner. Hence his example becomes an argument and stimulus to domestic piety. It cannot be imagined that the mere circumstance of the ark being deposited in his house, apart from the sentiments of affectionate veneration which he entertained for it as the symbolical representative of God's presence, would have drawn after it the recorded benediction. But it was the fact that he saw in it the accredited organ of Jehovah's glory, the pledge of His grace, and the golden throne of His mercy, and that he accordingly welcomed it, cherished it, and presented the spiritual sacrifices of his family devotion before it, which made it a source of blessing to him and to all his house. I intend, therefore, to take occasion from the conduct of Obed-edom, to recommend the cultivation of family religion. It is true that our houses cannot be appropriated in the way his was, to the special honour of God. No palpable and Divinely-appointed type of His invisible presence seeks admission into our tents. Yet may they nevertheless become His temples, designedly set apart and consecrated for His abode. We may act upon the very same principle that governed the pious Gittite, and thus secure to ourselves a similar reward. 1. Let me then begin with the observation that nothing can be more proper in itself, or more becoming persons professing to act under a sense of their dependence on God, than the observance of some special devotion when they first enter upon the occupation of their houses. Such a circumstance marks an epoch in the history of a family. In many cases, indeed, it is co-incident with the formation of a new family. But whether it be when first they assume that important station which constitutes them the heads of a separate household, or whether at some subsequent period of their family history they enter upon a new abode, it is highly becoming the piety of Christians to mark such an event by some distinct religious exercise of a domestic nature. Then let the altar be reared, the grateful Ebenezer be celebrated, and the access of God to the dwelling of His servants be implored with fervent and believing prayer. In every new position in which he is placed by the appointments of Divine Providence, the man of God will deem it not only an incumbent duty, but a privilege of inestimable value, to put himself and whoever is dear to him under His safeguard and guidance. Few of the events which fill

up the brief chronicle of our earthly existence are fraught with more consequences for good or for evil than the removals we make from place to place, as we prosecute our journey to the final resting-place of man. The first step they take becomes of immense importance. Upon it will depend in a degree far beyond what any prudential foresight of ours can calculate, the complexion of their whole future course. Nor of their course simply. Others besides themselves are implicated in their determination to open or to shut their doors to the ark of God. To welcome the entrance of God into their house in the offices of domestic religion is to become the benefactors of all their connexions, as well as to secure his blessing upon themselves; while the refusal to receive and entertain him as a family guest may issue in their own external exclusion, and that of many besides, from the family of His ransomed people, when they meet in the mansions of Heaven. Will it be other than a just recompense that those who will not admit God into their houses should be hereafter refused admission into his? 2. This consecration of your house to God, I proceed to remark, involves the perpetuated observance of family prayer. There would be no sincerity in the proceeding by which, upon your entrance into your habitation, you should set up an altar, if the presentation of the one sacrifice on that special occasion were all that you designed. Your solicitude, if you are governed by the principles of genuine piety, will be to detain the Divine Presence. If you invite your Heavenly Father, when you pitch your tent, you will desire that He should never more leave it. Of all the various forms under which men are combined in social life, the family constitution is that alone which takes its origin immediately from God. Other compacts into which they are moulded may have the sanction of his approbation, but this is the production of His own hands. He supplies the bonds which unite us in the sweet conjunctions of domestic life. It is attributed to Him as an instance of His love, that "He setteth the solitary in families: that He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children." In their social characters, it is consequently incumbent upon families to acknowledge Him. It is not enough that the individuals composing them should worship apart, each in the retirement of his closet, but upon the head of the household it devolves as a sacred obligation to collect them together, morning and evening, unitedly to offer up their praises and their prayers. The component parts of family worship are three: The reading of the Word of God; the celebration of the praise of God; and prayer. (1.) Since the Divine Being has graciously communicated to us the knowledge of His will, and put into our hands the volume that contains it, it is the dictate of reason that we should on all suitable occasions consult it. Nothing can be clearer than that the Author and Giver of the holy book designed it for the guidance of mankind in all the relations of life. Hence its marvellous adaptation to them all. It is profitable for every purpose. Every duty is enjoined in it, and instruction is communicated to every individual, in whatever modification of circumstances you can suppose him to be placed. Family relationships it especially recognises, laying down rules and affording encouragement to parents, to children, and to servants. And all this is done by it in addition to the disclosure of those momentous truths relating to human guilt and human redemption, to salvation by the cross of Christ, regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and to the glories and the pains of eternity, in which all the posterity of Adam have a common and an equal concern. The inference is too obvious to be avoided, that, while every one for himself should search the Scriptures, they should occupy a prominent position in the devotions of the household. (2.) The celebration of God's praise constitutes the second part of family worship. I mention it thus distinctly, because, though adoration and thanksgiving are comprehended in the general notion of prayer, to me it appears much to be desired that, whenever it can conveniently be done, some distinct attention should be given to this delightful and most celestial part of worship. Music is the language of feeling, and generally of elevated and joyous feeling; and when the heart keeps harmony with the voice, and the sweet modulations of the psalmody are instinct, as it were, with the affections of the soul, we seem to rise in the scale of enjoyment, and to approximate to the state of the blessed. (3.) It remains that I speak of prayer. (*E. Steane.*) *The nature and profitableness of family religion*.—I. THE NATURE OF FAMILY RELIGION. In conformity to the language of the narrative family religion may be said to consist in humbly and thankfully admitting the ark of God into our house. To receive the ark of God into our houses, is to receive Him whom the ark represented and symbolized, even Jesus Christ. Let Christ be received into our

houses, and effects will be produced; and will evince His powerful and gracious presence with us. In one particular, indeed, we shall especially manifest His dwelling with us, namely, in the establishment of His worship in our house, in a daily social calling on His name by all the members of our household. It is by the regular performance of family worship that we make our habitations temples unto the Lord, and show that we have admitted His ark into our house. II. OF THE PROFITABLENESS OF FAMILY RELIGION. Things are so appointed in the wisdom of God that duty and interest are closely joined together. It is a truth that the more attentive men are to their duty the more real peace and happiness they will enjoy. Scripture tells us that "godliness has the promise of the life that now is;" and reason, if we would listen to it, would tell us the same thing. It would tell us that those persons must experience most real enjoyment whom God regards with the greatest favour. But it is not in this indirect and incidental manner only that the profitableness of family religion shows itself. It is to be traced in its more immediate and practical effects. "The Lord blessed them." There was a peculiar manifestation of the Divine presence, favour, and protection, diffused around Obed-edom, and all that belonged to him. The power and goodness of God were, as it were, singularly exercised in his behalf. (*E. Cooper.*) *A prospering religion desired*:—It is well observed by a grave divine that while the ark brought the plague, every one was glad to be rid of it; but when it brought a blessing to Obed-edom, they looked upon it as worthy (of) entertainment. Many will own a blessing ark, a prospering truth: but he is an Obed-edom indeed that will own a persecuted, tossed, banished ark. (*J. Trapp.*) *Make room for the ark*:—Do not think that the ark will impoverish you. Obed-edom did not grudge a little corner for the ark of God. The devil might have whispered, "Of all houses, yours seems the least able to have the ark of God. You are a poor man, and there are a lot of children, and you need that corner for a cradle. Why, the neighbours are saying, 'What a foolish man Obed-edom is to have the ark in his place. Why, he has not a corner to spare; it is inconveniencing him very much;' and another says, 'I am glad I am not such a fool. I need all the space I have for wife and bairns, and sacks of wheat. I do not see what Obed-edom means by taking in the ark.'" Aye, but God made Obed-edom wealthy. The ark stayed there for three months, and God made Obed-edom's prosperity manifest. Josephus says, "The ark touched Obed-edom as the poorest in the place, and it left him as the richest." There is a picture. Oh, if you help the ark, God will help you, never fear. Cast out something, and bring it in. Let it be first, and God will see to the payment. (*J. Robertson.*)

Vers. 14, 15. And David danced before the Lord.—*Religious uses of music and dancing*:—The nations of the East have ever combined the dance as well as music with their most solemn religious ceremonies. There is nothing frivolous or trifling in the manner in which Orientals strive by the rhythmical movements and gestures of the body to express joy and praise. Just as our music might be divided into sacred, martial, and operatic (including in the latter all lighter melodies), so there are still among the Mohammedans three very distinct classes of dance, corresponding to these three divisions. From the various allusions to the dance in Holy Scripture, we may reasonably believe that their dances as well as their music have come down with little change from their Jewish predecessors. Of the third class of dance, performed exclusively by women, we need say nothing. Such was the dancing of the daughter of Herodias before Herod; such are the exhibitions of the dancing girls of Egypt, or the Nautch girls of India—all of them an abomination to the Lord. In the East the sexes always danced separately; nor was it otherwise when David led the triumphal procession before the ark. The men preceded with a leaping step, swaying to the sound of the music; then followed the musicians, and after them the damsels dancing by themselves. I had an opportunity of seeing such a religious dance in 1881, when Arabi Pasha led the procession with the sacred carpet, for the Kaaba of Mecca, out of Cairo on its way to the prophet's shrine. This is one of the greatest ceremonies of Mohammedanism; and the carpet, the gift of the khalif, is renewed only at intervals of several years. It was borne aloft on camels, and surrounded by troops; but in front was a vast crowd of ulemas and dervishes, with the chief muftis at their head, leaping, bounding, swaying their arms, and whirling round in time to the din of drums, trumpets, and cymbals which followed them. (*H. B. Tristram, D.D.*)

Ver. 16. **Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window.**—*The believer and the scoffer contrasted*.—I. **THE TEMPER AND CONDUCT OF A SCOFFER AT RELIGION.** Michal scorned David in her heart, because, being a king, she thought it unbecoming his dignity, and derogatory to his high place in Israel, that he should welcome the ark of God with leaping and dancing. And so it is, at this day, in many of the higher walks of life. The service of God is left, as an employment too servile for those who are among the mighty of the land, and fitted only for the poor, the illiterate, and the mean of the earth; as if the service of Him before whom archangels bow with adoring reverence, even the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, were beneath the notice of those who must perish for ever, if He look not upon them in love, and wash them not from their sins in that blood, which they are now trampling under foot in high disdain. It added deeply to David's trial that among all the multitudes of Israel none was found to despise him save Michal, his wife. There was much and cutting unkindness in the manner of Michal's reproach; and it is one of the frightful features of our lost and fallen nature that the severity and keenness of opposition for the truth's sake, which the servants of Christ experience from the enemies of Christ, is in proportion to the nearness of relationship or connexion between the parties; just as the civil wars of our own land, and of every land, have invariably been more sanguinary in their battles, more unsparing in their confiscations, and more cruel in their executions, than those which were waged with foreign states. Michal did not content herself with despising David in her heart, and yet showing him outward respect; but when he returned from glorifying God and blessing the people to bless his own household, she met him at his entrance, and with a deep, bitter sarcasm and irony exclaimed to him, "How glorious was the King of Israel to-day!" Her duty as a wife, her duty as a subject, were both forgotten, and she dishonoured her husband and her sovereign before his people and his family. How awful is the enmity of a sinner's heart against God in Christ! How fearfully doth it break through all barriers that oppose its indulgence, and how continually do we see it sweeping away, not only all the charities but all the decencies of domestic life! And yet we speak of the dignity of human nature! May God help us, and correct our delusions on this cardinal point of His own truth and Scripture! II. **THE MIND AND SPIRIT OF A TRUE BELIEVER.** In a broad and palpable contrast did the character of David stand to that of Michal; and as the one exhibited the tone and temper of a scoffer at religion, the other will exemplify the mind and spirit of a true believer in the Lord Jesus. He gloried in the service which was thus visited with reproach, and counted to him for shame. David said unto Michal, "It was before the Lord, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house, to appoint me a ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel; therefore will I play before the Lord." And here is the solid scriptural ground of a believer's joy, and glory, and gratitude to God. Who made him to differ? Nothing so fully crucifies self as a view of distinguishing love in the covenant of grace, writing our names in the book of life, sealing the record upon our hearts, and bidding us rest in the blessed persuasion that we have obtained mercy, and shall be one with Christ for ever. If called to serve Jehovah, to confess Him openly, and to own Him even among unbelievers, in His own house, he will not shrink, but take up the cross of this holy singularity, and bear it gladly after Jesus. Are you counted vile and mean, because you prefer the service of Him who bought you with His blood, to the infidelity of a world that lieth in the wicked one? Be yet more base, yet more vile, if any glory may thereby accrue to Him. (*R. P. Buddicom.*) *Respect for a husband a duty*.—There is something very remarkable about this Michal; she conceived a passionate love for David, when but a youth he stood before her flushed with the success over the lion and the bear, and holding in his hand the head of the slaughtered Philistine. But time passed on, and David fetched the ark from the house of Obed-edom, and he "danced before it with all his might, and Michal, Saul's daughter, saw him, and despised him in her heart; and, more than that, she went out to meet him and insulted him. Now here we have a perfectly consistent character—a woman who by her natural disposition loved what was heroic, manly, and generous; but, the moment real religious principles were introduced, admiration was changed into contempt. She could only look on one side of the character, the natural one; the supernatural she could not appreciate. She reads many lessons to all members of the human race, and especially to women. In the general form of her character she was, as a woman, what Saul was as a man—

able to appreciate the natural virtues of a man, and retaining the profession of religion as but the covering to a deep chasm of scepticism and infidelity. 1. The first striking feature of her character is the admiration of the heroic for its own sake, the undue estimation of the man in his vigour and success, and the tendency to worship at that shrine. 2. But Michal was as narrow and confined on other occasions as she had been bold and noble in these. David danced before the ark, and she despised him. If we seek the cause of this inconsistency it will appear to consist in a kind of selfishness. She despised him! Woman is essentially jealous, she is created so, and she should be so, it is her province. She is created to receive an amount of attention and devotion, the best preservation of which lies in her jealousy of it. But jealousy may assume too much the air of selfishness. It may become selfish, narrow, and narrowing. 3. But again, Michal could not appreciate especially the religious act, while she could that of the mere world-hero. She was like her father. It belonged to her relationship, to her parent, not to her capacity as a female. Herein she was unlike her brother Jonathan, who did fully appreciate and value the religious element in David's character. Women often apply the same standard which has been given them at birth by which to judge of the ordinary occurrences which fall within the usual scope of their duties to those which fall without them, and accordingly by false judgment despise what they cannot understand. So prudence is allowed to extinguish the light of more luminous virtues, and the arrangements of a household to derange those of the Church. The faults of violent temper, disrespect to a husband or a parent, irritability to children, injustice to servants, are counted as of small importance so as they are exercised to save a shilling; whereas the truth will be that the precaution far transcends in moral infirmity the fault which it is intended to check. 4. But again, Michal despised David in her heart, and followed up her inward contempt with words of insult and reproach. This seems to infer not only a contempt for David, but a cherished one, a contempt long unexpressed, and because hidden the more dangerous and melancholy. She did not try to check it, she allowed the feeling to heave and work within her until it broke out into the expressions of the text. There is a duty in respecting a husband. Independently of arranging his household, tending his hours of care, of sickness or weariness, quite apart from the desire to defend him from reproach, and to ward off the imputation of blame. There is a duty in the deep, inward, cherished feeling of respect. The office of the husband is as much to be respected as that of the parent, or the civil ruler. The woman must "see that she reverence her husband." 5. Michal despised peculiarly the act of David, his dancing before the ark, she said he was like "the vain fellows;" she cast opprobrious language on the man who with many infirmities was the man after God's own heart. Sad is it when any one looks out to discover his brother's failing; sadder still when that brother is one on whom God has set the seal of His approval; saddest of all, when a child looks out to expose the parent, or a wife the husband. But Michal's punishment was significant. She was childless, and that because she despised David. It mattered not what amount of truth there was in her charge. It mattered not how others supported her. It mattered not how much she found abettors in her circle of society or friends, she was not the person to censure her husband. She was not the instrument of his reproof. If there was anyone who should be, it was not Michal. She at least was to blame. She fell under God's malediction, quite irrespectively of the truth or justice of her charge. (*E. Monro.*) *Husband's claim upon a wife's reverence*:—The wife see that she reverence her husband, says the apostle. Yes; but even Paul himself would have allowed that it was impossible for Michal to reverence David all at once that day. Paul would have needed to have got Michal's ear early that morning when she tarried at home in the palace. Nay, he would have needed to have got her heart while she was yet Saul's daughter in Saul's palace. It is to tell a waterfall to flow uphill to tell Michal at this time to reverence David. Reverence does not come even at a Divine command. Reverence does not spring up in a day. Reverence is the result of long teaching and long training. Reverence has its roots in the heart and in the character; and the heart and the character only come and bring forth reverence as life goes on. That may be all true, but the apostle does not say that. He does not say that any of the wives to whom he wrote were too late now to reverence their husbands. He speaks it to all wives, and he expects that all wives who hear it shall lay it to heart, and shall do it. And yet their husbands, their very best husbands, are in so many things so difficult,

so impossible, to reverence. They fall so short of their young wife's dreams and visions. They are so full of faults, and follies, and tempers and habits to which no wife can possibly be blind. Most husbands are at so little trouble, after they have been for some time husbands, to make it easy, or, indeed, possible, for their wives to continue to love, and respect, and reverence them. All our wives have dreary, lonely, sorely-disappointed days at home—partly our fault and partly theirs, but mostly ours—that we know nothing about. (*Alex. Whyte, D.D.*) *Michal's lack of sympathy with David*:—It was the greatest day of David's life. And, sad to say, it was the very greatness of the day to David that made it such a day of death to Michal, Saul's daughter. Michal, Saul's daughter, died that day of a strange disease—a deep distaste at the things that were her husband's greatest delight. A deep distaste that had grown to be a deep dislike at David, till that deep distaste and dislike burst out that day into downright hatred and deliberate insult. You must understand all that the ark of God was to David, and the home-bringing of the ark, before you can fully understand the whole catastrophe of that day. You would need to be a kind of David yourself before you would look with right reverence and love at David that day. For David was beside himself that day. David never did anything by halves, and least of all his worship of God. It was like that day long afterwards in that same city when we read that His disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up. With all his might, then—and you know something of what all David's might in such matters was—with all his might David leaped and danced before the Lord till Michal despised him in her heart. Those who are deaf always despise those who dance. The deaf do not hear the music. And, on the other hand, those who do hear the music, they cannot understand those who sit still. David could not understand how Michal could sit still that day. But Michal's ear had never been opened to the music of the ark. She had not been brought up to it, and it was not her custom to go up to the house of the Lord and sing and play like David. Had Michal been married in the Lord: had Michal revered her husband; had she cared to please her husband; had she played on the psaltery and harp, if only for his sake—what a happy wife Michal would have been, and David what a happy husband! Had David not been so unequally yoked, Michal would have put on David's shoulder that day an ephod that she had worked for that day with her own hands; and as she put it on him she would have sung and said, I will clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. And then all that day in Jerusalem it would have been as it was at the Red Sea when Miriam the prophetess took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went after her with timbrels and with dances. But it was not so to be. For Michal sat at home that great day in Israel, and forsook her own mercy. Michal was not in the spirit of that day. And thus it was that she despised David in her heart when the very gates of brass and iron were lifting up their heads at David's psalm to let the King of Glory come in. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 20. **David returned to bless his household.**—*Family worship*:—I. There can be no question that these words are intended to denote that when the public work of the day was done David returned to his own dwelling to implore the blessing of Almighty God upon his family by prayer and supplication. I. WITH REGARD TO THE OBLIGATIONS TO FAMILY WORSHIP. 1. I begin by observing that this duty arises out of the relation in which families stand to God. He is their Founder and Benefactor. He "placeth the solitary in families;" children "are His heritage, and the fruit of the womb His reward." Does the duty of social worship result from man's being placed in society? Here is a society of the closest and most endearing kind, in which there is a clear and felt community of wants and necessities, a closer conjunction of interests than can possibly subsist in any other situation. 2. While the relation in which families stand to God evinces the obligation to family worship, the relation in which the head of the family stands to its several members makes it no less apparent. He is invested with a certain delegated authority over them, which he is bound to employ for the promotion of the Divine glory. The power which he thus possesses is a department of the stewardship which the great Proprietor commits to the care of men: and if it be neglected, if its responsibility be not habitually felt, he is a faithless steward, and must fail in rendering an account. 3. So consonant is this duty to the natural sentiments of the human heart that even heathen nations appear to have been sensible of its propriety; for besides their tutelar deities who were

supposed to preside over cities and nations, and who had public honours paid to them in that character, we read of the "penates," or household gods, to whom families addressed their devotions. Such were, in all probability, the "teraphim," or graven images, which Rachel carried away when she left the house of her father, Laban the Syrian; and those also which Micah, a man of Mount Ephraim, had in his dwelling, and on account of which he engaged a young man to officiate as priest or domestic chaplain. 4. But the obligation to this duty will more clearly appear when we attend to what the Scriptures teach us regarding it.

II. THE ADVANTAGES WHICH ACCRUE FROM THE FAITHFUL DISCHARGE OF THIS DUTY.

1. When accompanied with suitable dispositions of mind, family worship exercises a most beneficial influence even upon the temporal interests of those who practise it. It cannot fail to give a certain order and regularity to all the concerns of the household; for, being performed at a stated time, morning and evening, account will be laid, both by the head and the members of the household, to have their affairs in such a state that it may be performed with convenience; and thus habits of regularity and dispatch will be acquired, which must prove highly conducive to domestic economy and comfort. 2. The influence of domestic worship in promoting the temporal interests of a family is still further apparent from its tendency to promote industry in business and sobriety of life. The man that offers up his desires to God for the welfare of his household feels that by that very act he becomes bound to concur in every practicable way towards that end; and no one can continue long to pray for a blessing on his secular affairs, while at the same time he neglects his business and spends his time and substance in idleness and dissipation. 3. Attention to this duty is calculated to promote the worldly interests of a family, inasmuch as it draws down the blessing of God upon their labours. It is His blessing alone that maketh rich and prosperous, and in what manner is that blessing more likely to be obtained than by a whole family joining in prayer, and asking it daily of God? "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked, but He blesseth the habitation of the just." 4. Another, and far more valuable benefit, which flows from the faithful discharge of this duty, is its tendency, under the blessing of God, to promote the spiritual and eternal interests of those who practise it. It is one of the most important means through which God has promised to convey the blessings of salvation. He has assured us by an apostle that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." 5. The regular performance of this duty is no less advantageous to the members of his household. To some, it is true, family worship, like all other means of grace, may yield no saving or spiritual benefit. As there are some spots of ground so completely sterile and impenetrable, that no culture can make them fruitful, even so there are some hearts so hard and callous that the wisest instruction, the most fervent prayers, and the most holy example produce no impression upon them. Still, however, we may safely assert that family devotion, when punctually and faithfully observed, has a most powerful tendency to form the minds of a household to the love and practice of religion. Who knows not the force of early impressions and the strength of early habits? 6. Nor is the influence of family worship confined to the members of the household who engage in it. It has a tendency to promote the truest and most permanent welfare of the community at large. Society rests upon reverence for law, and nothing can uphold it so well as reverence for the law of God. It is the caricature of this principle, religious serfdom, on which the continental despotisms at this moment are striving to rest their tottering thrones. We have in this country the blessed reality to a considerable extent, enlightened and genuine regard for the Divine law, and that among the masses of the people. 7. Nor is the influence of the duty we are recommending more useful and extensive than it is lasting. Besides blessings imparted to a neighbourhood, a congregation, a city, a nation, there may be blessings scattered over a long track of generations. Out of one home many homes may arise; each of these again may become a well-head of moral and religious power. Thus a seed shall be preserved and multiplied to serve God, which shall be accounted to Him for a generation. III. SOME OF THE MOST POPULAR EXCUSES OR APOLOGIES FOR THE NEGLECT OF THE DUTY OF FAMILY WORSHIP.

1. One of the most common of these apologies is want of time. The time that is necessary for the performance of this exercise might easily be redeemed from sleep, idleness, business, or amusement. Besides, the advantages attending the duty would more than compensate the expense of time. By the spirit of order and regularity which, as we have seen, it tends to produce, time will be saved,

instead of being lost, while, by drawing down the blessing of God on your labours, your united supplications will promote the success of your worldly employments. "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord."

2. But a more plausible excuse for the neglect of the duty of family worship is want of ability. But let me entreat those who complain of this inability to remember that in prayer, as in other things, facility and correctness are to be acquired only by frequent practice and use. You can never form any accurate judgment of your qualifications until you have made the trial. Another reason which has been offered by some for neglecting family prayer is that they cannot overcome their natural reluctance and timidity to engage in prayer in the presence of others. To be ashamed of engaging in family prayer is virtually to be ashamed of religion itself; and how awfully criminal such conduct must be, against which are pointed such denunciations as the following—"Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and My words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father, with the holy angels." 4. There are others who plead as an excuse for neglecting this duty that it had been so long neglected that they know not how to begin. To introduce family worship now, they think, would only be exhibiting their own inconsistency of character. 5. There is only one excuse more to which we would request your attention, namely, that of those who acknowledge the reasonableness of the duty which has been recommended, but who are reluctant to attend to it, from the fear of the opposition, censure and ridicule which they may meet with from their families. But I would ask those who urge this plea, whether they have ever made the experiment? If they have not, how know they but that this is a hindrance which exists only in their own imagination? There is, even in the very worst of men, a natural reverence for holiness, and I believe that the instances are extremely rare in which the members of a household will openly discourage or censure the ordinances of religion. (*P. Grant.*) *Blessing the household*:—You should bless your households—I. BY YOUR PRAYERS. Spiritual sacrifices of prayers and praise will ever be presented on the domestic altar by those who are alive to the spiritual interests of their families. It will be their constant practice to take them by the hand, as it were, to the throne of the heavenly grace, and there devoutly to pray with them and for them. The importance of such engagements, in the great and important business of blessing our households, cannot possibly be estimated. You should bless your households, II. BY YOUR INSTRUCTIONS. "That the soul be without knowledge, it is not good." Hence the importance of sound Scriptural knowledge to the young of our different families. You should bless your households, III. BY YOUR DISCIPLINE. It is said of David that "he had not offended Aronijah in any thing in saying, What hast thou done?" How neglectful was this renowned and illustrious individual, in this particular instance, of a most important part of a parent's duty! Every one acquainted with a parent's relation and obligations, and conversant with the management and direction of a family, must be fully aware of the importance of discipline to comfort, good order, and regularity. There must be established, in our different houses, an inviolable connexion between authority and obedience. Remember that discipline is God's established law. He exercises it in his family; and we must in ours. You should bless your households, IV. BY YOUR EXAMPLE. Not only in the church and the world, but also in your different families, is faith to be shown by your works. (*W. Snell.*) *Domestic religion*:—These words seem to intimate what at all events is certain from other accounts of this great and good man, that domestic devotion was his habitual practice. With him religion was not an affair restricted to times and places; but it was a hallowed habit, which accompanied him into the camp and the cabinet, into the closet and the family circle; and his example is particularly worthy of our notice, because it is that of a man who did not consider himself in any degree exempted from the most sacred obligations of domestic life by the many duties of his public and elevated station. Let us, then, take occasion from it to make some remarks upon the importance of religion in the family. I. DOMESTIC RELIGION TENDS TO PROMOTE THE TEMPORAL WELFARE OF FAMILIES. The prosperity of every family depends upon the right spirit and practice of its members. In the natural course of things, it is to be looked for only as the reward of virtuous and well-directed industry; it is consequent upon harmony and order, sobriety and diligence, discretion and integrity, in the affairs of life. II. FAMILY RELIGION IS RECOMMENDED BY THE SUBSTANTIAL SUPPORT AND COMFORT IT AFFORDS IN ALL SEASONS OF DOMESTIC TRIAL AND AFFLICTION. Every

householder has not only certain duties of a social and secular nature to discharge, but a course of trial to undergo, which calls for patience and resignation to the will of God. We need not descant upon those afflictions of domestic life which so often turn the abode of joy into the scene of heartrending sorrow. The best and most prosperous family is, we all know, liable to those disappointments, losses, and sorrows which are common to society in every form. III. FAMILY-RELIGION IS, MOREOVER, POWERFULLY RECOMMENDED AS RANKING AMONGST THE MOST EFFICIENT MEANS OF PROMOTING THE CAUSE OF TRUTH AND GODLINESS. The service of God is the grand object for which human beings are united together under the domestic constitution, and endued with the mighty power of the social affections. If you look for the final end in anything short of this, it must be something limited merely to the objects of a transitory life, and falling therefore immeasurably short of all that relates immediately to the interest of sinful and immortal creatures. Now the great importance of family-worship, in reference to the grand designs of the domestic constitution, must be evident under whatever aspect you consider the subject. 1. If you contemplate it in reference to those who are entrusted with household authority, it must manifestly be of great advantage to them in the discharge of their sacred duties. The parent and the master are, as such, accountable to the Judge of all for the manner in which they act in regard to the precious means of usefulness placed at their disposal. The souls of their children and domestics are entrusted to their care. 2. The worship and fear of God in families must directly tend to restrain the evil tendencies of those who are placed under authority, and to promote most effectually their spiritual welfare. Every household which duly recognises the authority of the supreme Parent in the stated exercises of devotion, is a most important school for the acquisition of the best principles and habits. 3. These remarks will suffice, however, to shew the vast importance of family-religion in relation to the general interests of Christianity. It is to education conducted on religious principles that the world, under the Divine blessing, will always be principally indebted for whatever it shall possess of genuine wisdom and goodness. Happy, then, thrice happy, is the family which is animated by the spirit of devotion, and regulated by the principles of Christianity! In a world of sin and sorrow it presents a scene most refreshing to the eye—a home of peace and blessedness—a garden of the Lord, where the trees of righteousness are seen to grow and blossom with the fruit of immortality. In conclusion, we would exhort those who enjoy the inestimable advantages of parental and religious discipline, to remember their great responsibility to God, and to consider well how much depends upon the improvement of their privileges. (C. R. Muston, M.A.) *The duty and advantages of family prayer*:—Our text points to the more enlarged view of gospel expansiveness—the extension of our religious privileges to those around us, in order that they in their turn may extend like blessings to others. I. THE DUTY OF FAMILY WORSHIP. 1. First, then, the consent of all pious antiquity, patriarchs and prophets, of evangelists and holy men, whether dwelling in wilderness-tents or in houses of cedar, in an upper room at Jerusalem or in a lonely hut by the sea-shore, that they all prayed with and blessed their households. 2. On the score of its reasonableness, on the identity of interests and sympathies which must exist in the same household. 3. The consideration of that law of stewardship which, in spiritual things as well as in temporal, makes each man his brother's keeper, his brother's instructor, his brother's counsellor, and priest and friend. What that master would be thought of who should neglect to snatch a servant from the flames, or what that parent would be thought of who from his children should withhold their daily food, we need not be told; yet wherein is he to be otherwise accounted of, who should behold his servants day by day as brands unpitied in the burning, or who should feed his children only with "the meat that perisheth," when their immortal natures were hungering for that which "endureth to everlasting life?" II. SOME OF THE ADVANTAGES WHICH RESULT FROM A DEVOUT OBSERVANCE OF THE DUTIES OF FAMILY RELIGION. 1. The low ground of worldly interests and worldly comforts as being furthered thereby. You know your happiness lies largely in the faithfulness, the trustworthiness, the affection and love of your domestics: what more likely to kindle such qualities within them than to witness your daily and devout mindfulness of the fact that you also "have a Master in Heaven?" 2. Again, the duty will be of the highest practical benefit to yourselves. When you have risen from your knees you will feel that a solemn necessity is laid upon you to live and speak and

act according to the spirit of your prayers: be it even from no worthier motive than a regard to your own consistency, temper will be curbed, uncharitableness will be repressed, pride will bring down its lofty looks, and anger hold out the kind and forgiving hand. 3. Another benefit of a devoutly conducted family service is good to the souls of others; to the souls of the servants that wait on thee, of the relations that tarry with thee, of the stranger who—though it may be but for a night—may be sojourning within thy gates. 4. Once more, by keeping up these devout solemnities in your household, you secure a remembrance in the private intercessions of its members. When all pray with you, then all will pray for you: the walls of every chamber shall hear mention of your name: prayer shall watch over your infant's slumbers: prayer shall smoothe for you the bed of languishing: "as the mountains are round about Jerusalem," shall prayer compass your daily path: as guardian angels shall prayer stand round your bed. (*D. Moore, M.A.*) **How glorious was the King of Israel to-day.**—*The jeer of sarcaasm, and the retort of piety*:—David had simply divested himself of his robes, and acted like the rest of the people in playing before God. She accused him of immodesty; this was, of course, but a pitiful satire, he having in all things acted blamelessly, though humbly, like the rest of the people. His reply to her was with usual tartness. Seldom did he seem to lose his temper for a moment, but in this case he half did so at any rate. His answer was, "It was before the Lord which chose me before thy father, and before all his house." Thus significantly, and as it were ominously did he remind her of her pedigree. And because she had slighted her husband when he had acted in God's service according to the dictates of his heart, the Lord struck her with a curse—the greatest curse which an Eastern woman could possibly know—a curse, moreover, which wiped out the last expiring hope of her family pride—she went childless to the day of her death. I. **DAVID'S TROUBLE.** His trouble was peculiar. It came from a quarter where he ought least to have expected it. Has it not been to many a Christian woman that her husband has been her greatest enemy in religion, and many a Christian man has found the partner of his own bosom—the hardest obstacle in the road to heaven? Natural affections are so interwoven with a thousand ligaments that they cannot be easily broken; but they are delicate as the finest nerves, and can never be injured without causing the most dolorous sensation. II. **DAVID'S JUSTIFICATION.** What did David say in extenuation of what he had done? He said, "It was before the Lord, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house, and appointed me ruler over the people, over Israel, therefore will I play before the Lord." David's justification of his acts was God's election of him. Let me cull a picture from the memoir of one in years gone by. He preaches in a church in Glasgow; he is just inducted into the church, preferment lies open before him, he may speedily be made a Bishop if he likes, he seeks it not. Without mitre or benefice he takes to Kennington-common and Moorfields, goes to every stump and hedge in the country, so that he is Rural Dean of all the commons everywhere, and Canon Residentiary nowhere. He is pelted with rotten eggs; he finds one time that his forehead has been laid open in the midst of the sermon, while he has been laying men's hearts open. Why does he do it? Men say he is fanatical. What did Whitfield need to do this for? What did John Wesley need to go all over the country for? Why, there is the Rev. Mr. So-and-so, with his fourteen livings, and never preaches at all—good man he is. "Oh," say the world, "and he makes a good thing, depend upon it." That is a common saying, "He makes a good thing of it." And when he died, he did make a good thing of it, for he silenced the tongue of slander, leaving nothing but an imperishable reputation behind. When Mr. Wesley was labouring abundantly, they said, "He is a rich man;" and taxed him for his plate very heavily. He said, "You may take my plate at any rate if you like, for all I have is two silver spoons; I have one in London, and one in York, and by the grace of God, I shall never have any more as long as there are poor people about." But the people said, "Depend upon it, they are making a good thing of it; why cannot they be still as other people." What other men could not do, or would not do, they did; they could not rest before they did it; they could dance like David before the ark, degrading the clerical character; they could bring down the fine dignity of the parson, to stand like a mountebank before the shows of Moorfields, or in the Spa-fields' riding schools; they could come down on stage-boards to preach the gospel; they were not ashamed to be like David—they thought all this disgrace was honour, and all this shame was glory; and they bore it all, for

their justification was found in the fact that they believed God had chosen them; and therefore they chose to suffer for Christ's sake, rather than reign without Christ. And now, if you think God has chosen you and yet do not feel that He has done great things for you, or holds any strong claims upon your gratitude, then shun the cross. If you have never had much forgiven, get over the stile, and go down the green lane into Bye-path meadow, if it is comfortable walking, go down there. If you do not owe much to the Lord Jesus Christ, shirk his service, go up in the corner there when the trumpet plays, and tell Michal you are very sorry you have displeased her. Say, "I will never do the like again, trust me; I am sorry you do not like it; I hope you will now forgive me; but as I hold religion to be a thing to please everyone as well as myself, I will never dance before the ark again." Do that now if you are under no very great obligation to the Father of spirits, and have never tasted the distinguishing love of God to your souls. But oh, there are some of you ready to start up from your seats, and say, "Well, I am not that man!" and assuredly, as your pastor, I can look on some of you that have had much forgiven. Not long ago you were up to the throat in drunkenness; you could blaspheme God. Not very long ago perhaps you carried on dishonesty, and never entered the house of God. Some of you were frivolous, gay, careless, despisers of God, without hope, without Christ, strangers to the commonwealth of Israel. Well, and what brought you here now? Why, sovereign grace has done it. The mercy you have received is a complete justification for anything that you may do in God's service, any ecstasy that you may feel when you are worshipping him, and any excess of liberality you may display when you are engaged in pressing on to the kingdom of your Lord and Master. III. NOT LESS WORTHY OF OUR NOTICE WAS HIS RESOLUTION. What did he say? "I will yet be more vile than thus, and I will be base in mine own sight." Resolve, when you are in any sort of persecution, to face it with a full countenance. Like a nettle is the persecutor; touch it gently and it will sting you, but grasp it, and it hurts you not. Lay hold of those who oppose you, not with rough vengeance, but with the strong grip of quiet decision, and you have won the day. Yield no principle, no, not the breadth of a hair of that principle. Stand up for every solitary grain of truth; contend for it as for your life. Think of the snows of the Alps, and call to mind the Waldenses, and the Albigenses, your great forerunners. Think again, of the Lollards, the disciples of Wickliffe; think of your brethren in Germany, who, not many centuries ago, nay, but a century ago, were sewn up in sacks, had their hands chopped off, and bled and died—a glorious list of martyrs. Your whole pedigree, from the beginning to the end, is stained with blood. From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been made to suffer the violence of men; and you! will you yield? Shall these soft times, these gentle ages, take away your pristine valour—make you the craven sons of heroic fathers? No, if you are not called to the sufferings of a martyr, yet bear the spirit of a martyr. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Afraid of the excitement of religion:*—The Sunday services were well attended and were used of God to the conversion of some. Each night showed fresh cases of blessing, and the last day I was asked to visit the Bible class leader, who had been taken ill on the Monday. On entering the room he exclaimed, "This is a judgment on me." "What do you mean?" said I. "Well, I prayed in public last week that the Lord would keep all excitement out of the meetings, and He answered it by keeping me out of them altogether, and I have not been able to get my young men to any of them." It is wise to distinguish between the "religion of excitement" and the "excitement of religion." We must never put perspiration in the place of inspiration, or thunder in the place of lightning. (*Newton Jones.*)

Ver. 21. David said unto Michal, It was before the Lord, which chose me before thy father.—*David dancing before the ark because of his election:*—I What effect had this doctrine, this experience, this inward conviction upon David? **IT MADE GOD THE LEADING THOUGHT WITH DAVID.** 1. This was especially the case with David in his devotion. David that day worshipped God in spirit and in truth. The effect of this truth upon David was also that, as the Lord had become the great influence of his life, and the great object of his adoration, so he was to him his supreme Lord. II. Secondly, **IT WILL CREATE IN US A PROPER DISREGARD FOR HUMAN OPINION.** 1. In his worship David did not allow the opinions of men to weigh with him. He worshipped "before the Lord," and there he left it. 2. He does not seek honour from the many. David sought not

the honour which cometh from men. 3. David did not even consult the judgment of the few. 4. Beloved, the doctrines of grace put the very idea of honouring man out of court with us. III. Then, thirdly, A SENSE OF ELECTION CAUSES A LOW OPINION OF SELF. David said, "I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight." David would more and more abase himself before the Lord. A sense of electing love will render you base in your own sight. I will tell you why. 1. First, you will never understand why the Lord has chosen you. Often will you sing:

"What was there in me that could merit esteem,
Or give the Creator delight?
'Twas even so, Father, I ever must sing,
'Because it seem'd good in thy sight.'"

2. I dare say David, in a few quick thoughts, reviewed his former estate. 3. Then the king recollected the dangers and troubles he had experienced. 4. David's high position must have made him feel lowly when he knew to whom he owed it all. All the while David had a deep sense of his personal unworthiness. He did not know his own heart fully—no man does so. But he knew enough of himself to make him base in his own sight; for he could never think himself worthy of the choice of God, and all that it involved. Our heart adores and wonders as we think of the election of God. As we rise in the assurance of the Divine choice, we sink in our valuation of ourselves. IV. A SENSE OF DIVINE ELECTION FOSTERS A FEELING OF HOLY BROTHERHOOD. It is wonderful how democratic the doctrines of grace are, and how aristocratic they are too. The chosen are all kings, and when we mix with the poorest of them we are kings with kings. Free grace strips the proud, but it adorns the humble. David honoured the humblest of the Lord's chosen; for when Michal talked about what the handmaids of his servants would say, he answered, "Of the maid-servants which thou hast spoken of, of them shall I be had in honour." To be esteemed by them was a cheer to him. V. A SENSE OF BEING CHOSEN OF GOD STIRS A DESIRE FOR THE SERVICE OF GOD. 1. Such service will be personal. 2. This personal service will be cheerful. 3. This service will be in connection with the great sacrifice. 4. This service should be thoughtful. 5. This service must be obedient. 6. This service should be practical. 7. This service must be seen at home. If you are chosen of God you will, like David, bless your household. You will long to see your sons and daughters brought to God. VI. A SENSE OF DIVINE ELECTION WILL EXCITE SACRED ENTHUSIASM. 1. David had an inward delight in God. God was his exceeding joy. 2. In David's case his inward peace boiled over in holy excitement. Before the ark he was singing, he was harping, he was worshipping, and at last must show it by the joyful motion of his body. 3. David felt so exultant that he wished everybody to know of his joy in God. He told all the crowd around of his delight in God; and he sang that day, "Declare His glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people." (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Irrepressible praisefulness*:—Once robbers besieged a monastery to rob it of its treasures. The monks carried the golden organ to a river near by, and sunk it in the water to keep it from the robbers' hands. At certain periods, so the legend runs, the organ would rise out of the river and give forth such ravishing music as was never elsewhere heard by mortal ears. Such an instrument is a truly thankful heart—one in which is the joy of the Lord. The floods may go over it, but it ever rises out of them and sings its sweetest songs. Nothing can ever check its praise. It sings in the darkest night, its music rolling out into the gloom to cheer the weary pilgrim. A thankful heart always finds something good, even when all things seem evil. *When to shout "Glory"*:—Billy Bray, the Cornish preacher, was a constant visitor among the sick and dying. On one occasion he was sitting by the beside of a Christian brother who had been always very reticent, and afraid to confess joyously his faith in Christ. Now, however, he was filled with gladness. Turning to Billy, whose beaming face and sunny words had done so much to produce this joy, he said, "Oh, Mr. Bray, I'm so happy that, if I had the power, I'd shout 'Glory!'" "Hae, mon," said Billy, "what a pity it was thee didn't shout 'Glory!' when thee hadst the power!" *Reasonableness of religious zeal*:—In the Natural History Museum at Central Park, New York, a valuable butterfly may be seen. It is estimated that the insect cost its former owner, a Pennsylvanian doctor, at least £2,000. The butterfly is to be found only in a certain part of West Africa, and the gentleman fitted out an expedition and main-

tained it for more than two years, in order that the rare insect might be added to his entomological collection. If such zeal is shown by one who desires to secure a butterfly, is it to be wondered at that Christians at times display an unusual enthusiasm? Ought they not rather to do so more widely and frequently, when the glory of God and the salvation of never-dying souls are at stake?

CHAPTER VII.

Vers. 1—17. **I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains.**—*Proposal to build a temple*:—1. The spirit of David was essentially active and fond of work. Even in Eastern countries, with their proverbial stillness and conservatism, such men are sometimes found, but they are far more common elsewhere. Great undertakings do not frighten them; they have spirit enough for a lifetime of effort, they never seem weary of pushing on. When they look on the disorders of the world, they are not content with the languid utterance, "Something must be done;" they consider what it is possible for them to do, and gird themselves to the doing of it. For some time David seems to have found ample scope for his active energies in subduing the Philistines and other hostile tribes that were yet mingled with the Israelites, and that had long given them much annoyance. When all his enemies were quieted, and he sat in his house, he began to consider to what work of internal improvement he would now give his attention. Was it right that there should be such a contrast between the dwelling-place of David and the dwelling-place of God? It was the very argument that was afterwards used by Haggai and Zechariah after the return from captivity, to rouse the languid zeal of their countrymen for the re-erection of the house of God. "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses and this house lie waste?" A generous heart, even though it is a godless one, is uncomfortable when surrounded by elegance and luxury, while starvation and misery prevail in its neighbourhood. To the feelings of the godly a disreputable place of worship, contrasting meanly with the taste and elegance of the hall, or even the villa, is a pain and a reproach. What we have more need to look at is the disproportion of the sums paid by rich men, and even by men who can hardly be called rich, in gratifying their own tastes and in extending the kingdom of Christ. Wealth which remunerates honest and wholesome labour is not all selfishly thrown away. But it is somewhat strange that we hear so seldom of rich Christian men devoting their superfluous wealth to maintaining a mission station with a full staff of labourers, or to the rearing of colleges, or hospitals, or Christian institutions, which might provide on a large scale for Christian activity in ways that might be wonderfully useful. It is in this direction that there is most need to press the example of David. 2. When the thought of building a temple occurred to David, he conferred on the subject with the prophet Nathan. Nathan was to inform David that, unlike Saul, he was not to be the only one of his race to occupy the throne; his son would reign after he was gathered to his fathers, the kingdom would be established in his hands, and the throne of his kingdom would be established for ever. To this favoured son of his would be entrusted the honour of building the temple, God would be his father, and he would be God's son. The proposal which David had made to build a temple was declined. The time for a change, though drawing near, had not yet arrived. The curtain-canopied tabernacle had been designed by God to wean His people from these sensuous ideas of worship to which the magnificent temples of Egypt had accustomed them, and to give them the true idea of a spiritual service, though not without the visible emblem of a present God. The time had not yet arrived for changing this simple arrangement. God could impart His blessing in the humble tent as well as in the stately temple. 3. But the message through Nathan contained also elements of encouragement, chiefly with reference to David's offspring, and to the stability and permanence of his throne. To appreciate the value of this promise for the future, we must bear in mind the great insecurity of new dynasties in Eastern countries, and the fearful tragedies that were often perpetrated to get rid of the old king's family, and prepare the way for some ambitious and unscrupulous usurper. To David,

therefore, it was an unspeakable comfort to be assured that his dynasty would be a stable dynasty; that his son would reign after him. A father naturally desires peace and prosperity for his children, and if he extends his view down the generations, the desire is strong that it may be well with them and with their seed for ever. But no father, in ordinary circumstances, can flatter himself that his posterity shall escape their share of the current troubles and calamities of life. 4. The emotions roused in David by this communication were alike delightful and exuberant. He takes no notice of the disappointment—of his not being permitted to build the temple. Any regret that this might occasion is swallowed up by his delight in the store of blessing actually promised. And here we may see a remarkable instance of God's way of dealing with His people's prayers. Virtually, if not formally, David had asked of God to permit him to build a temple to His name. That petition, bearing though it did very directly on God's glory, is not vouchsafed. But in refusing him that request, He makes over to him mercies of far higher reach and importance. And how often does God do so! How often, when His people are worrying and perplexing themselves about their prayers not being answered, in God answering them in a far richer way! Glimpses of this we see occasionally, but the full revelation of it remains for the future. 5. It is a striking scene that is presented to us when "David went in, and sat before the Lord." It is the only instance in Scripture in which any one is said to have taken the attitude of sitting while pouring his heart out to God. Yet the nature of the communion was in keeping with the attitude. We seem to see in this prayer the very best of David—much intensity of feeling, great humility, wondering gratitude, holy intimacy and trust, and supreme satisfaction in the blessing of God. We see him walking in the very light of God's countenance, and supremely happy. The joy of David in this act of fellowship with God was the purest of which human beings are capable. It was indeed a joy unspeakable and full of glory. Oh that men would but acquaint themselves with God and be at peace! (W. G. Blaikie, D.D.) *David's desire to build a temple*:—I. DAVID'S COUNSEL AND PURPOSE TO BUILD THE TEMPLE ALLOWED BY MAN BUT DISALLOWED BY GOD. 1. First, the moving cause of this counsel was the peace God had given him now round about. 2. Second, Nathan's over-hasty approving of David's purpose (v. 3) before he had well considered it in his own mind, or consulted with God about it. This was Nathan's private opinion, but not by Divine revelation, which sheweth, that the prophets did not always speak by prophetic inspiration, but sometimes as private men by a human prudence. 3. Third, God suffers not His servants to lie long under mistakes. He comes to Nathan that night to rectify both his and David's error (verses 4, 5, 6, 7), from whence: (1) This mistake arose from a pious mind, therefore God soon discovers it, and reveals His will therein (Phil. 3. 15). 2. David thought, because God had promised there should a house be built him, when Israel was once settled in Canaan (Deut. 12. 10, 11), that now the time was come, and he was the man whom God had designed to do this great work. (3) God took this pious purpose of David's so well that he accepted of the will for the deed (1 Kings. 8, 18, and 2 Cor. 8, 12). Nay, God doth not only graciously accept it, but he doth bountifully reward it (v. 10, 11), etc., here, as if David had done the deed. (4) This Divine acceptance of David's pious purpose (as if it had been a performance) was signified by God's calling him twice over My servant David (v. 5, 8). II. THE REASONS GOD RENDERED TO DAVID WHY HE WAS REFUSED TO BUILD THE TEMPLE. 1. He was a martial man, and had shed much blood. The temple was a type of the church built by Christ, that Prince of Peace (Isa. 9. 6), therefore saith God, I reserve this piece of service for thy son Solomon, whose name signifies peaceable. 2. It was meet the shadow should be suitable to the substance. 2. A second reason is rendered by Solomon (1 Kings, 5. 3), that God had designed David soon after this transaction to wage war with the nations round about Israel, therefore could he look for little leisure to carry on so great and glorious a fabric. 3. The third reason of God's refusing David for this work is found in this Divine oracle to David here, saying, there is no necessity or present haste for building Me a house, seeing that a tent has given Me content to dwell in, ever since Israel's coming out of Egypt, and so will be still till My time be come; yet as I have been hitherto all-sufficient unto Israel, so will be as efficacious to them from the ark of My presence in the tabernacle, as if it were magnificently fixed in the temple. 4. The oracle of God secretly taxeth David for being too preposterous in his zeal,

saying all the judges of Israel were willing to wait for a Divine warrant to this great work, none of them durst undertake it for want of my commanding warrant, and wilt not thou wait also? Zeal must be rightly timed (1 Chron. 17, 6.) (*C. Ness.*) *The sanctuary for the people*:—I. THE SANCTUARY, IN DAVID'S VIEW WAS THE HOUSE OF THE LORD. The sanctuary signifies a holy or a sanctified place—a dwelling-place of the Most High—a place where people assembled to honour God and worship Him in the spirit of liberality and holiness. II. IN THE SANCTUARY, WORK MUST BE DONE FOR THE WORLD. The religion of Christ reaches out to the lost and the undone. Giving is not a hindrance but a help. The poorest as well as the richest feel that it is a blessed privilege to give. The widow's mite has a right to a place in the aggregations which support missions and which build up the waste places. III. THE SANCTUARY IS THE TRAINING-PLACE FOR THE NOBLER NATURE. Business is laid aside. The sharpness, the grasping, the watching, the suspicious spirit may be banished. IV. THE CONDITION OF THE SANCTUARY EVIDENCES OUR REGARD FOR GOD. What we do for friends at home attests our love for those committed to our keeping. So what is done for the sanctuary proves the regard cherished for every effort put forth to promote the glory of God and advance the interests of our fellow-men. David felt this when he called attention to the fact that he dwelt in cedar while the ark of God dwelt within curtains. He did not desire to build the temple to save his soul, but because of his love for God and of his desire to promote the interests of His cause. (*J. D. Fulton, D.D.*) *The intended temple*:—David looking at his own personal comfort did not say, Let me now enjoy it; I have paid dearly for it; everything in my house cost me blood; if any man is entitled to a long quiet afternoon in life, I am the man; I am thankful for this tranquillity, and nothing shall disturb it. Men of David's quality never made speeches of that kind: their peace is in their activity; their Sabbath is in their worship. So, said David, look at the condition of affairs: I dwell in a house of cedar, and the ark of God dwelleth within curtains, etc. Truly, he was a poet with a fine sense of rhythm. Were a syllable too much in a line it would afflict him like the puncture of an edged instrument. Without studying letters, he knew when things swung in astronomic rhythm and balance and harmony. We may have lost that fine sense of unity and practical poesy; some men have lost it in speech. God has set all things in relation. He is a God of order. He has published the universe as a poem, and all his goings fall into noble sequence. We must study that spirit and pray for it, so that we cannot rest while a picture is out of square, whilst a pillar that ought to be upright is leaning a little to the right or to the left. We ought to be flung into disorder and sense of shame by a false colour, a false note. But while this is impossible to us in a practical way, what is possible to us is a sense of moral justice, a sense of righteous relation, a sense of what is due to God. To be at ease whilst His house is without a roof is to proclaim oneself no child of Heaven. 1. Having come into personal comfort, David will do good. That is the right expression of gratitude. What can I do for the Church? What can I do for the poor? Having read many books, and acquired some information, what can I do for the ignorant? 2. Nathan and David settled the matter according to their own will. Nathan was a man who might perhaps be not indisposed to agree with the king whatever he said. He may come to another temper under Divine ministry: for that we must wait. The idea struck Nathan as a good one. Nathan had no objection. He said, The idea is beautiful; carry it out instantaneously; the Lord is evidently with thee; that is a thought the image and superscription of which cannot be mistaken; and Nathan went home to sleep. There are some things that appear to need no judgment. There are some proposals that are so beautiful and precious that we at once accept them, endorse them, and pass them on to fulfilment, and then retire to rest. The Lord taught David another lesson; he said: This thing is all wrong; it is out of season; there is much more to be done before this man can advance in the direction he has proposed: my house must not be built by his hands; I have an interest in my house: I care for the masonry as well as for the sanctuary. No blasphemer ought to be engaged in building the walls of a cathedral; no flippant man ought to touch the meanest part of God's house; and no man of blood should build a temple. 3. Yet how gentle is the Most High! Who can speak like God? It is the dignity that gives the value to the condescension. The lesson which God taught to David is to trust the providence which has been good from the

very first:—"Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote,"—so I am not going to forsake thee; if I had taken thee from a throne, reasoning in another direction might have been at least partially justified, but "I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel." God will have His providence judged as a whole—that is to say, he will have the mind thrown back to the point of origin, and have all the days linked, like loops of gold, like loops of light; then he will say to the subject of His gracious government: Look back at the beginning; count the days; read between the lines; study the whole, and see how all the time I have been building thee a house; and, until that house is finished, wait! What peace it would give to us all if we could adopt this holy method of criticism! Look at the beginning: Where were we? What were we? How have we been trained, watched, defended! 4. God further shows that all things are critically timed: "Thou shalt sleep with thy fathers" (v. 12)—But God never sleeps. He says: "I will put thee to rest, O brave soldier, chivalrous grand heart, I will close thine eyelids, stained with rivers of tears; I bury the universe." We must leave something for the future to do. All things are written down in God's book. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Significance of the ark within curtains*:—Was not that long continuance in the humble tabernacle intended to make plain the contrast between this God and the gods who were enshrined in the massive structures that Israel had seen in Egypt? Was it not a lesson, even in the days when Israel needed some accommodation to its weakness in the shape of symbolical and ceremonial worship, that He "dwelleth not in temples made with hands?" Was it not an early gleam of the perfect day—a protest as strong as could then be made against localising the Divine presence and creating "sacred places?" The degree of religious development in Israel could not yet dispense with all localising, but the minimum of it was attained by the dwelling of the ark in the tabernacle; and there was a danger, which experience proved to be only too real, that a gorgeous temple should become the tomb of religion rather than the dwelling-place of God. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The church contrasted with the palace*:—The cedar was largely used for decorative purposes throughout the whole East. In "Nineveh and its Remains," Layard thus describes the internal appearance of an Assyrian building: "The ceilings . . . were divided into square compartments, painted with flowers, or with the figures of animals. Some were inlaid with ivory, each compartment being surrounded by elegant borders and mouldings. The beams, as well as the sides of the chambers, may have been gilded, or even plated with gold and silver; and the rarest woods, in which the cedar was conspicuous, were used for the woodwork." (Zeph. 9. 14; Jer. 22. 14; 1 Kings 6. 15; 7. 3.) The true relation of the houses of men to the house of God may be illustrated from Ancient Athens. The dwelling-houses of Athens were mean; its temples were the wonder of the world, abounding in all magnificence of wealth and art. (*Sunday School Times.*) *Remembering God's house*:—Mathew Henry says: "Note: When God, in His providence, has remarkably done much for us, it should put us upon contriving what we may do for Him and His glory. 'What shall I render unto the Lord?'" And John Trapp adds: "Ahab dwelt in a palace of ivory, and yet had no thoughts of heart for God and His service." David and Ahab both have their like among the sons of men. *Purpose in life*:—The great Socialist, Robert Dale Owen, says: "I committed one fatal error in my youth, and dearly have I bewailed it; I started in life without an object, even without an ambition. Had I created for myself a definite purpose—literary, artistic, scientific, social, there would have been something to labour for, and to overcome. But the power is gone. I have thrown away a life. I am an unhappy man." Lack of purpose has ruined more lives than has a deliberately-chosen bad purpose. It leaves that life at the mercy of every shabby influence without a guiding principle or unifying power. (*H. O. Mackey.*) *Communion with God*:—The narrative presents David—I. STILL CONCERNED FOR THE GLORY OF GOD. Looking round upon the splendid house he has reared, the contrast between that and the place where was the ark of God grieves him. "I dwell in a house of Cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains." 1. The gratitude of his heart to the Giver of all his mercies is strongly characteristic of the man. His heart was tender as a woman's and strong as a hero's. True gratitude always acknowledges first the Hand Divine. The grateful heart needs no constraint to bring the offering of

the first-fruit to the Lord. 2. The piety of David is unmistakably shown here. The needle suddenly disturbed and forced from its centre trembles to return. David is never at rest, never restful, until he is obeying and serving God. A gracious soul will always revolt from meanness towards God's house and luxury toward his own. Devoted souls love to consecrate wealth and leisure to God. Gracious hearts can never do enough for God. These remove the reason for the sarcasm of the infidel, "that," "judged by the houses they are said to dwell in, the Christian's gods are very human." II. GOD'S REPLY AND DAVID'S RECEPTION THEREOF. 1. The purpose in David's heart is accepted. 2. The actual building of the Temple is denied him. Generous impulses should be taken to God. He speeds not who tries to run before the Lord sends him. Impatient hurry is apt to lead astray. 3. A wonderful promise is given him. Dr. Kennicott, Bishop Horsley, and others point out that the Hebrew verb translated "If he commit iniquity" is not in the active but in the passive voice, and thus the passage would be rendered, "I will be his Father, and he shall be my son: even in his suffering for iniquity I shall chasten him with the rod of men (with the rod due to men), and with the stripes (due to) the children of men." Another view is presented in Ps. lxxxix. It is not the king himself but his children that are supposed to transgress and require correction, but out of faithfulness to them their chastisements are not to be destructive. Dr. Gifford, in his "Voices of the Prophets," thus writes:—"The seed which shall be of David's sons must be some descendant later than Solomon;" and the whole description is such as cannot be applied to a mortal king, or only as far as he is type of one greater than himself. It points to eternal and spiritual truth prefigured and embodied in the Kingdom of David to be realised in the Kingdom of his Son. David seems to have grasped the double application of this prophecy, to have risen to the prophetic within the promise. Reference to his Psalms will clearly establish this (lxii., xlv., and cx.). And also study of David's prayer and thanksgiving will establish this. 4. David's reception of the promise. His heart is filled with warmest emotions of gratitude and delight. Large as the promise would be if confined to Solomon, it would scarcely account for the profound humility and reverence depicted in the language used by David. His emotions are irrepressible. (H. E. Stone.) *Concern for religious things*:—David's self is all right, but in the nobility of the grace that God has given to him, his thoughts are away from self and upon God. What ails John Welsh that he rises at a most unseasonable time to wrap his plaid about him, and sob, and groan, and cry? The ark of God—that is, Scotland—is within curtains, is being buffeted by the winds of indifference, and that robs the eyelids of John Welsh of their sleep, and he tells his wife that he cannot rest, for he has the souls of three thousand to answer for, and he knows not how it is with many of them. John Welsh is like David, concerned not for himself, but for God. Ah, the times have been in this land when men were burdened with the public state, when a Christless generation would lie heavily on the hearts of the covenanted people, when sleep would fly, and groans and tears would come for the wickedness of the land. Campbell, of Kinnioncleugh, what ails you? You are in the covenant of grace, and the tears, bitter and salt, are running down your cheeks. What is the sorrow? What is the burden? Has the Lord forsaken you? They ask him, "Why this agony and groaning?" He replied, "It is the 'ark' in Scotland that I am concerned about. It is Scotland's kirk that I am troubled about." Ah! there are few now burdened about Scotland's kirk. As prosperity and wealth come, the spiritual drought and spiritual darkness, and the awful indifference of a generation that will not have God, do not lie as burdens, as they should, on our hearts. We are content with the houses of cedar; we are content, and we rub our hands in a kind of competing glory in church extension. Denomination after denomination is rushing on for denominational objects, and the unholy fire is being spread abroad, while all the time God's ark is within curtains, the people are unsaved, and their hearts are empty of love to Jesus. (J. Robertson.) *Self-denying grace needed in the church*:—Do you know the problem in the heathen field? Do you know why those Chinese and those heathen tribes refuse to come to Christ? It is because they do not believe in our earnestness. For every commercial post there are a thousand applicants; for every chance to get the gold that perisheth, there are competitors by the score; but to tell the story of redeeming love, one is considered sufficient for a province containing two million souls. Oh, this awful blame that lies at the door of the professing Church of Christ! We are dwelling

in cedar while the ark of the Lord is buffeted by the storms. Real grace cannot be content with self, with the house of cedar. Because our wealthy churches have no missionary spirit, have no self-denying, but are wasting their givings on self, the poorer parts of the cities and the heathen fields are left struggling and helpless. Verily God in His day will judge the so-called Christian communities. Oh, for more of the self-denying grace that David had! He felt that the very house of cedar was about to tumble down upon him while the ark of God was exposed to the storms of the night. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 3—17. **Go, do all that is in thine heart.**—*Divine correction of a prophet's mistake and Divine denial of a king's desire*:—1. It is pleasant to glance at the circumstances which gave birth to David's desire to build the temple. The regal position into which he passed on the death of Saul was no bed of roses. The land was still over-run by the Philistines, who held many of its strongest fortresses. Jerusalem was in the hands of the Jebusites. There was hard and long-lasting work to be done, but David gave himself to it with full purpose of heart; and his God who had called him to it did not suffer him to labour in vain. Victory after victory crowned his arduous struggles, until, at last, the Philistines were for ever banished; the Land of Promise was fully possessed by the Israelites; and David's unresisted rule extended over all the twelve tribes. It was a happy time for the king and his people. Peace had come into the land, and prosperity was in her train. "The king sat in his house, and the Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies." We can scarcely enter into the joy which all this created, and the thankfulness it inspired; not because we know nothing of such circumstances, but because we have always lived in them. Those who have never mourned on account of the deep darkness of midnight, cannot appreciate the beauty of the dawn and the splendours of the noon like men who through long hours of thick gloom have watched and waited for the morning. How can we estimate the blessedness of peace and security, as it was estimated by the Hebrews after nearly a life-time of constant disquiet and bloody strife, and well-grounded dread of national annihilation and of individual slavery or death? It may be asked, if David were so joyous and thankful, could he not have taken his harp of sweet and solemn sound, and have expressed his new-born praise in some new-born psalm? Doubtless he did this, but it was not enough to satisfy his gratitude. The truly thankful heart is glad to put on its singing robes, and lift its exultant strains to heaven; but it cannot be contented with words and music alone, even though another David should pen the hymn, and an inspired Handel should compose the melody. It will want to express its emotion in works, to put on the garb of a willing servant, and, in addition to saying great things about God, to do right and good and noble things for God. Let us be assured that if "we know and believe the love that God hath to us"—if His love have enkindled ours—we too shall be eager to embody our living thankfulness in deeds of truth, and kindness, and purity. The praise that expresses itself in action is not only the most acceptable to God, it is also the only praise which can give relief to the spirit burdened with a sense of what it owes to Him, whose mercy is like Himself—without beginning of days or end of years. 2. We must turn from the origin and nature of David's purpose to Nathan's mistaken sanction of it. A sympathetic heart is a great quickener of the brain. If your spirit be in unison with that of another man, how readily you and he can understand each other. Half words are enough, and either of you can fully discern the other's desire or purpose long before his language has fully disclosed it. It is this law of our nature which makes it so much easier for a man to find out the Divine will when his heart is brought into living sympathy with God. Then his faculty of discernment is so perfect that to him God can say, "I will guide thee with Mine eye." Between Nathan and David there was this sympathy, so that the latter had scarcely begun to speak about his purpose before the former divined all that he intended. Here is a most instructive case of the fallibility of an always good and oftentimes inspired man! It is frequently difficult to distinguish between the inclinations of our own wills and the guidance of God's hand. It is so easy to mistake the bent of our own desires for the intimations of Providence; and when our own hearts are in favour of a thing it requires little argument to convince us that God is in favour of it too. No matter how wise or right any course may appear to be, if we would be always safe we must always distrust our own unaided judgments, and cherish the dependent and

teachable spirit, which cries, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Nathan went home to his evening prayer, and his nightly rest, and was speedily made aware of his error. 3. We have now to look at the denial of David's desire, and at the facts and promises which were set before him to reconcile him to his disappointment. There was neither disdain of his gratitude nor condemnation of his idea that the prospered nation ought to have a better house for holy service. The Lord in His great kindness was careful so to convey the denial that it could not possibly impair David's faith in the Divine love, nor excite his hostility to the Divine plan. He testified that God's gentleness had made him great. Of that gentleness he seldom had richer experience than on this occasion. (1.) The first words in the message were calculated to pacify David's conscience, which had been troubled about the poverty of the place wherein God was worshipped. He was reminded that the matter which had distressed him had called forth no complaint from the Lord. (2.) Having referred to the forbearance which others had met with, the Divine message proceeds to speak of what had been done for David. The Lord spake as if He feared that by thwarting David's purpose He might expose His love to unjust suspicion; and therefore He was careful to show that He had already done so much for His servant that, whatever course He might see it best to pursue, His love ought not to be suspected for a moment. Surely He had placed that beyond the shadow of a doubt! The way in which David's doubts were prevented is the way in which ours must be checked and cured. If God's way to our requests should tempt us to distrust His love, we must meet the temptation with memories of the many times and the manifold ways wherein He has heard our prayer and enriched us with His blessing. There is great significance in the fact that in refusing David the coveted honour of building the temple, the Lord reminded him of the glory as well as the mercy already bestowed upon him. Was it not telling David that the fame he had secured was enough for any one man's lawful ambition? Why should he want to add to that the glory of being the greatest temple-builder the world had seen? He must not aspire to that crown too. God would reserve it for another. Men righteously denounced Napoleon for his desire to make a French empire of all Europe. There is too often a Napoleonism in commerce which is not a whit more admirable. Instead of vigorously and contentedly pursuing their own proper business, men have sought profitable pecuniary connection with ten or twenty other totally distinct enterprises. In how many cases this vaulting ambition has overleaped itself! (3.) From another part of the inspired history we learn that the character of David's preceding work was given as one reason why the present purpose was to be laid aside. It should not be supposed that this implies censure of David's warlike course. Had he not been qualified for it, and called to it, by God? Was it not a necessary work, and had he not Divine succour in it? It was both lawful and expedient; and yet it had unfitted him for the new kind of work to which he wanted to put his hands. In our present imperfect state, ability for one thing may involve disability for another thing. As no one man is intended to gain everything, so no one man is endowed with all the talents. Happy is he who finds out what he is fit for, and devotes himself to it; and is either so wise or so busy that he does not attempt numerous other achievements. (4.) Another way in which the Lord sought to reconcile David to the denial of his desire was by promising that his purpose should not perish, but be carried out by his own son. It is no wonder that God's message checked all murmuring all rebellion in David's heart. He did more than cheerfully submit; he exulted in the decision and purpose of the Lord. Instead of weeping and wailing, because his plan had not been adopted, he broke out into an impassioned and sublime strain of thanksgiving. Let it be remembered to the honour of his piety that such was his confidence in the wisdom and love and faithfulness of God that one of the most fervent songs he ever sung was inspired by the very message in which he was told he was not to do what he had asked to do. It ought to be easier for us to imitate David's hearty acquiescence, because we know that subsequent events proved how wise it was. According to God's promise, Solomon succeeded to the throne, and was in every way fitted for the task assigned to him. It was a magnificent testimony to the truth that God's "Nay" and God's "Yea" are only two different forms in which the same everlasting love and infinite wisdom are expressed. (C. Vince.) *Nathan's mistake*:—David's proposal was so generous and so religious that the prophet Nathan didn't have a question that its prompting was from the Lord. He was ready to bid the king God-speed, without a doubt as to the propriety of the

thing proposed. But the sequel showed that David's plan didn't have the Lord's approval. Nor was this the last time that a man of God made a mistake in supposing that because a proposition was a religious one it necessarily had the Lord's approval. A young man comes to his pastor, and says that he has decided to give up everything else and study for the ministry. It doesn't follow that the minister ought to say, "Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the Lord is with thee." It is still a question whether this well-intentioned proposal is really of the Lord. So again, it may be, when a man comes with a proposition as to the use of his property, in establishing a local fund for the support of the ministry, in founding another college, or in building a new hospital. To show a religious purpose is one thing. To be sure that that purpose has the Lord's approval, or that just as it is it deserves the approval of the Lord's ministers, is quite another thing. Other men of God need to learn caution from the experience of Nathan. (*H. C. Trumbull.*) *A noble purpose unrealized*:—I. A CONCEPTION OF A NOBLE PURPOSE. It was a great thought that came to David. It was in part suggested by the exigencies of the situation. After the ark had come to its new home, Asaph and others had been appointed to celebrate, and thank, and praise the Lord, and minister before Him (1 Chron. xvi. 4-37); and it is supposed that, at this period, the twenty-four courses of priests were appointed, an arrangement which lasted to the time of our Lord. It is thus, especially in young life, that great conceptions visit the soul; ideals of surpassing beauty cast a light forward upon the future; resolves of service for God and man brace the soul as the air from the glaciers does the dwellers in the plains; and all life assumes a nobler aspect, and is set to a higher key. Secretly that lad resolves to be a preacher, missionary, or philanthropist; and that girl, to be queen in an ideal home, or to go far hence to the zenanas of India. "I will do this great thing for God," the young heart says to itself, altogether heedless of sacrifice, tears, blood. The bugle-notes of lofty purpose ring out gladly, summoning the soul to noble exploit; and it is saved from the low levels which satisfy others by the immortal hope that has already gone forward to occupy the future. Young people, never surrender your ideal, nor act unworthily of it, nor disobey the heavenly vision. Above all, when you come to the house of cedar, and God has given you rest, be more than ever careful to gird yourselves, and arise to realize the purpose that visited you when you kept your father's sheep. II. THE IDEAL IS NOT ALWAYS REALIZED. There is no definite "No" spoken by God's gentle lips. He presses His promises and blessings upon us, and leads us forward in a golden haze of love, which conceals this negative. The plant is conscious of a great possibility throbbing within it; but somehow the days pass, and it does not come to a flower. The picture which is to gain immortality is always to be painted; the book which is to elucidate the problem of the ages is always to be written; the immortal song is always to be sung. The young man is kept at his desk in the counting-house instead of going to the pulpit; the girl becomes a withered woman, cherishing a faded flower; the king hands on to his son the building of the house. III. GOD EXPLAINS HIS REASONS AFTERWARDS. What we know not now, we shall know hereafter. The blood-stained hand might not raise the temple of peace. It would have wounded David needlessly to have been told this at the time. It was enough to wrap up the Divine "No" in a promise of infinite blessing; but, as the years passed, the reason for God's refusal grew clear and distinct before him. Meanwhile, David possessed his soul in patience, and said to himself: God has a reason, I cannot understand it; but it is well. IV. AN UNREALIZED CONCEPTION MAY YET BE FRAUGHT WITH IMMENSE BLESSING. Solomon completes the story. David was a better man because he had given expression to the noble purpose. Its gleam left a permanent glow on his life. The rejected candidate to the missionary society stands upon a higher moral platform than those who were never touched by the glow of missionary enthusiasm. For a woman to have loved passionately, even though the dark waters may have engulfed her love before it was consummated, leaves her ever after richer, deeper, than if she had never loved, nor been loved in return. God will credit us with what we would have been if we might. In the glory David will find himself credited with the building of the temple on Mount Zion. V. DO THE NEXT THING. The energy which David would have expended in building the temple wrought itself out in gathering the materials for its construction. If you cannot have what you hoped, do not sit down in despair and allow the energies of your life to run to waste; but arise, and gird yourself to help others to achieve.

If you may not build, you may gather materials for him that shall. If you may not go down the mine, you can hold the ropes. There is a fact in nature known as the law of the conservation of force. The force of the accumulating velocity of the falling stone passes into heat, of which some is retained by the stone, the rest passes into the atmosphere. No true ideals are fruitless; somehow they help the world of men. No tears are wept, no prayers uttered, no conceptions honestly entertained in vain. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Our hearts the measure of our work*:—Think much about intentions. Give, and it shall be given you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. After which Bengel acutely annotates that it is by our hearts that we both mete out to others and have it meted out to ourselves. It would have gone hard with the poor widow if she had only had a farthing meted out to her in her Lord's judgment on her. But her Lord looked on her heart. And thus it is that she sits in heaven to-day among the queens who sit there on their thrones of gold, because she had such a queenly heart that day in the temple porch. Both from David's intended temple, from the poor widow's actual collection at the door of David's temple, and from Bengel's spiritual annotation let us learn this spiritual lesson, that our hearts are the measure both of our work and of our wages in the sight of God. You cannot build and repair all the churches and mission-houses and manses at home and abroad you would like to build and repair. You cannot endow all the chairs of sacred learning you would like. You cannot contribute to the sustentation of the Christian ministry as you would like. You cannot visit and relieve all the fatherless and widows in their affliction as you would like. You cannot stop all the sources of sin and misery in this world as you would like. You cannot make the reading, or the religion, or the devotional life of your people what your heart is full of. You wish you could. So did David. David had magnificent dreams about the temple. He built the temple every night in his sleep. And had he been permitted he would not have slept with his fathers till he had dedicated a most magnificent house to the name of the Lord. But it stands in God's true and faithful Word, that it was all in David's heart. And He who looks not so much on the action as on the intention, He saw in this also a man after His own heart. May all David's good intentions, and generous preparations be found in all our rich people, and may all the widow's love and goodwill be found in all our poor people. For the heart is the measure. And as we measure our good words, and good wishes, and good purposes, and good preparations, and good performances in our heart, so will it be measured back to us by Him who sees and weighs and measures the heart and nothing but the heart. (*Alex. Whyte, D.D.*)

Vers. 5—17. Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in?—Folded hands:—1. Let us understand that a purpose may be good, yet Providence may see fit to deny its accomplishment. That is to say, God may take the will for the deed. We may work up a sort of personal enthusiasm, and because the end appears right in our eyes, may expect that Providence will immediately accept it; but, the question is not whether the plan is good, but whether it is God's plan for us in which to serve Him. These so-called crises of human existence are sometimes nothing more nor less than mere crises of human will, dictating to God what ought to be done. 2. Let us remember that a wish may be intense, and yet it is not on that account to be granted. We act so often from mixed motives that we are not always the ones to know whether wishes we cherish are not wiles of the devil. The day has been for many a child of God, when he struggled with some most eager and passionate desire of his heart; God denied it, and the believer has lived to thank Him on the bended knees of his grateful soul. God has promised to grant, not what we seek or crave or implore in set terms, but what we "need" (*Phil. 4, 19*). 3. Let us acknowledge that sometimes a human heart is too full of unworthy feeling for success in high spiritual endeavour. Hence the Lord does not entrust this to such agents. This hard decision for David is not without its parallel in modern experience. Are none of us men "of blood"? It is related of Richard the Lion-hearted that for seven whole years he would not suffer himself to take the Sacrament, because he was conscious of real hatred in his heart towards the king of France. It is possibly a poignant experience, but it may be profitable to acknowledge, "There are things I cannot do, because God is holier than I am." For this will leave the way open for fresh increases in

holiness at once; and it also settles one's mind down to give over impossibilities, and take up what is legitimately within reach. 4. Let us admit freely, that an intention may be excellent, and yet have to be surrendered into another's hands. This plan of David was good, but Solomon was to carry it out; that was all (1 Kings, viii. 18). God may choose to have his work done by those whom he selects, and not by volunteers. 5. Let us believe that a human heart may be apparently broken, and yet remain full of joy. Every now and then we fall on some new chapter which shows King David's frank delight in this lowly task permitted to him (1 Chron. xxviii. 2-8). He rouses the whole nation with his enthusiasm; and yet his first sentence of address is a candid statement of his purpose which the Lord had thwarted the moment he mentioned it, and now of the purpose which had come in the place of it, making him as happy as a child. Now let us add only an illustration of this whole thought, and finish. Two boys, Franz Knigstein and Albrecht Dürer, once lived together in Nuremberg; they were going to be artists, and had entered Michael Wohlgemuth's study for instruction. The parents of both were poor, and were struggling to keep their sons at their work, until they should be able to care for themselves. Of these two pupils, the master knew that Albrecht possessed genius, but Franz would never make a painter of whom he should be proud. But both were industrious and frugal and affectionate. They loved each other tenderly, and were kind and faithful unto all at home. Years passed on: one went to Italy, the other continued study in Germany. Ere long Franz married, and, by and by, Albrecht; and the old people died, and times were hard, and art was dull. Albrecht feared that Franz had not the artist spirit, and could never succeed. Once they planned together to make an etching of the passion of our Lord; when they came to show each other what had been accomplished, the picture of Franz was cold and lifeless, while that of Albrecht was full of beauty. Franz himself saw it then. He was in middle life, and so far as he knew he had been a failure. He must give it up; he could not be successful as an artist. But he did not complain; only for a passionate moment he buried his face in his hands. Then he said in broken tones, though still full of courage: "The good Lord gave me no such gift as this; but he has something yet for me to do; some homely work shall be found for me; I was blind so long, so much time I have lost; be you the artist of Nuremberg, and I——" "O, Franz! be quiet an instant," exclaimed Albrecht; and a quick rush was made to the paper before him on the table. Only a few lines with a swift pencil; Franz thought he was adding another stroke to his etching, and waited patiently leaning over the mantel with his fingers twined and clasped. And then, next day, Albrecht showed his friend the sheet: "Why, those are only my own hands," said Franz: "where did you get them?" And there was hardly need of an answer. "I took them as you stood, making the sad surrender of your life so very, very bravely; and I murmured to myself, those hands that may never paint a picture, can now most certainly make one; I have faith in those folded hands, my brother-friend: they will go to men's hearts in the years to come!" And, sure enough, the prophecy was true; for over the artistic world has gone the tale, and over the worlds of love and duty has gone the picture; and the *Folded Hands*, by Albrecht Dürer, are but the hands of Franz Knigstein once folded in sweet, brave resignation, when he gave up his dearest wish, and yet believed the good Lord had a homely duty for him to do, worth the doing. That is the picture which hangs up over my table, and has hung there for years; a mere copy of an etching that belongs in the gallery of Vienna. What it means is, there are some things, my Christian friend, you and I can never do! But there are others we can do, and we can always do something towards accomplishing a preparation for some one else to finish; and what matters all the humiliation, if only the dear Lord gets the glory? (C. S. Robinson, D.D.)

Ver. 8. **I took thee from the sheepcote.**—*God's making of a life*:—Though he was a born king by nature and character, David was not born a king. His father was a simple farmer, and his childhood was spent in the quiet scenes of a humble village. Jesus was born in the same Judean village-city, little Bethlehem. It is exactly thus that God ever carries out His mighty programme of action in creation, providence, and grace. The Rev. W. L. Watkinson says that, on visiting an art gallery recently, he noticed that some of the greatest pictures had not a splendid thing in them. The ordinary artist, when he wants to be effective, paints in a breadth of golden harvest, or he portrays a kingfisher or some other

iridescent bird, or a tree in bloom, or that captivating thing, a rainbow. But you will notice that some of the greatest painters that ever lived never touch these things. They take common things—a railway cut, a ploughed field—no conspicuous object, only the black earth, the brown earth, the red earth; but their touch is a supreme touch, so that you can see the blossom in the dust and the rainbow in the cloud; and the picture, although it contains not a brilliant thing, is bathed in imagination, poetry, and beauty. So Christ can take the most common human plants in His garden and develop them into the most indescribable beauty and interest. God can take our poor humble lives and crown them with dignity and glory, as He honoured David the shepherd boy, if we fall into the royal line of the servants of righteousness. Before honour is humility. David was not a self-exalted king. He was called to rule, and he followed the Divine call wherever it led him, whether into the desert or into the palace. *Filling present limits:*—If a man be not signally successful in his present field he cannot reasonably hope to be more successful in a larger field. He must first fill out to his existing limits before he will be able to expand into the area of larger boundaries. A man may indeed have abilities beyond the sphere he is in at present, but in every such case the first indication of this is his filling that sphere satisfactorily. If he lacks where he is, he ought not to feel that he could do better, or even as well, if he were in a larger place. It were folly to expect that there is milk enough for a gallon measure when it cannot fill a pint pot. (*Great Thoughts.*) *God the Giver of power:*—That God is the Giver of power and dominion is a truth which has always been recognized in the unchangeable East. Thus, in the inscription of Darius on the rock at Behistun, the ninth paragraph reads: "Says Darius the king:—Ormazd [the god] granted me the empire. Ormazd brought help to me so that I gained this empire. By the grace of Ormazd, I hold this empire." Substitute "Jehovah" for "Ormazd," and David might truthfully have written that inscription. Again, in the Annals of Assurbanipal which are preserved on terra-cotta cylinders, now in the British Museum, it is said: "I am Assurbanipal, the seed of [the gods] Assur and Beltis, son of the great king of the North Palace, whom [the gods] Assur and Sin the lord of crowns, raised to the kingdom, prophesying his name from the days of old; and in his birth have created him to rule Assyria. [The gods] Shamas, Vul, and Ishtar, in power most high, commanded the making of his kingdom." (*Sunday School Times.*) *From obscurity to eminence:*—For purposes of sober illustration or intense appeal to the unselfish and heroic, nothing can surpass the life of David Livingstone, whom Florence Nightingale called "the greatest man of his generation." The vision of the boy placing his book on the spinning-jenny and studying amid the roar of the machinery at Blantyre, or sitting contentedly down before his father's door to spend the night, upon arriving after the hour for locking it; the old coat, eleven years behind the fashion, which he wore when he emerged at Cape Town after Kolobeng had been pillaged; the sadness of the scene when he buried his little daughter in "the first grave in all this country," he wrote to his parents, "marked as the resting-place of one of whom it is believed and confessed that she shall live again"; his jocular letters to his daughter Agnes about his distorted teeth, "so that my smile is like that of a hippopotamus"; the meeting with Stanley when he was a "mere ruckle of bones"; the indomitable grit of the man whose last words in Scotland were, "Fear God, and work hard"—this life is full of such things as these, capable of use, inviting it. And when, before or since, has this world been swayed by eloquence comparable with that of his death? No pulpit has ever spoken with such power. The worn frame kneeling by the bedside at Ilala, pulseless and still, while the rain dripped from the eaves of the hut, dead in the attitude of prayer, solitary and alone, sent a thrill through the souls of men which, thank God, is vibrating still, and is working out the redemption wrought once for Africa by the world's Redeemer. (*W. G. Blaikie.*)

Vers. 11—16. The Lord telleth thee that he will make thee an house.—*God's covenant with David:*—1. This narrative is an interesting illustration of the truth that God will honour the man who seeks to honour Him. David wanted to build a house for the Lord, and he was moved to it, we have reason to believe, by the highest considerations. He determined that he would build a house for the Lord, and as far as possible make it worthy of Him. But David, because he had been a man of war, was not permitted to carry out the high resolve. But while the Lord did not allow David to build the house, He per-

mitted him to make all the necessary preparations for it. He was permitted to gather the materials and provide the gold and the silver. And this preparatory work does not stand as high with us as it should. It is the man who reaps the harvest, who brings the sheaves to the garner, who gets all the honour, while the man who did the still harder work of clearing the land and preparing the soil for the seed is scarcely thought of. Perhaps just here it might be well to remind ourselves that our gracious Master put a far higher value on this preparatory work than we are accustomed to do. He placed John the Baptist above all the prophets, above all who had gone before him, and yet John's work from first to last was a preparatory one. After he had gone to his rest and reward, if any one had asked, What did John do while he dwelt among us? the only answer could have been, He prepared the way of the Lord; he made His path straight before Him. That was his mission, that was his life-work, and yet it was that mission and that short life-work which lifted him to as high a place as man had ever reached before.

2. Then, again, while David was not allowed to build the house of the Lord, he was called to do a still greater work for the Church. David was to write the songs of the sanctuary, and the Lord of hosts, it would seem, had been fitting him for this greater work from his childhood up. It is a fact to which our attention has been called by one of England's greatest preachers that the life of David is constantly cropping out in the psalms—that they are so woven together and so essential to each other that we never could have had the psalms but for the life. Now, I have spoken of this contribution to the worship of Jehovah as a more important work than the one on which David had set his heart—as a more important work than to build the house of the Lord. Has not the result made the statement good? Where is the magnificent house which Solomon built, and where the Shekinah, the terrestrial throne of Jehovah? And where is the house built at such a fabulous cost that took its place? Not one stone is left standing on another. But the psalms are still ours; the sacred songs of David are still a part of our spiritual patrimony. We are marching still to the inspired and inspiring music. They are growing daily dearer to us, like the water from the rock which grew the sweeter the longer it flowed. But David's covenant God was so well pleased with that which he had it in his heart to do that he went one step farther. If David might not build the house of the Lord, his son might do it in his stead. And this, I think, is just what David would have chosen for himself. If it had been left for the king of Israel to decide, I think he would have said, "Let my son build the house; let him have all the glory of it; let it evermore be associated with his name." We cannot doubt that this is what such a man as the sweet singer of Israel would have chosen. We live in our children. We rise up early, we sit up late, we eat the bread of sorrow, we wear ourselves out prematurely, we reach the grave before it is ready for us, and all that it may be better for our children after we are gone. And yet, strong and tenacious as our affections are, there have been but few men among us who could love as David the king did. He was the man who left his throne, and fasted and wept and lay all night on the earth, and refused to be comforted, because the life of his little child was hanging by a thread. He was the man who uttered the bitterest cry save one that ever came from a breaking heart: "O, my son Absalom! my son! my son! would God that I had died for thee! O, Absalom, my son! my son!" The honour of the son is the honour of the father multiplied a hundred-fold. At all events, so it is with every man who can love as David did.

3. Because this work was not hurried on, because it was delayed, no one was robbed, no one was oppressed, no one was oppressively taxed. The bed of the poor man was not sold from under him to build the house of the Lord; the stones were not cemented together with tears and blood, and when the majestic edifice was dedicated no curses mingled with the alleluias. And that, no doubt, was one reason why the work was thus delayed, our heavenly Father is so considerate for the poor. And yet the building of that house in the way in which it was done was the best thing up to that time that Israel ever did for the poor. Next to God himself, the poor and needy, the widow and the fatherless, have no such friend as God's house. Building a church in any place makes it sure that the sick will have a hospital, and the orphan a home, and the dead a burial-place where they may sleep in peace. From beneath the sanctuary flow those streams which carry health and life whithersoever they may go.

4. Now we have reached the climax. David's covenant God went far beyond his thoughts, far beyond his highest aspirations, and gave him that which David would never have ventured

to ask for. He promised to establish his throne for ever: "And when thy days be fulfilled," etc. Look heavenward, and see how wonderfully this promise has been fulfilled. The Son of David is now at the right hand of the Majesty on high; the Son of David is now seated on that throne which has a rainbow round about it, and all power in heaven and on earth has been committed to His hands (*J. B. Shaw, D.D.*) *God's covenant with David*:—I. **THE RELIGIOUS USE OF PROSPERITY.** In the hour of his greatest success the heart of the king was upon a plan for the building of God's house. In his times of trial he had called upon God, and now in his triumph he did the same. The question as to the comparative helpfulness of adversity and prosperity in fixing the heart on sacred things admits of but one answer; if it fails in the one condition, it proves to have been a deception in the other. II. **THE SUBJECTION OF MATERIAL PROSPERITY TO THE SPIRITUAL.** The supreme idea of David was to build a house for the Lord. This old-fashioned idea is the right one for to-day—the best belongs to God. It is also true that our gifts are largely in material form. The cup of cold water, the loaf of bread, the new garment for the needy—these are made sacred in Christ's name. Practical religion means more than mere prayer, so-called. The cup of cold water in the name of a disciple of Christ, for aught we can see, is a factor in a real prayer. The gift of a garment to one shivering with cold is itself a factor in the religion that prompts one to say, "Be ye warmed." The gift in Christ's name is really the expression of our prayer to Him for His blessing upon the one on whom that gift is bestowed. III. **THE DIVINE VETO ON HUMAN PLANS.** The resolution of many an one, like David, may seem to be best even to the best men, and yet be out of God's plan. But one great purpose of one great master mind can ever succeed. King David never even dreamed that his plans would miscarry; and Nathan the prophet declared "the Lord is with thee." Every prophecy has been a special revelation. Not because a recognized prophet spoke was it certain that he would declare the mind of God. Nathan spoke without inspiration, and made a mistake. Disappointment filled the king's heart upon the Divine decree, but his royal hands were stayed. His plan was not Divine. Scarce a man since but has winced under the Divine veto. We make splendid plans, but under the veto those plans become mere castles in the air. The same shadow darkens the palace and the cottage alike. We plan for health, and the veto brings sickness; we plan for success, and the veto brings failure; we plan for long life, and the veto brings death. It is ever so, and ever shall be; disappointments will never cease until from the heart we shall all say, "Thy will, not mine, be done." IV. **THE DIVINE LEADERSHIP IN OUR PERSONAL HISTORY.** What was true in David's life is true in every life. We live under the Divine sovereignty. A personal God deals with His children. Events no human brain has foreseen shape our lives. The experience of the past gives hope for the future. He who has been with us in the days of youth will be with us in the valley of shadows. The future of each life brightens in our assurances of the Divine help in the past. This is the law. Because God had been with David in his struggles all the way, therefore He would be with him in all the days to come. V. **THE GREAT COVENANT.** The Divine promises are better than our fears. To the disappointed king there came a covenant message of surpassing power. The disappointment arose because in this day of his greatness he was not permitted to carry out his chosen designs. The disheartened king heard the prophet's message that Jehovah needed no house; but a greater declaration was awaiting his attention. It was a far-off vision the prophet has seen: "The Lord telleth thee that He will make thee an house." This whole theme reveals the ever-recurring fact of the true spiritual meaning that lies beneath all Scripture history. Four thousand years before the star shone over Bethlehem, the expectation of the Messiah was cherished by the friends of God. The promise to Abraham was not of seeds, as of many, but of one "which is Christ." Jacob could bless his sons without discerning Shiloh. Moses' choice took into account "the reproach of Christ." So in our text, David plans for a house that shall bear Jehovah's name; and immediately there is revealed to him the covenant, no man can break, that the anointed shall spring from his line; and further yet, that the importance of the spiritual kingdom far exceeds any importance of the earthly. This was the great consolation of the centuries that Messiah's kingdom should appear in the earth. They lived and they died in so grand a hope, founded upon the unshaken revelation of the Word of God—a word of the everlasting covenant. (*Monday Club Sermons.*)

Ver. 14. **I will be his Father, and he shall be my son.**—*Divine relationship*:—I. **JEHOVAH'S RELATIONSHIP.** God has written in His Word, saying, "I will be his Father, and he shall be my son." Here I commence with a fundamental principle, and that because fundamental principles, in our day, are become almost obsolete; and, in hundreds and thousands of instances, are cast aside. The fundamental principle I mean is the original adoption of His sons. This seems to be the very spirit of the promise of my text, "I will be his Father." It is not left to after-date to be fixed, but it is accomplished in after-date manifestly, to prove that Jehovah had before ordained that it should be so. II. **THE OPEN MANIFESTATION OF THE SONSHIP.** "He shall be my son." 1. "He shall be my son," manifestly, for the family likeness shall be put upon him. He once bore the image of the earthy; and earthy enough God knows he was, before regeneration work made the change in him. He bore the image of the earthy, the image of the fallen Adam, the image of ruin, the image of the curse. But though he has borne the image of the earthy, he shall bear the image of the heavenly; and this family likeness expresses and exhibits, before all the world, the distinction between the children of God and the children of the world. 2. God's sons are privileged to wear the family robes. You recollect a passage in the Book of Samuel pointing to this, "With such robes were the king's daughters that were virgins, apparelled;" and all His sons too. 3. That when Jehovah determines openly to display the character of His sons, it is by affording them the spirit of adoption. The privilege of adoption is one thing, and the spirit of adoption is another. In the privilege of adoption, all that pertains to the family of God is made over to the sons, and secured to them for ever; but in the spirit of adoption, the poor sinner born from above, the poor sinner regenerated by grace Divine, is brought to know his relationship, as the apostle has it. As soon as this spirit of adoption is sent forth into his heart, he cries out, "Father." "Abba" is the word given—"Father." 4. Let me add here, the sons of God are very tenacious about the maintaining of truth and holiness; and they are the only persons in the world that are anxious to maintain them. In this sense also they differ from all people, from all nations under heaven. 5. But go on just to mark, that the sons of God, especially as they grow up a little above their boyhood, and begin to be young men in Christ and fathers in Christ, will be very tenacious to understand all the truth, and to hold the truth and nothing but the truth, to compare one truth with another, and to refuse to give up an iota of it, and unfurl a banner with this inscription upon it, "Buy the truth and sell it not." III. But there is something in my text that may not be quite so welcome to my hearers, "If he commit iniquity, I WILL CHASTEN HIM WITH THE ROD OF MEN AND WITH THE STRIPES OF THE CHILDREN OF MEN, BUT MY MERCY SHALL NOT DEPART AWAY FROM HIM." 1. You know, if the father uses his rod, he holds it tightly in his hand; he does not throw it at the child, and let the chances be as they may be—he holds it firmly in his hand. Now, whatever trials you may pass through, bear in mind two things; there is something wrong, and you should say with Job, "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me?" and then in the next place remember that the rod is in the hand of your Father, and He will not make a sword of it. 2. But there is one other phrase: "My mercy shall not depart away from him." Hear the record of Divine faithfulness, "My mercy shall not depart away from him." The verse closes with an awful contrast, which marks the difference between His sons and His enemies: "As I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee." But He will never do this with His sons. Why so? because they are in union with Christ. (*J. Irons.*) *Consciousness of sonship*:—Correggio stood before a grand painting, enraptured; and as he gazed, grasping the sublime conception, amazed at the wondrous execution and colouring of the picture, exclaimed, "Thank God! I, too, am a painter." So, when a Christian looks steadily at what it is to be children of our Father, with sublime thrills of joy he can say, "Thank God! I, too, am a child of the Lord God Almighty." (*G. C. Baldwin.*) *The confidences of father and son*:—A young man was taking leave of a well-beloved father, who said to him, "My son, if you are in any trouble or need anything, write to me; you know I am always ready to do all I can for you." "Yes, I know it, dear father," said the son, "and will you keep safely for me this box containing the most precious things I own?" After a time the young man became ill, and the expected aid from his father was delayed. A chance acquaintance said, "Your father may have forgotten his promise." The young man's eyes flashed as he said with

emotion, "My father never failed me yet. I love him and he loves me. I know whom I can trust, and I am as sure of his help as if the money were in my hand! The mail may miscarry, but my father's promise is sure. Never suggest to me again that my father is not faithful to his promise." (*Weekly Pulpit*.)

Ver. 15. But my mercy shall not depart away from him.—*But One forsaken and He victorious*:—At Mildmay, Mr. Spurgeon related the story of an aged saint, who, depressed much with bodily infirmity, asked a friend if he ever knew anyone forsaken of God, for that was his condition. "Only one," was the reply, "but He to-day is sitting on His Father's throne." (*Newton Jones*.)

Vers. 16, 17. Thy house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever.—*The advantages of civil government contrasted with the blessings of the spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ*:—I. **THE FIRST AND PRIMARY ADVANTAGE EXPECTED FROM EVERY WELL-CONSTITUTED HUMAN GOVERNMENT IS SECURITY AND THE SENSE OF SECURITY.** The depravity of our nature has introduced such a universal selfishness and rapacity among mankind is their natural state, that men in every age and country have been convinced of the expediency and necessity of attempting to organise some form of government for the purpose of their common security. While every individual is left to exert his own power as he chooses, none can be secure either in his property or person: it becomes absolutely indispensable, therefore, if men would escape the intolerable evils of such a state, to collect and embody this scattered and uncertain force of the many, in some public depository of power: such a provision is necessary for the protection and preservation of every community. Hence almost all nations, even the most uncivilised, have attempted some constitution of this kind, however rude, for the prevention or the redress of those injuries to which the subjects were continually liable by the passions of our nature. But the utmost degree of personal security that can be enjoyed under any form of civil power, is a most imperfect shadow of the safety which Jesus Christ bestows upon the subjects of his spiritual reign. Until a man submits to His mediatorial authority, he remains exposed to unutterable evils. II. **THE SECOND BENEFIT EXPECTED FROM HUMAN GOVERNMENTS IS LIBERTY.** So far as this advantage is consistent with the former, or with the public security, the more largely it is enjoyed the better. But, suppose the utmost possible degree of civil liberty enjoyed, what is it in comparison with that spiritual, real freedom, which Jesus Christ confers? The former is, at the best, only an external, circumstantial blessing; it does not enter into the inner man. But "if the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed": "where the Spirit of the Lord is," there is the only true liberty. The Christian is the genuine freeman, and none beside is such except in name. III. **THE NEXT ADVANTAGE DERIVED FROM A GOOD GOVERNMENT IS PLENTY.** To secure this advantage, you are aware that there are arrangements in nature, in a great measure independent of human institutions, and beyond the control of human policy. But perhaps, in this respect, there has been often much error on the part of those in power. But in the kingdom of Jesus Christ there exists an infinite plenty of all the provisions that can be desired for all the wants of the soul. None are neglected here: the poorest may be enriched beyond the most splendid opulence of this world, even with "the unsearchable riches of Christ;" as the apostles, "though poor, could make many rich,—though they had nothing, they possessed all things." For in Jesus Christ "all fulness" dwells, for the supply of spiritual destitution. IV. **A TENDENCY TO IMPROVEMENT IN ITS SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS,** is a fourth benefit which ought to accompany every well-ordered government. The best of these institutions are such as will be at once permanent and progressive, by their intrinsic wisdom and excellence,—by their adaptation to all the varying circumstances of the nation,—by their power of providing for unseen and possible emergencies: they will gradually rise from security to convenience, and then exalt convenience into ornament—into just refinement and diffused illumination: such has been the aim of the greatest legislators. But the difference between the most moral and the most flagitious of natural characters, is less than the difference that subsists between the subjects of Jesus Christ and the children of this world; because the latter is the difference between the spiritually dead and living. V. **THE FIFTH AND LAST REQUISITE OF A WELL-CONSTITUTED GOVERNMENT IS STABILITY:** this is the crown of all its other advantages. Nothing can be wanting

to such a reign but that it should last : and this is what the text emphatically expresses—"Thy throne shall be established for ever" : as the Psalmist says of the Messiah, "He shall reign as long as the sun and moon endure." In this the kingdom of David was an emblem, however faint, of that which would be erected by Jesus Christ; wonderfully preserved as was the throne of Judah, while the greatest monarchies were marked by perpetual vicissitudes : the kings of Israel were ever changing in their line, while the descendants of David maintained a direct succession. (*R. Hall, M.A.*) *A long tenure of blessing* :—"If a man might have a cottage on a hundred years' lease, he would prize it much more than the possession of a palace for a day." Of course he would; and this it is which adds so much preciousness to the joys of heaven, for they are eternal. The pleasures of this world, however bright they seem, are but for this one day of life, which is already half over. If they were all they profess to be, and a thousand times more, they would not be worthy to be mentioned in comparison with "pleasures for evermore" at God's right hand. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Christ's reign foreshadowed* :—Apart from the fact that the kingdom in the form in which David's descendants ruled over it, has long since crumbled away, the large words of the promise must be regarded as inflated and exaggerated, if, by "for ever" they only mean for long generations. A "seed," or line of perishable men, can only last for ever if it closes in a Person who is not subject to the law of mortality. Unless we can with our hearts rejoicingly confess, "Thou art the King of glory, O Christ. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom," we do not pierce to the full understanding of Nathan's prophecy. All the glorious prerogatives shadowed in it were but partially fulfilled in Israel's monarchs. Their failures and their successes, their sins and their virtues, equally declared them to be but shadowy forerunners of him in whom all that they at the best imperfectly aimed at and possessed is completely and for ever fulfilled. They were prophetic persons by their office, and pointed on to him. (*J. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Vers. 18, 19. **Then went King David in and sat before the Lord.**—*David's address to the Lord* :—I. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF DIVINE GRACE. A purpose of love is disclosed here. It is seen in the choice of David and his house, and in the merciful designs which were announced to them. The text furnishes us with a striking illustration of the plighted love of God to Christ and His people. The element of election is conspicuous in this narrative. The great truth that God has, in Christ Jesus, chosen to Himself a church, is brought to the level of our comprehension. II. THE HEADSHIP OF CHRIST. You may have remarked that the promises were made to David personally, although his family was included in the blessing. The covenant was with Jesse's son, who was regarded as the progenitor of a chosen seed—"Thine house,—thy kingdom,—thy throne shall be established for ever." David elsewhere alludes to this, for, amongst his last words, he says that God had made a covenant with him, ordered in all things and sure—meaning that He had promised to him certain irrevocable blessings. Here, then, we have another very important truth connected with our salvation, namely, that Christ is the covenant-head of His Church; that he is the representative of His people in all that concerns their salvation; that "all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him amen." III. THE MARVELLOUS PRESERVATION OF THE CHURCH. David, in the text, speaks of God's providential care during the past : "Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me hitherto?" and he expresses confidence in His promised favour for the future : "Thou hast spoken also of Thy servant's house for a great while to come." David and his family had been, and were still to be, the objects of God's providential care; and Christ and His people being typified by them, we must regard that circumstance as declaratory of the duration and stability of the Church. Observe, that from the beginning there has always been a preservation of—1. A godly seed amongst the wicked. The Lord's people have ever been in a minority. They are variously described by the inspired penman as a remnant, "a garden enclosed," a "vineyard;" and by our Saviour as a "little flock." It is interesting to observe that the righteous seed maintained in the world has been expressly "taught of the Lord;" and consequently that in all ages there has been a preservation of—2. The truth amidst error. At first it was imparted by Jehovah Himself to Adam, and to Enoch, and to Abraham, and to Moses. Afterwards the Lord was pleased to raise up prophets whose special mission it was to declare His will. Then came our

Saviour, who was "the Truth" itself, and after him the apostles and evangelists. The doctrines of salvation were declared to Adam as they are preached to you now. Man's lost estate, redemption through Christ, justification by faith, and the need of personal holiness have been set forth in every era of revelation. They are to be found in the first promise, in the ceremonies of the Levitical law, and in the writings of the prophets as well as in the New Testament. The truth has never been extinguished. (A. B. Wharton, LL.B.) *Prospect and retrospect*:—We pause as on an isthmus of time; the past and the future are alike open to view. There are no utterances which more fitly express our emotions, as we glance back over the years, than these used here: "Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?" And there are no words better for us to speak, as we are looking forward into the eternity we are rapidly nearing, where the fruition of our best hopes is ere long to be, than these which the king employed in his gratitude then: "And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but Thou hast spoken also of Thy servant's house for a great while to come." I. THE RETROSPECT. 1. In the history the review of the past was laid upon David himself. What a series of reflections must have thronged upon that king's mind as he sat there in silence alone with the ark of God. He had not journeyed along over the hills and valleys of years by ways of pleasantness and by paths of peace. He would well consider his dangers and his deliverances too. He could not have forgotten the hour in which, as a stripling lad, he had slain the Philistine giant with the pebble from the brook, only by trusting in the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Then that would make him think of the terrible manner of Saul's attacks upon his life while he as a simple-hearted minstrel was trying to soothe him with his harp. He would seem to see at this moment of review, perhaps as he had never seen before, that his defences must have been actually Divine. Who could have turned in their course those javelins that went quivering through the air out of the mad monarch's hand? This was a career that might well be reviewed in the words, "Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?" The call, therefore, is very plain to us: "Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged." David might sometimes wonder why, among all that band of brethren of his, so stalwart and strong, he, the weakest and the youngest, had been selected for this wonderful place of honour as the king of Israel. But we may marvel the more that we were made to be the recipients of this grander honour still as kings and priests unto God. Among the private papers of John Howard was found after his death one bearing only these pathetic words: "Lord God, why me?" Such a reflection must have been suggested in the very spirit of David's exclamation there before the ark: "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto!" 2. The result of this retrospection upon the prayer of the king is the special thing to be observed, because there comes to view the true temper which on every such occasion as this ought to be found in the heart of the Christian. But there appears nothing of superciliousness nor of self conceit, not even of satisfied complacency, in David at this moment. On the contrary no words can be found which in more vigorous terms could express his humility and utter self-abnegation than these he employs for himself: "Who am I, O Lord God!" Matthew Henry, commenting in his own inimitable way, exclaims in a kind of expostulation at his self-abasement: "Why, he was upon all accounts a very considerable and valuable man! His endowments were extraordinary. His gifts and graces were eminent. He was a man of honour, success, and usefulness; the darling of his country and the dread of its enemies." But David here evidently counts himself nothing before his Maker, and attributes everything to God's sovereign grace to him. Nor is this all: he disclaims also any credit for his relationship and family connection. David was evidently an essentially modest man. He made very much the same remark as this to his royal predecessor on the occasion when he was offered the hand of his daughter in marriage. A calm and candid review of his past religious life always humbles a genuine Christian, rather than exalts him into self-importance. There are so many falls for which he is responsible; there are so many neglects for which he is to blame; there are so many weaknesses in his character and so many errors in his walk, that he feels he has little reason to grow self-complacent.

It is better to keep saying with this king before the mercy-seat: "Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me hitherto?"

II. Having now considered the believer's retrospect, we turn to CONSIDER HIS PROSPECT, as he sits at the table of the Lord. You cannot fail to observe how, in the utterance of the text, the comparative value of these two was reckoned. Glorious indeed were the remembrances which thronged upon David—the deliverances, the honours, the communings; he dismisses them at once when he begins to think of the anticipations he is permitted to cherish. (C. S. Robinson, D.D.) *The grateful monarch*:—I. THE POSTURE HE ASSUMED. "Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord." II. THE FERVENT GRATITUDE HE EXPRESSED. It was called forth: 1. By looking back at the past. "Who am I, O Lord God?" etc. 2. By thinking of the future. "And this was yet a small thing in Thy sight, O Lord God," etc. III. THE TOUCHING APPEAL HE PRESENTED. "And what shall David say more unto thee? for thou, Lord God, knowest Thy servant." 1. Thou knowest the sinfulness of Thy servant. David knew something of this himself, but he was by no means aware of the depths of wickedness which were within him. 2. Thou knowest the weakness of Thy servant. "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." 3. Thou knowest the integrity of Thy servant. According to an Indian proverb—"A diamond with flaws is more precious than a pebble that has none." Now David, in addition to his great transgression, had several flaws; his infirmities and failings were many; and yet the whole of his history shows that he was a true child of God notwithstanding. 4. Thou knowest the desires of Thy servant. It was in David's heart to build a temple for God; but although not permitted to carry the design into execution, He whom he sought to serve and honour, approved of the feeling by which he was prompted, and accepted the will for the deed. Thus the humble believer can say, "Lord, all my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hid from thee." 5. Thou knowest the obligations of Thy servant. Often should the question be asked, "How much owest thou unto thy Lord?" David owed much; for God's merciful kindness towards him had been great. Let us then think of these things. Never should we forget that all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. And let us ask ourselves, what effect the contemplation of God's knowledge has upon our minds? Does it inspire us with joy, or make us miserable? Is it a congenial, or an unwelcome and repulsive theme? The subject speaks to the self-righteous formalist. "Ye are they which justify yourselves before me; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination in the sight of God." It speaks to all workers of iniquity. The practical language of such is, "Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?" (*Expository Outlines*.) *David's prayer for his house*:—The plan of David to build a "house magnificent" for Jehovah was not approved. Man proposes; God disposes. We think we know; but God knows better. The Divine veto was conveyed to him as gently as possible; it was coupled with a great promise, "Thy house and thy kingdom shall be established before thee." 1. On receiving this communication the king left his cedar palace, went into the weather-beaten tabernacle, and "sat before the Lord." The season of silent prayer is of inestimable value. Some of our deepest feelings are more readily expressed in silence than in words. . A hand-clasp has volumes in it. Our Lord never preached a more impressive sermon to Peter than when He "turned and looked on him." So in our communion with God we may sometimes make known our most earnest desires without a word (1 Sam. i. 13-15). 2. Then David pours out his soul in thanksgiving. He makes audible acknowledgment of God's goodness in taking him from the sheepfold and setting him up as the head of a royal line; and in his promises of goodness "for a great while to come." His gratitude finds its climacteric expression in the words, "There is none like Thee; neither is there any God beside Thee." One thing is clear: God loves to be thanked for His goodness. Observe how the importance of thanksgiving is emphasised in the Scriptures (Psalm xc. 2). Paul enjoins the Philippians to "make known their requests with thanksgiving unto God" (Phil. iv. 6). Possibly our prayers would be more effectual if they were more frequently winged with praises. The filial spirit, without which there can be no true approach to the mercy-seat, suggests a due recognition of the Father's goodness. 3. Then David's prayer: "Let the house of Thy servant David be established before Thee." This was in pursuance of a covenant. God on His part had promised to perpetuate the

Davidic line; David on his part had promised faithfulness. The plea, in the present instance, was but a reminder: "Do according to thy word!" The unit of church membership, now as in the Old Economy, is the household. Every Christian head of a family has a covenant with God, in which salvation is promised "to thee and thy seed after thee." The same law is over all God's people; but some fall short of their privilege in refusing to claim it. The man who has no family altar, for example, can scarcely put God in remembrance of His covenant. If we want our households saved, let us cover them with a constant canopy of intercession; saying often, like David, "O Lord, thou hast promised! Thou hast promised!" 4. The prayer of David was answered gloriously. (1) The sovereignty of Judah was continued in his line until the beginning of the Christian era (Gen. xlix. 10). (2) Then came Christ, of the Davidic line. In His triumphal entry He was greeted, "Hosanna! Hosanna to the Son of David!" (3) The Davidic covenant is thus bound up with the destinies of the Christian Church. (*Homiletic Review.*) *Marrow and fatness:*

—I. THE HUMILITY APPARENT IN DAVID'S WORDS. 1. He owned the lowliness of his origin—"What is my house?" He came not of royal blood. 2. David laid the most stress upon his own personal unworthiness. He said, "Who am I? What was there in me that thou shouldst make me a king, and a progenitor of the Christ?" And will not each believer here say the same? Who am I? II. DAVID'S WONDERING GRATITUDE. 1. He wondered, first, at what God had done for him: "What is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?—to a house of cedar, and to be able to talk about building a house for thee: to be thy chosen king, and to have my seed established on my throne, and to become the ancestor of the Christ!" 2. David did not end his wonder there, but went on to another and greater theme, viz., the blessings which the Lord had promised him. He praised the Lord for what he had laid up as well as for what he had laid out. He said, "And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God, but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come." What a wonderful expression! "And this was yet a small thing in thy sight." 3. David had yet another theme for wonder, which was this—the manner of the giving of all this. There is often as much in the manner of a gift as in a gift itself. III. DAVID'S EMOTION OF LOVE. 1. David found but a scant outlet for his love. What precious words are these: "What can David say more?" It is love struck dumb by receiving an unspeakable gift. The king was exactly in the same case as Paul when he said, "What shall we then say to these things?" 2. Notice the childlikeness of this love. "What can David say more?" 3. Observe, it is a love which longs for communion, and enjoys it. He says, "What can David say more unto thee?" He can talk to other people, but he does not quite know how to speak to God, and then he adds, "For Thou, Lord God, knowest Thy servant," which is a parallel passage to that of Peter, "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee." 4. But do you see it is obedient love as well? It is not mere sentiment, there is a practicalness about it, for he says, "Lord, Thou knowest Thy servant," he subscribes himself as henceforth bound to God's service. With delight he puts on his Master's livery, and sits like a servitor in the hall of the King of kings, waiting to hear what shall be spoken to him. IV. DAVID'S HEART WAS FULL OF PRAISE. 1. The praise was for the freeness of the grace which brought him such blessedness. "For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart hast thou done all these great things." Whenever the believer asks why God gave him grace in Christ Jesus he can only resort to one answer—the Lord's own heart has devised and ordained our salvation. 2. David praised also the faithfulness of God. He says, "For Thy word's sake." Is not that the ground upon which all mercy is received by the child of God? God has promised it and will keep His word. He never did run back from His covenant yet. 3. Then the king's heart was taken up with the greatness of the covenant blessings. "According to Thine own heart, hast Thou done all these great things." They were all great. There was not a little mercy among them. 4. Once more David praised God for his condescending familiarity. "According to Thine own heart, hast Thou done all these great things, to make Thy servant know them." They were revealed to David by a prophet, just as Jesus communed with His disciples, and said, "I have told you before it come to pass, that when it come to pass ye may believe." V. DAVID'S SOUL WAS ROUNDED UP IN HIGH THOUGHTS OF GOD, for our text concludes with these words: "Wherefore

Thou art great, O Lord God: for there is none like Thee, neither is there any God beside Thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears." "God is great. He is the greatest because He is the best. The old Romans used to say, *optimus maximus*—the best, the greatest. Thou, God, art good, and therefore Thou art great. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The solicitude of success*:—Through the lips of Nathan David had received from God a personal message of the greatest moment. Then the king went in and sat before the Lord, breaking out into the language of the text, which is of the nature of an expostulation. He did not receive the message as one he had a right to expect; he expresses no exultation, only surprise and solicitude; his soul was troubled by his rare fortune, troubled as men generally are by disaster. But is not this a common experience of sincere and devout souls? They are humbled rather than elated by the honours they receive; the praises lavished upon them and their doings surprise and chasten them; their unlooked-for riches excite in their heart a troubled wonder; their specially happy lot seems so far in excess of what they might reasonably expect that they dare hardly realise it; their exceptional health, affluence, promotion, or felicity gives them from time to time a sense of positive uneasiness and painfulness. "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me thus far?" It may seem paradoxical to say so, but in deep, true souls disappointment and disaster often cause less anxiety and questioning than is occasioned by brilliant success. We know what we are, we know the errors, sins, and general unworthiness which have marked our career, and we cannot understand our good fortune; we suspect that we are being lifted up to be cast down; we are perturbed by a secret fear lest these windfalls and triumphs may in one way or other precipitate our ruin, as superior beauty is often fatal to birds and flowers; and we conceive the dread lest these earthly successes may only aggravate our doom as the good things of Dives did. Who am I, and what is my house, that I should be so distinguished? Yet this is the right spirit in which to accept accessions of wealth and social distinctions and joys. It is a far truer temper than to regard our luck as the reward of our merit, and to boast ourselves in our good fortune. To recognise our demerit, and to acknowledge that riches and honours are God's free gifts, is the true attitude towards worldly advancement and advantage. But at the same time we must not permit morbid feeling to blind us to the graciousness of God, and to rob us of the sweetness of His gifts. Let us then learn to trust God in His bright providences as we do in His dark ones, and to take His richest gifts without suspicion or misgiving. It is a fine trait in the Christian character when we can fill high places and enjoy goodly things in the spirit of unquestioning trust and appreciation. After the king had humbled himself before God because of these extraordinary favours, he concludes: "And what can David say more unto Thee? for Thou knowest Thy servant, O Lord God. For Thy word's sake, and according to Thine own heart, hast Thou wrought all this greatness to make Thy servant know it." The suspicious, ascetic spirit is not the highest mood of life. (W. L. Watkinson.) *Alone with God*:—Christian life in our day is full of activity. It finds pleasure in planning, giving, and working for the growth of Christ's kingdom. The spirit of consecration gives joy to all Christians who recognise it, and inspires confident hopes in the aggressive movements of the Church. But it conceals, also, a great peril. All Christian power springs from communion with God, and from the indwelling of Divine grace. One can do good to others only as his own heart pulsates with love to Jesus, and has a present experience of His love. We can impart only what we receive. Any spring will run dry unless fed from unfailing sources. Any Christian labour will be fruitless, and Christian zeal be like sounding brass, unless the soul waits daily upon God, and finds new strength in prayer and in the study of the Bible. *Courtiers' privileges*:—It would be a great favour if a king should give leave to one of his meanest subjects to have a key of his privy chamber, to come to him and visit him, and be familiar with him when he pleaseth. How would such a favour be talked of in the world? Yet this is but a faint image of what the believer is admitted to. He may come not merely to the palace of mercy, and the throne of grace, but to the very heart of God. Confidences such as ours surpass all the familiarities of friendship, and yet they are permitted, nay commanded, between the All-glorious Lord and our poor sinful selves. We may well copy the example of David when he went in and sat before the Lord, and said, "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house? And is this the manner of

man, O Lord God?" (C. H. Spurgeon.) **Thou hast brought me hitherto.**—*Thus far*:—These verses represent David as coming to a point in his life when he steps aside for a moment out of the current of events to ask what they all mean, what light they throw upon his own life and destiny, and what on the character of God. David had become King now over all Israel and Judah, and he had conquered the Philistines sufficiently to have a moment's rest. The kingdom is established. David is so impressed with this that he retires to be alone with God, and in the sacred solitude he says: "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that Thou hast brought us thus far?" And David felt that he was, somehow or other, being worked by a vast Power, that he was in the sweep of a tremendous current of purposes, part of a larger scheme than he himself had ever conceived, and evidently destined for some end larger than he knew. His life, he felt, could never be explained from himself. He was king of the people, but, just as surely, he was the servant of Jehovah. A greater than he was really directing his course. What had happened up to this point was proof, too, that somewhat more was intended. The sense of great things to come came in with that interpretation of the past. The wonder of accomplishments thus far shot into the future as a luminous prophecy of high destiny and great ends. And with this sense of his importance, and the importance of the nation at having a distinct place in the Divine economy, came a great sense of humility. "Who am I, and what is my house?" The moment man learns his real greatness he is humble; it is when he masquerades an absent majesty he lifts a proud head. Now, it is always a difficult thing to construct the theology of history. I am not going to attempt it here. But a much more difficult thing, I think, is to learn history and have no theology. I do not suppose that David, or the man who wrote his history, or we ourselves, would speak of God taking him from the sheep-fold and making him king and giving him success in any such sense as to make God the Author of David's misdoings. It is quite true that we cannot apply any theology to a satisfactory explanation of all the facts of history, but to read history and behold its trend and drift and its vast issues without believing in the Ordering Intelligence, who is moral and good, is to me impossible. "Take away the belief in the self-conscious personality of God," said Tennyson, "and you take away the backbone of the world." "On God and God-like men we build our trust." Now, if we survey the past of the world and of mankind we may always ask with incredulity, "And is this the law of man, O Lord God?" And with the conviction that God is at work, which any adequate view of the past gives, comes the belief in the still greater future. So much is done that it must be little, I think, compared with what remains. Think for a moment of the evolution of mankind. Let man read back the history of his race as far as he can, until he sees his ancestors of the Tertiary Period joining together to fight against the stronger animals. What a tremendous distance he has come from that early struggle to this present time when he is not only lord over the brute creation, but when he bends the elements of nature into his service! Think how from a few simple sounds he has developed all the richness of a modern language! Captain Cook said the language of Fuegians was like a man clearing his throat. Think of the wonderful way in which man has risen from physical to moral and spiritual conceptions. The story of it lies embedded in our language to-day. One writer sums it up by saying: "From A to Z the dictionary is crowded with examples of the physical roots from which moral and intellectual terms have sprung." "Supercilious," e.g., means literally one who raises his eyebrows. Then, how did it come to mean a quality of spirit? Because man came to read the inner nature and to relate it to physical expression. A calculating man simply meant at first one who counted with small stones (*calculus*, pebble), but calculation now is a mental effort. This passage of words from physical to intellectual, moral, and spiritual meanings, indicates the passage of man to higher stages of life. Long, long ago man began to guess in a very crude way about the causes and properties of things, and the outcome is modern science with all its wonders. Well, having brought us thus far, is it not certain that much more is in store for us? Mr. Wallace puts fifteen great discoveries, all applications of science, to the credit of the nineteenth century, as against eight for all previous history. Is this wonder a sign that we are nearing the end of the world? Nay, rather we have just discovered that the reserve of the universe is exhaustless. "Each generation of physicists," says Mr. H. Spencer in his last book, "discovers in so-called brute matter powers

which but a few years before the most instructed physicists would have thought incredible." Is this march of science the law of man, O Lord God? Nay, rather, we would ask, "Who are we that Thou hast brought us thus far?" Think, again, how far God has brought us on the paths of morality and theology and religion. From the crudest guesses as to His own nature He has led us into the temple of the Father of Jesus Christ, and from mistaken sacrifices to the communion of the Holy Spirit. Think how the finest moral feelings have developed out of rude physical relations; even the modesty of woman and the love of man were once what we should now deem vulgarities. In this the law of man, O Lord God? "For Thy word's sake, and according to Thine heart, hast thou wrought all this greatness?" The whole development of mankind in language, art, and science, in social union, morality, and religion, is the history of a great forming Spirit bringing order out of chaos, the history of the inner word of God winning utterance for itself through all discordant sounds, and turning the Babel of man into the Pentecost of the Holy Ghost. But let us turn our thoughts on this subject to our own individual lives. If you believe that God is conducting the march of the race to high and noble ends, you need to believe also that He is personally dealing with you. David's thoughts turned not only upon his nation and its place in the world, but upon himself and his own relation to God. David was king, you say, and it was a wonderful thing to have come from the sheepfolds of Bethlehem to the throne of Israel. Well might the shepherd-boy of former days now ask, "Who am I?" But your life contains nothing startling of this kind; you were born an ordinary person, and you are an ordinary person still. Perhaps instead of success and promotion you have had much misfortune and adversity. When you think of the way you have come thus far, you have very mingled feelings about it, you see great blunders and sad mistakes—blunders and mistakes which, perhaps, have brought you a harvest of sorrows. You may be in the very midst of circumstances now which appear to be very much against you, which are at least very difficult to deal with. Types of life and careers are an infinite variety. But this thought that God is dealing with us is not confined to any type, much less confined to the successful type. From the sheepfold to the throne is by no means the one line along which the Divine leadership is recognised. Rather, indeed, it is the normal experience of man. A few men may adopt a certain course of thought, and reason themselves out of this conviction, or suppose they had done so, but mankind will never consent to it. The general feeling with regard to the race is that a "God marshals it," and with regard to the individual even "that man proposes and God disposes." Most men who from advanced years look back feel that someone else, not themselves, has really tracked their way. Without denying or diminishing man's share in the conduct of his own life, without in any sense risking his sense of responsibility in regard to it; without taking away any of the truth of the statement that as he sows he reaps, we all feel that "There is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them as we will." Shakespeare got it out of human life, and the conviction is in human life still. To the transfiguration of events, too, there is common testimony. All of us who can look back some years know how utterly we sometimes mistook the bearing of the events through which we were passing. Ruskin says he has never known anything of what was most seriously happening to him till afterwards. Is not that true of all in a measure? What you called an accident has become the ruling factor in your lot; what you called a chance meeting has deposited the most permanent influence in your life; what you intended perhaps for your success has turned out a hindrance; what you thought was going to crush you into a final defeat has been the greatest blessing to you. 'Tis passing strange! and life is full of it. Crete cries out from the burden of years, and Greece ventures to the rescue. The way is blocked; nothing can be done. Greece proclaims war against Turkey, and Prince George goes to the front. Someone blunders badly, Greece is hopelessly beaten, and the iniquitous Turk revels in victory. Crete is doomed, then! No—wait; slow-footed Time will bring another message. The defeat of Greece lays an obligation on the Powers to give Crete freedom, and the time comes when Prince George becomes himself Governor of the island, and instead of the groans of oppressed men you hear the chanting of Te Deums and the voice of thanksgiving; and soldiers, instead of holding the people in terror, are pelted with flowers by little children. There have been things as strange as that in your life and mine; storms have wrought for peace,

troubles have brought us strength, and we were helped from unexpected quarters. We look back to-day, and we see a great deal of our own folly and fault, and their results. but do we not also see the hand of God? But whatever you are, though bad and wicked, if you still feel there is a God above you, whose hand has been in your life though you have rebelled much, a God of mercy and redemption, a God with a great purpose which cannot be defeated, even yet the future throws open its golden doors, and the unseen powers are ready to guide you to the city of celestial life. Thus far. What for? Why alive to-day? That you may go on in the Divine life, on to do God's work, on to use God's power, on to manifest God's beauty, and at last to take your own proper place in the Eternal City of God. (T. K. Williams.) **And is this the manner of man, O Lord God?**—*God's manner above man's*:—1. It is not the manner of men to forgive great and frequent injuries and affronts. They are too soon provoked, and sometimes incensed; and not soon, or easily reconciled. They often retain a remembrance of injuries, which they profess to have forgiven; and it is difficult to bring them to a real friendship and to manifest the genuine evidences of it. If a prince forgiveth one act of treason, he will scarce forgive a second, and still keep the traitor near him. But our God is rich in mercy. Though he is the offended party, he makes the first overtures of reconciliation, bears with many provocations, waits to be gracious, and multiplies to pardon. 2. Nor is it the manner of men to confer such benefits as God doth. They have no such inexhaustible stores and treasures, out of which to draw their gifts. What is it that princes can bestow upon their greatest favourites, compared with the gifts of God? They confer honours and titles; a mere empty sound! God gives us the real honour, the glorious privilege, of being his children. Princes may bestow gold, silver, jewels, palaces, estates. But would you, Christians, give up your present comfort and interest in the Divine favour, for any of these? The greatest favourite of a prince may be peculiarly wretched, as was the case with Haman. His station is slippery and he may soon fall into disgrace and ruin. But the Lord will give strength to his people, bless them with peace, and confirm them to the end. The favourite of a prince must die, and his master, with all his wealth and power, cannot save him: but when flesh and heart faileth, God is the strength of his servants, and their portion for ever. The favourites of men, even of princes, must be confined to a few. But God can enrich, and ennoble thousands and millions. (J. Orton.)

CHAPTER VIII.

Vers. 1—18. David smote the Philistines and subdued them.—*The victorious king*:—These years of war gave birth to some of the grandest of the psalms, amongst which may be numbered, ii., xx., xxi., lx., cx. I. **THE FOE.** They trust in chariots and in horses; their kings think that they will be saved by the multitude of their hosts. They inspire fear through the hearts of Israel, so that the land trembles as though God had rent it, and the people drink the wine of staggering and dismay. So tremendous is their assault, so overwhelming their numbers, that all help of man seems vain. It is thus in every era of the history of God's people, that Satan has stirred up their foes. Right behind the coalitions of men lies the malignity of the fallen spirit, who ever seeks to bruise the heel of the woman's seed. II. **THE ATTITUDE OF FAITH.** Whilst the serried ranks of the foe are in sight, the hero-king is permitted a vision into the unseen and eternal. There is no fear upon the face of God, no change in his determination to set his king upon his holy hill. In fact, it seems that the day of his foe's attack is that in which he receives a new assurance of sonship, and is bidden to claim the nations for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. In perfect peace he anticipates the result, the Lord will send forth the rod of His strength out of Zion, and strike through kings in the day of His wrath, and make His enemies His footstool, so that in all after-days he may combine the office of priest and king, as Melchizedek did on that same site centuries before. III. **THE WARRIORS OF THE PRIEST-KING.** Catching the contagion of his faith, they triumph in God's salvation, and in His Name set up their banners. They believe

that God, as a Man of War, is going forth with their hosts, and will tread down their adversaries. They are characterised by the willingness of their service. No mercenaries are pressed into their ranks; they gladly gather around the standard, as the warriors of whom Deborah sang, who willingly offered themselves. They are clad not in mail, but in the fine linen of the priests; "the beauties of holiness," a phrase which suggests that the warfare was conducted by religious men as an act of worship to God. They are numerous as the dewdrops that bespangle the morning grass, when every blade has its own coronet of jewels, and the light is reflected from a million diamonds (Psa. cx.) What an exquisite conception of David's ideal for his soldiers, and of the knightly chivalry, of the purity, truth, and righteousness, in which all the soldiers of the Messiah should be arrayed!

IV. THE COMPLETENESS OF THE VICTORY. The armies of the alien cannot stand the onset of those heaven-accounted soldiers. Kings of armies flee apace. They are bowed down and fallen in bitter, hopeless defeat. They are made as a fiery furnace in the time of God's anger, and swallowed up in His wrath. Their dead bodies strew the battlefield, and the valleys are choked with slain. In David we have a type of the Messiah. For, of a truth, against the Holy Servant Jesus, whom God has anointed, both the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel have gathered together. Men have refused His sway, and do refuse it; but God hath sworn, and will not repent, that to Him every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess: and it is more sure than that to-morrow's sun will rise that, ere long, great voices shall be heard in Heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of the world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ: and He shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. xi. 15-18.) (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *David's foreign wars*:—The first series of David's wars, on the termination of which it is said that he enjoyed "rest round about from all his enemies" (2 Sam. vii. 1), was concluded before his proposal to build the temple. These seem to have been wars with such remnants of the ancient inhabitants as combined to molest his people within the limits of the twelve tribes. The wars now undertaken were chiefly against neighbouring nations, including the occupants of that large territory between Palestine and the Euphrates, which God had promised to Abraham (Gen. xv. 18). The nations against which David now went forth were most of them extremely warlike; they seem, too, to have been banded together in leagues or confederacies; so that the enterprise was attended with difficulties and dangers which only a heart, made brave and fearless by trust in the Invisible, could have ventured to face. The 20th Psalm may have been written for the occasion, and left behind for the Levites, to be sung in the name of the nation, when they remembered the perils to which their king and his troops had gone forth. It is an instructive fact that the history of these wars occupies so small a portion of the Bible. A single verse is all that can be afforded to most of them. Had they been narrated at length, they would probably have forced a narrative that would have placed David, as a captain, on a level with Cyrus, Hannibal, or Cesar. It is one of the less noticed proofs of the inspiration of the Old Testament, that such dazzling transactions as these are passed over so briefly. There is no other history in the world where more space would be occupied in describing the carrying of an ark to its permanent resting-place, than in narrating seven great military campaigns. It would be beyond the power of human nature to resist the temptation to describe great battles—the story of which is always read with such interest, and which reflect so much earthly glory on one's nation, and create in the mind of the national reader such a feeling of satisfaction and pride. (1.) The first campaign was against David's old friends, the Philistines. In former battles, David seems to have been content with driving them out of his territories—now he attacked them in their own. The town which he took, called *Metheg-ammah*, or the bridle of Ammah (so named from its situation), appears, from 1 Chron. xviii. 1, to have been Gath itself. It was now David's lot, amid the vicissitudes of the world, to attack the place where he had once been sheltered—to hurl his weapons against the king (if he was still alive) whose hospitality he had experienced. (2.) Much the same thing had to be done in his next campaign—that against Moab. The king of Moab had protected his father and mother when it became apparently unsafe for them to remain in their native land—and, through Ruth, Moabite blood ran in David's veins. Jewish writers have a tradition that, after a time, the king put his parents to death, and that this occasioned the war which David carried on against them. The severity practised against Moab was very great; it was a terrible blow, intended to cripple them for a whole generation, and make it

physically impossible for them to take up arms again. (3.) The third of David's conquests was over a more distant enemy, Hadadezer, the king of Zobah, in the direction of the Euphrates. It appears that in the course of this campaign another enemy had to be encountered—a vast mass of Syrians came out against him. It is evident that this campaign was a very remarkable one, for the slaughter of the Syrians amounted to the prodigious number of 22,000; and the victory, besides giving David possession of Damascus and the whole of Syria, was followed by the voluntary submission of Toi, the king of Hamath (ver. 10), in the valley of Lebanon. (4.) Of the wars with the Ammonites and Amalekites (ver. 12) nothing is recorded, nor is it certain whether these wars were carried on at the same time with the other campaigns, or whether (as we are inclined to think) the war with Amalek was that which took place while David was at Ziklag, and the war with Ammon that which is described in a subsequent chapter. (5.) The last enemy specified is Edom; and it is evident that the contest with that ferocious people was peculiarly bloody and critical. There is a degree of indistinctness in the narrative of this event, when it is attempted to harmonize the three passages that contain allusions to it—in Samuel and Chronicles, and in the introduction to the 60th Psalm. In one place, it is said that it was 18,000 Syrians that fell in the Valley of Salt (2 Sam. viii. 13); in another they are said to have been Edomites (1 Chron. viii. 12); the introduction to the Psalm makes the number of Edomites 12,000; in Samuel, the victory is ascribed to David—in Chronicles, to Abishai—and in the Psalm, to Joab. It is probable that the war with Edom was carried on at the same time as the war with the Syrians; that while David and his army were in the north a detachment of the Syrians was sent to co-operate with the Edomites in attacking the southern part of Judah; that hearing of this, David despatched Abishai with a portion of his troops to encounter them; that Abishai completely defeated the confederate armies in the Valley of Salt (near Edom), much about the same time as David routed the Syrians in the neighbourhood of Damascus. If the Edomites and Syrians were confederate, it is not surprising that in one place it should be said it was 18,000 Syrians that fell, and in another 18,000 Edomites. The psalm (60th), gives us a glimpse of the state of things in David's army at this time, revealing the frightful difficulties and dangers of the enterprise, and the singularly lofty efforts of prayerful courage which were needed to carry him through the crisis. It appears that his army, far from home, and engaged with a very powerful foe, had sunk to the lowest ebb, and had even, for a time, been visited with the most direful reverses. The effect of these victories must have been very striking. Not only were the people now freed from all the harassing attacks to which they had been subject at every moment and on every side, but the Hebrew kingdom was elevated to the rank of a first-rate Power. Garrisons were placed in all the surrounding strongholds; the accumulated hoards of Eastern wealth were transferred to Jerusalem; and streams of tribute rolled their golden waters into the treasury of David. The secret of David's success is expressed once and again in the narrative: "The Lord was with David, and preserved him whithersoever he went." It is one of the great lessons of the Old Testament that the godly man can and does perform his duty better than any other, because the Lord is with him—whether he be steward of a house, or keeper of a prison, or ruler of a kingdom, like Joseph; or a judge and lawgiver, like Moses; or a warrior, like Samson or Gideon or Jephthah; or a king, like David or Jehoshaphat or Josiah; or a prime minister over a hundred and twenty provinces, like Daniel. This is one of the prominent lessons of the Book of Psalms—it is inscribed upon its very portals; the godly man "shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." In all these warlike expeditions King David fulfilled his typical character—was an emblem of the Lion of the tribe of Judah, going forth "conquering and to conquer." (W. G. Blaikie, M.A.)

Vers. 6—14. **And David put garrisons in Syria of Damascus.**—*The garrison of the graces*:—"He that buildeth a ship doth not make his work of such a sort that it may avoid all waves and billows, that is impossible; but he so builds it that it may be tight and staunch, and able to endure all weathers." Even so the very frame and construction of the spiritual life were formed with a view to trials. Jerusalem was walled because enemies were expected; David built towers and armouries because he looked for war; and what mean the graces of

faith and patience unless affliction is to be reckoned on? Our glorious Leader would never have armed and armoured all his followers if there had not been allotted to them a wrestling with principalities and powers. See how Paul, in the same chapter in which he tells us of the panoply of God, reminds us of the adversaries whom we shall surely encounter. Has the Lord made thee to be strong in faith and brave in heart? Then be not surprised if thy stout ship is sent to traverse stormy seas. God doth not throw away strength by putting it where it will never be needed. Storms will surely come where grace is given to bear them, and through these storms grace will develop into glory (*C. H. Spurgeon*.) **The Lord preserved David whithersoever he went.**—*God over man*:—I. THE EMPLOYMENT IN WHICH DAVID WAS ENGAGED. (1.) In the service of God, in which he was engaged (2) with a single eye to God's glory, (3) with all his heart, (4) and under the Divine direction. II. THE CARE WHICH DAVID EXPERIENCED. (1.) Special, as to his person, circumstances, etc. (2.) Complete, in going out, returning, etc. (3.) Constant, by day and by night, in youth, manhood, age, health, sickness, etc. Application. "Who will this day consecrate his service unto the Lord?" Those who do so will find it (1) delightful, (2) honourable, (3) easy, (4) profitable. (*Pulpit Analyst*.)

Vers. 15—18. **David reigned over all Israel.**—*Administration of the kingdom*:—I. The first thing pointed out to us here is THE CATHOLICITY OF HIS KINGLY GOVERNMENT, embracing all Israel, all people. He did not bestow his attention on one favoured section of the people to the neglect or careless oversight of the rest. He did not, for example, seek the prosperity of his own tribe, Judah, to the neglect of the other eleven. In a word, there was no favouritism in his reign. In this he reflected that universality of God's care on which we find the Psalmist dwelling with such complacency: "The Lord is good to all; and His tender mercies are over all His works." In the next place, we have much to learn from the statement that the most prominent thing that David did was to "execute judgment and justice to the people." II. That was the SOLID FOUNDATION ON WHICH ALL HIS BENEFITS RESTED. For it is never said that Saul did anything of the kind. And most certainly they are not words that could have been used of the ordinary government of Oriental kings. This idea of equal justice to all, and especially to those who had no helper, was a very beautiful one in David's eyes. It gathered round it those bright and happy features which in the seventy-second Psalm are associated with the administration of another King. "Give the king Thy judgments, O God, and Thy righteousness to the king's son. He shall judge Thy people with righteousness, and Thy poor with judgment." And in all this we find the features of that higher government of David's Son which shows so richly His most gracious nature. The cry of sorrow and need, as it rose from the dark world, did not repel, but rather attracted, Him. All were in the lowest depths of spiritual poverty, but for that reason His hand was the more freely offered for their help. We are not to think of David, however, as being satisfied if he merely secured justice to the poor and succeeded in lightening their yoke. His ulterior aim was to fill his kingdom with active, useful, honourable citizens. III. The remaining notices of David's administration in the passage before us are simply to the effect that THE GOVERNMENT CONSISTED OF VARIOUS DEPARTMENTS, and that each department had an officer at its head. 1. There was the military department, at the head of which was Joab, or rather he was over "the host"—the great muster of the people for military purposes. A more select body, "the Cherethites and the Pelethites," seems to have formed a bodyguard for the king, or a band of household troops, and was under a separate commander. The troops forming "the host" were divided into twelve courses of twenty-four thousand each, regularly officered, and for one month of the year the officers of one of the courses, and probably the people, or some of them, attended on the king at Jerusalem (1 Chron. xxvii. 1.) 2. There was the civil department, at the head of which were Jehoshaphat the recorder and Seriah the scribe or secretary. While these were in attendance on David at Jerusalem they did not supersede the ordinary home rule of the tribes of Israel. Each tribe had still its prince or ruler, and continued, under a general superintendence from the king, to conduct its local affairs (1 Chro. xxvii. 16-22). This home-rule system, besides interesting the people greatly in the prosperity of the country, was a great check against the abuse of the royal authority; and it is a proof that the confidence of Rehoboam in the stability of his government, confirmed perhaps by a superstitious view of that

promise to David, must have been an absolute infatuation, the product of utter inexperience on his part, and of the most foolish counsel ever tendered by professional advisers. 3. Ecclesiastical administration. The capture of Jerusalem and its erection into the capital of the kingdom made a great change in ecclesiastical arrangements. For some time before it would have been hard to tell where the ecclesiastical capital was to be found. Shiloh had been stripped of its glory when Ichabod received his name, and the Philistine armies destroyed the place. Nob had shared a similar fate at the hands of Saul. The old tabernacle erected by Moses in the wilderness was at Gibeon (1 Chron. xxi. 29), and remained there even after the removal of the ark to Zion (1 Kings iii. 4). At Hebron, too, there must have been a shrine while David reigned there. But from the time when David brought up the ark to Jerusalem that city became the greatest centre of the national worship. There the services enjoined by the law of Moses were celebrated; it became the scene of the great festivals of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. We are told that the heads of the ecclesiastical department were Zadok the son of Ahitub and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar. These represented the elder and the younger branches of the priesthood. It is scarcely possible to say how far these careful ecclesiastical arrangements were instrumental in fostering the spirit of genuine piety. But there is too much reason to fear that even in David's time that element was very deficient. The bursts of religious enthusiasm that occasionally rolled over the country were no sure indications of piety in a people easily roused to temporary gushes of feeling, but deficient in stability. The systematic administration of his kingdom by King David was the fruit of a remarkable faculty of orderly arrangement that belonged to most of the great men of Israel. We see it in Abraham, in his prompt and successful marshalling of his servants to pursue and attack the kings of the East when they carried off Lot; we see it in Joseph, first collecting and then distributing the stores of food in Egypt; in Moses, conducting that marvellous host in order and safety through the wilderness; and, in later times, in Ezra and Nehemiah, reducing the chaos which they found at Jerusalem to a state of order and prosperity which seemed to verify the vision of the dry bones. We see it in the Son of David, in the orderly way in which all His arrangements were made: the sending forth of the twelve Apostles and the seventy disciples, the arranging of the multitude when He fed the five thousand, and the careful gathering up of the fragments "that nothing be lost." In the spiritual kingdom, a corresponding order is demanded, and times of peace and rest in the Church are times when this development is specially to be studied. (IV. *G. Blaikie, D.D.*) *A just governor*:—The people of Khartoum (after giving General Gordon an enthusiastic welcome as their new Governor-General), anxiously awaited a speech in return. It came characteristic of the man: "With the help of God I will hold the balance level." It was what they wanted, a just ruler and judge, and at last they had got one. Governors formerly could only be approached by bribery of the officials around them. General Gordon had a letter-box made in the door of his palace, for all petitions, and they received his personal attention.

CHAPTER IX.

Vers. 1—13. **Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake.** *A gracious temper*:—I. AN AFFECTING EXHIBITION OF THE VICISSITUDES OF HUMAN LIFE. I do not now refer to those common changes which are taking place in the community, but to those which are calculated powerfully to affect the mind. Neither do I now particularly allude to those by which persons have rapidly risen from their original obscurity, to stations of eminent dignity, emolument, or power, so that mankind have been astonished at their sudden elevation. My reference is to events of a precisely opposite character. See, for example, the patriarch Job, the richest man in his day in the east. Listen to the language of one who was in the golden mediocrity, and had all her wants liberally supplied, but was afterwards so reduced that she exclaimed—"Call me no more Naomi, but call me Marah, for I went out full but the Lord has sent me home empty." Look at the

family of Saul. And, not to multiply examples from scripture, have we not witnessed similar events, and equally surprising, within the last twenty years of our lives? If we look into the more private circle, how many, through changes and war, through the violence and fraud of others, or through their own imprudence and ambition, have been precipitated from the summit of the mount to the very bottom of the valley! To them we may almost apply the language of Solomon—I have seen “princes sitting on dunghills.” In a word—we are taught the folly of making earthly things our rest and portion. If you possess them in abundance, they cannot give true or abiding satisfaction:—possess them!—they are so insecure, that you know not that they shall be yours by the dawn of to-morrow’s morn. “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” You may be in a palace and on a throne, and your family overloaded with opulence and secular distinctions, and in a few years the question may be asked, “Is there any left of the house of Saul?”

II. THERE IS A NOBLE TRIUMPH OF A GENEROUS AND GRACIOUS TEMPER. For who was Saul? We have said he was a king; and let us not indulge towards him a radical spirit, but do him justice. For some time he acted according to the rules of equity and humanity, and law, by the advice of his wise and pious counsellor Samuel; and for a while his kingdom prospered. But at length he disobeyed the positive commands of God, distinctly given him by the prophet. With respect to David, who never treated him but with respectful courtesy and kindness, he was so jealous of his rising character and fame, that he left no means which he could command untried, to deprive him of his life. Now, mark the disposition and demeanour of David. Religion does not require us to select as our chosen associates, those who have furnished unequivocal evidence that they would injure us if it were in their power: but it does require of us to control our passions; to suppress unholy irritation; to pass by an offence; to bury it in silence; to be willing to show acts of kindness to the injurious.

III. HERE IS A BEAUTIFUL SPECIMEN OF DELICATE FRIENDSHIP. There was a condescension and an activity in the benevolence which is here described, and which deserve more emphatic notice. David was in his palace, surrounded by the distinctions of royalty. Mephibosheth, the last of Saul’s remaining sons, was in the shade of seclusion and poverty. But the prince did not deem it beneath his dignity to ask after the humblest or the poorest subject in his realm, and to solicit information of his condition, and to stretch out his hand to lift the impoverished relict from his obscurity, and liberally supply his wants. Let those in elevated rank, and magisterial office, wear their honours unmoved, and let those in opulence enjoy their abundance, and share in the permitted delights of the sons of men—but let them also be assured that it is no degradation to be touched with the feeling of human infirmities, or to wipe away tears from the eyes of the distressed; nor is there any enjoyment more sweet or luxurious (next to communion with God) than that with which he is inspired, who can say, “I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame; and I was a father to the poor. The blessing of him who was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy.”

IV. Behold in this text and history, a DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION OF THE MIND OF HIM OF WHOM DAVID WAS AN ANCESTOR AND A TYPE. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was a lineal descendant of David, according to the flesh. In real dignity, the Saviour infinitely surpassed him; and hence David called Him Lord; hence the proclamation—“I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright and morning star,” which shines with a brilliancy above the rest. (J. Clayton.)

Kindness to Jonathan’s son:—I. THE UNSELFISH KINDNESS OF DAVID. To send across the Jordan to Lo-debar to find a young man whom he perhaps had never seen, the grandson of Saul, who had so often sought to slay him, and whose house was a rival one in the kingdom—a young man crippled in both feet, with no prospect of being useful to the king—to alienate from the crown the forfeited estates of the house of Saul and restore them to cripple Mephibosheth—affords beautiful evidence of the unselfish kindness of David’s generous heart. David’s wonderful exaltation from the sheepfold to the kingdom had a natural tendency to repress or stifle the kindlier impulses of his heart. How many are there who in times of prosperity utterly forget the friends of former and adverse days! To seek out the lame, the halt, the blind, the poor, the wretched, to minister unto others, not to be ministered unto, is the beauty and the glory of the Christian life.

III. DAVID’S KINDNESS to the son was not only unselfish, it was ALSO

ACCORDING TO THE COVENANT WITH HIS FATHER. Twenty-two years before, David, fearing the wrath of Saul, made a covenant of friendship with Prince Jonathan, and then fled from the court. That covenant was a holy thing; it sacredly bound both David and Jonathan in life, and even after death: "Thou shalt not only while I yet live show me the kindness of the Lord, but thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever." All covenants, agreements, bargains, constitutions, except those sinful in themselves, should be most faithfully observed by all the parties who enact or ratify them. One of the characteristics of the man who shall abide in the tabernacle of the Lord and dwell in His holy hill is that he sweareth to his own hurt and changeth not. Fidelity to covenant engagements, whether in daily labour, the mechanic's shop, the marts of business, the learned professions, whether in pulpit or pew, is one of the very highest virtues of mankind. Be true to your word at the loss of property or even of life itself. III. DAVID'S KINDNESS was not only unselfish and according to covenant; it was **THE KINDNESS OF GOD**. "Is there not yet any of the house of Saul that I may show the kindness of God unto him?" Referring to the covenant, we find that Jonathan made David swear that he would show the kindness of the Lord to him and his house. Even the tender mercies of man are cruel. True and unselfish kindness of man to man must have its origin in God—kindness that flows into the human soul from God, and is akin to the kindness of His great and loving heart. Show me not man's kindness, but the kindness of God. We hear much in these days of the enthusiasm of humanity, and the brotherhood of man; but whence comes this enthusiasm, and who first taught this brotherhood of man? The so-called "natural religions" never inspired in man any love for humanity, and the Christless teachers of the race never proclaimed the brotherhood of man. It is simple historic verity to assert that apart from Christ and His religion there has never been any true and lasting humanitarianism on the earth. David had felt in his own soul something of the great and wondrous kindness of God, and this kindness he will show to Jonathan's crippled son. IV. **THE KINDNESS SHOWN WAS FOR THE SAKE OF ANOTHER**—kindness to the son for the father's sake. How many since David have shown kindness to the children of the old and tried friends of former days for the parents' sake? Years ago you had a dear friend who stood by you in the darkest hour of your sorest trial, and now he is no more; but his children remain, and how deeply concerned are you in their welfare and happiness? how ready are you to aid them in every possible way, to share in their joys and sympathise in their sorrows, and by word and deed to show the kindness of God to the children for the father's sake? The child of an old friend is far nearer to us all than the child of the stranger. If the unseen spiritual history of souls could be laid bare to mortal gaze, it would be seen that thousands and tens of thousands of the most active and useful Christians of every age of the Church were saved in virtue of covenanted mercy and pious ancestors. Of many it may be said, as of Timothy, "The unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois and thy mother Eunice." God has shown His marvellous kindness to many wayward and wicked children for the sake of sainted father or mother—saved, in the infinite mercy of God, by His kindness for another's sake. God's covenant of love with the parent abides in all the fulness of Divine blessing for children and children's children, even unto a thousand generations of such as love Him and keep His covenant and commandments. The kindness of God shown by David to Mephibosheth for the sake of another affords a most striking and beautiful illustration of the method whereby God shows His saving kindness to sinners. We are saved through the infinite mercy and kindness of God bestowed on us abundantly solely for the sake of another, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Kindness to one for another's sake is the law of Christian service. When we give meat to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, when we clothe the naked and visit the prisoner and minister to the sick, we show the kindness of God unto our brethren for the sake of the Elder Brother, and He recognises the service as rendered unto himself. If in all of our ministries of mercy to the "lame" of body or mind or soul we realised and acted on the principle of thus showing the kindness of God for the sake of our Saviour, how full of joy and blessedness would all our service be! Let each Christian ask himself daily, "Is there yet any one of Adam's lost race to whom I may show the kindness of God for my

Saviour's sake?" (*A. W. Pitzer, D.D.*) *David and Mephibosheth, a faint image of God and the world*:—The fragment of history of which this chapter is composed may be looked upon in two lights. 1. As supplying a fine illustration of human friendship. Between David and Jonathan there existed a friendship the most tender and strong. 2. As a faint image of Divine love to the world. We are far from regarding David here as a type of the Eternal. I see more of the Eternal in the true kindness of a holy man—such kindness as David now displays—than I can see in any part of material nature. It is a brighter reflection of the Infinite One than stars or suns. I see the sun in the ray;—the dew-drop mirrors the Atlantic. I. **THE DISINTERESTEDNESS OF THE KINDNESS IS ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE DIVINE.** 1. The kindness which David displayed to Mephibosheth was unmerited. Was David under any obligation to show this kindness? Was there any excellence in the son of Jonathan to call it forth? No; David had the affection even before he knew there was such a person. Was God under any obligation to show mercy to the world? or did He see aught of excellence in the world to call it forth? No; if He had left humanity to perish for ever in its sins, no one could have complained. Angels would still have sung on, "Just and right are Thy ways," &c. Was there an excellence in man to call it forth? No; "God commendeth His love to us in that while we were yet sinners," &c. 2. The kindness which David showed Mephibosheth was unsought. The son of Jonathan did not make any application;—he did not knock at the door of royalty entreating favour. Did the world seek the gift of Christ? No, for two reasons:—(1.) Because it did not feel the need of a Saviour. (2.) If it had it never could have supposed that such a gift was possible. God sent Christ into the world not only without the world's request, but against the world's will. "He came to His own, but His own," &c. II. **THE OCCASION ON WHICH THIS DISINTERESTED KINDNESS WAS DISPLAYED IS ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE DIVINE.** 1. The kindness which David showed Mephibosheth was in consideration of some one else. It was "for Jonathan's sake." Why all this love to the poor lame youth more than to some one else? Hundreds in the empire perhaps required and desired more than he. Because of Jonathan. Why does God show love to this world more than hell? Hell requires mercy. Because of some one else. Christ is not the cause of God's love, but He is its channel. All blessings, temporal and spiritual, come through Christ. "He took not on Him the nature of angels," &c. 2. The kindness which David showed Mephibosheth was on account of some one else who was very near to the heart of the king. You remember David's wail over Jonathan: "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan," &c. How dear is Christ to the Everlasting Father. "Mine Elect, in whom my soul delighteth." "My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." I do not understand the mysterious connection subsisting between Jesus and the Everlasting Father. My intellect bows reverently before the mystery. But the Bible tells me that it is that of "an only-begotten Son." III. **THE RESULTS WHICH THIS DISINTERESTED KINDNESS REALISED ARE ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE DIVINE.** 1. It found out Mephibosheth. "Then King David sent and fetched him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lo-debar." Christ came to seek and to save; like the man who had lost one of his sheep, the woman her silver, the father his son. The apostles were sent out in search of God's objects of love. "God's love searches men out." Providence, conscience, and the Gospel are His Messengers. (Matt. xxii. 2—10.) 2. It restored him to his patrimonial inheritance. "I will restore thee all the land," &c. (ver. 7). Thou shalt walk the fields and meadows which thy father often trod. God's love restores us to our lost possessions. Salvation is "paradise regained." "All things are yours," &c. 3. Exalted to distinguished honours. "And thou shalt eat bread at my table continually" (ver. 7). "If any man hear My voice, I will come in unto him," &c. 4. The command of suitable attendants. "Thy sons and thy servants shall till the land for him," &c. What agents God employs for the objects of His love! "All things work together for good." "Are they not all ministering spirits?" &c. (*Homilist.*) *David's treatment of Mephibosheth*:—The chapter opens with a question which we should have thought at one period of our study to have been utterly impossible. There is a most subduing melancholy in the inquiry. The king's own sweet music is lost in that atmosphere. The question sounds hollow, dismal, like a poor voice struggling in a cave of wind. "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul?"

Can such a house die? Are there influences at work which can crumble the pyramids? "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away,"—a very subtle suggestion of an infinite effect operating continually in human affairs. If questions of this kind were not asked, the heart might sometimes at least secretly wonder whether God be not really partial to the rich and strong and great. He seems to spare the tempest from their roof, and to turn away the wind when it would strike their flocks or their lives. But it is not so. With God there is no respect of persons. "That I may show him kindness" (ver. 1). Once leave David to himself, and he blossoms into wonderful grace of character. He never began a war. David was no aggressor. The shepherdly heart was David's: he began at the sheepcotes, and he never left them as to all high moral pastoral solicitude and love. He was often in war, but always challenged, provoked, defied. A man may add a little to his own respectability by pronouncing judgment on the errors and sins of David. But remember that again and again when the hand of pressure is taken from him he wants to be a shepherd, to do acts of kindness, to go out after that which is lost until he find it. David always saw where another chair could be put to the banqueting-table. He observed how much food was taken away from that table that might have been consumed there by necessity, could that necessity have been discovered and urged by hospitable welcomes to partake of the feast. But can Saul or Jonathan have left any man to whom kindness can be shown? Their sons will be wealthy. The inheritance of such men must be a boundless estate. Quite a sad thing is it to be in such circumstances that nobody can do us a kindness; and sadder still to be supposed to be in such circumstances when in reality we are not. We are effusive in our kindness to people who are lying in the street; but there are many men of really radiant face, and merry life, and joyous, happy, witty speech would be glad of the help of a little child's hand. They are the men who are to be inquired about. Persons are to be glad that the question may be put to them, Where are such men? They will require to be found at twilight, for they shrink from noonday, and their gloom would make midnight a darkness impenetrable. "For Jonathan's sake." It is an honest word. "Not "for Saul's sake": there are some memories we cannot honour; but "for Jonathan's sake": there are some memories we can never forget. How the past lives and burns! We can never repay, in the sense of being equal with, any man who ever did us kindness. Kindness is not to be repaid, in the sense of being discharged, struck off the book of memory, and no longer constituting a pious recollection. We cannot pay for our salvation; silver and gold have no place in the region opened by that infinite word: they are terms unknown. Nothing could be done for Jonathan: he had passed away; but there is always the next best thing to be done. Blessed are they whose quick ingenuity is inspired to find out the next best thing. We cannot do the departed any good, for they have passed beyond the human touch; but we can do deeds to the poor, the ignorant, the out-of-the-way, the suffering, which will be a happy memorial to those we have lost. Take some poor child, open its way in life, and when you have done so set up in your heart's memory a stone bearing the inscription, "Sacred to the memory of a loving parent." So write the epitaph of the dead, and the writing shall never be obliterated. "Then King David sent. . . ." (ver. 5). What has David to do with such matters now? He is the king. Why should kings stoop to look after obscure subjects? Does not elevation destroy responsibility? Does not a throne excuse from human solicitude and pity? Does not a great public position exonerate a man from care for those he has left behind? The man struggles up through the king: there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty gives him understanding. David was first a man, then a shepherd, then a king; and in proportion as he was fit to be king he cared nothing for his kingship. Mephibosheth was worthy, too, of his father. He quietly accepted his degradation. He was not one of the men who had a grievance and was continually fomenting the people in order to have that grievance remedied. There was no little philosophy in Mephibosheth. He saw how history had gone; he recognised Providence in events, and he had rest in proportion as he had true piety. There are many men in obscurity who ought not to be there when looked upon from a certain point of view. They could easily establish a grievance, and bring an accusation against public policy or

social justice. Mephibosheth waited until he was sent for. Blessed are they who can accept their fortunes, and who can call fate by the name of Providence. The great, the eternal truth underlying all this is, that there comes a time when sonship rises above accident. Mephibosheth had come to that happy time. He was Jonathan's son. True, he was lame; true, he was in an obscure position; true, he had counted himself as little better than a dead dog: but there came a time when sonship was the principal fact of his life. So it shall be in the great search which God makes in His universe for the obscure and the lost, the woebegone and the friendless. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *David's kindness to Mephibosheth*:—I. THE FIRST, AND, PERHAPS, ONE OF THE MOST OBVIOUS LESSONS IS THE MUTABLENESS OF ALL HUMAN AFFAIRS. 1. David is on the throne, and none of Saul's family is left but a lame grandson, who is living in such obscurity, that except to a few faithful and generous adherents, his existence appears to be unknown. 2. And, then, what an illustration of the changefulness of human life we have in the fact that "David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" Another illustration of our changeful life is Jonathan. David wishes to show kindness to Saul's house for Jonathan's sake. And then, there is Mephibosheth, the obscure orphan, whom David's affectionate remembrance of his departed friend has brought to light: who was only five years old at the time of his father's death, and has been ever since dependant on charity. Do we not witness the same change in men's lives? Monarchs are cast down from their high places, their thrones are overturned, and they are compelled to flee in disguise from their native land. Other men, born in humble circumstances, rise from one position to another till they reach the highest places of power. Some sink from wealth to pauperism; other rise from pauperism to wealth. So rapid is the fall of some, that when you hear of it the words of the poet spring to your lips—

"Ships, wealth, general confidence: all were his;
He counted them at break of day;
And when the sun set, where were they?"

With the same rapidity others rise. We see the good and true die, as the base-hearted die; one event happeneth alike to all—to the righteous and to the wicked. The dearest friendships are dissolved; death puts the most close friends far apart. Children that come into the world amid the most auspicious circumstances are oftentimes early deprived of earthly love and care, misfortunes befall them, and while their life is but young and tender, it is nipped in the bud. In all these respects we witness the same mutation as men have witnessed in all former times. The providence of God is uniform in successive ages. "That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God recalleth that which is past." II. A SECOND LESSON THIS NARRATIVE TEACHES US IS, THE BEAUTY AND EXCELLENCY OF FAITHFUL FRIENDSHIP. "Is there," said David, "yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" David has been concerned in the establishment of his throne, and the cares and duties of his kingdom. He has had little leisure from state business and war, to attend to matters of a more private nature. But now he remembers the ancient covenant made between him and his friend long dead. "Friendship," says Jean Paul, "requires action." Well, here is a befitting action. What strength of expression David employs! He desires to show to the house of Saul, for Jonathan's sake, "the kindness of God." In that tender, solemn hour, when the two friends covenanted in the open field, and swore eternal love and faithfulness, Jonathan said to David, "And thou shalt not only while yet I live show me the kindness of the Lord, that I die not, but also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever." And David sware he would not. The kindness of the Lord! The expression is strong; but it carries with it its own exposition and defence. It was kindness, the covenant of which God was called to witness, and it was kindness cherished in God's sight and fear, and for His glory. Friendships change. Friends die. But there is one friend that sticketh closer than a brother. Jesus Christ will not neglect nor despise you because you are unfortunate and poor. Your adversities and distresses awaken his tenderest sympathies and compassion. He knows where you dwell. He sees that there is a "need be" for your present trials. He

liveth for evermore. III. THAT THIS CHAPTER TEACHES US GOD'S CARE FOR THE FATHERLESS, ESPECIALLY THE SEED OF HIS SERVANTS. Mephibosheth was only five years old when his father was slain. His nurse, in her anxiety to escape with him, let him fall, so that he was lame for life. See how God cared for him. Machir, the son of Ammiel, of Lodebar, the same man who in after years joined with Shobi and Barzillai in supplying David and his people with beds and food at Mahanaim, clearly a large-souled, benevolent man, took him into his house and brought him up in his family. Now, as the result of David's inquiry, the lame, orphan youth is raised to sit at the king's table. In every age God has shown Himself the Father of the fatherless. Especially does God care for the children of those who love Him; He remembers them for their fathers' sake. He suffers not all the pains taken to be unrewarded—all the tears shed unnoticed—all the prayers offered unheard. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children." IV. This chapter illustrates the truth that even IN THIS WORLD VICE BRINGS ITS OWN PUNISHMENT AND VIRTUE ITS OWN REWARD. 1. See from this chapter, how He punishes sin! Saul was proud and disobedient; and God makes that saying good, "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall;" and that other saying, addressed to the guilty monarch personally, "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry." 2. Now mark how God rewards piety on earth! No man serves Him for nought. Follow the career of David. He begins life in the fear of God. Some of his most devout and beautiful psalms appear to have been composed while he was yet a youth. He took care to cleanse his way by a diligent use of God's word. He loved the exercise of Divine worship. He endeavoured to acquit himself well in all stations. In his father's house, among his flocks, at court, as Saul's armour-bearer and companion; in banishment, leading a roving life; on the throne of Israel—everywhere he sought to please God. There is a lesson here conveyed to all. Whatever your position may be, however humble and obscure, discharge its duties in the fear of God. "Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." May that blessedness be yours and mine! Amen! (IV. Walters.) *David and Mephibosheth*:—It is a proof that the bloody wars in which David had been engaged had not destroyed the tenderness of his heart, that the very chapter which follows the account of his battles opens with a yearning of affection—a longing for an outlet to feelings of kindness. This proceeding of David's in making inquiry for a fit object of beneficence may afford us a lesson as to the true course of enlightened kindness. Doubtless David had numberless persons applying for a share of his bounty; yet he makes inquiry for a new channel in which it may flow. The most clamorous persons are seldom the most deserving. Enlightened benevolence aims at something higher than the mere relief of passing distress. There are other debts besides money debts it becomes you to look after. In youth, perhaps, you received much kindness from friends and relatives which at the time you could not repay; but now the tables are turned; you are prosperous, they or their families are needy. And these cases are apt to slip out of your mind. It is not always hard-heartedness that makes the prosperous forget the less fortunate; it is often utter thoughtlessness. Thoughtlessness regarding his neighbours is not a poor man's vice. The empty house is remembered, even though it costs a sacrifice to send it a little of his own scanty supplies. Few men are so hardened as not to feel the obligation to show kindness when that obligation is brought before them. 3. Accustomed to think that his wisest course was to conceal from David his very existence, and looking on him with the dread with which the family of former kings regarded the reigning monarch, he must have come into his presence with a strange mixture of feeling. He had a profound sense of the greatness which David had achieved and the honour implied in his countenance and fellowship. But there was no need for his humbling himself so low. There was no need for him calling himself a dog, a dead dog—the most humiliating image it was possible to find. We should have thought him more worthy of his father if, recognising the high position which David had attained by the grace of God, he had gracefully thanked him for the regard shown to his father's memory, and shown more of the self-respect which was due to Jonathan's son. In his subsequent conduct, in the days of David's calamity, Mephibosheth gave evidence of the

same disinterested spirit which had shone so beautifully in Jonathan, but his noble qualities were like a light twinkling among ruins or a jewel glistening in a wreck. Every arrangement was thus made that could conduce to his comfort. His being a cripple did not deprive him of the honour of a place at the royal table, little though he could contribute to the lustre of the palace. The lameness and consequent awkwardness, that would have made many a king ashamed of such an inmate of his palace, only recommended him the more to David. Regard for outward appearances was swallowed up by a higher regard—regard for what was right and true. There is yet another application to be made of this passage in David's history. We have seen how it exemplifies the duty incumbent on us all to consider whether kindness is not due from us to the friends or the relatives of those who have been helpful to ourselves. This remark is not applicable merely to temporal obligations, but also, and indeed emphatically, to spiritual. We should consider ourselves in debt to those who have conferred spiritual benefits upon us. Should a descendant of Luther or Calvin, of Latimer or Cranmer or Knox, appear among us in need of kindness, what true Protestant would not feel that for what he owed to the fathers it was his duty to show kindness to the children? (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*) *David and Mephibosheth*:—There is so much Gospel in this quaint incident that I am embarrassed to know where to begin. Whom do Mephibosheth, and David, and Jonathan make you think of? I. Mephibosheth, in the first place, stands for the **DISABLED HUMAN SOUL**. Lord Byron described sin as a charming recklessness, as a gallantry, as a Don Juan; George Sand describes sin as triumphant in many intricate plots; Gavarini, with his engraver's knife, also shows sin as a great jocularly; but the Bible presents it as a Mephibosheth, lame on both feet. Sin, like the nurse in the context, attempted to carry us, and let us fall, and we have been disabled, and in our whole moral nature we are decrepit. Sometimes theologians haggle about a technicality. They use the words "total depravity," and some people believe in the doctrine and some reject it. What do you mean by total depravity? Do you mean that every man is as bad as he can be? Then I do not believe it either. But do you mean that sin has let us fall, that it has disfigured, and disabled, and crippled our entire moral nature until we cannot walk straight, and are lame in both feet? Then I shall admit your proposition. I do not care what the sentimentalists or the poets say in regard to sin; in the name of God I declare to you to-day that sin is disorganisation, disintegration, ghastly disfiguration, hobbling deformity. II. Mephibosheth stands for the **DISABLED HUMAN SOUL HUMBLING AND RESTORED**. When this invalid of my text got a command to come to King David's palace he trembled. The fact was that the grandfather of Mephibosheth had treated David most shockingly, and now Mephibosheth says to himself: "What does the king want of me? Isn't it enough that I am lame? Is he going to destroy my life? Is he going to wreak on me the vengeance which he holds towards my grandfather Saul? It's too bad." But go to the palace Mephibosheth must, since the king has commanded it. With staff and crutches, and helped by his friends, I see Mephibosheth going up the stairs of the palace. Consider the analogy. When the command is given from the palace of heaven to the human soul to come, the soul begins to tremble. It says: "What is God going to do with me now? Is He going to destroy me? Is He going to wreak His vengeance upon me?" My friend, we come out with our prayers and sympathies to help you up to the palace. If you want to get to the palace you may get there. Start now. The Holy Spirit will help you. All you have to do is just to throw yourself on your face at the feet of the King, as Mephibosheth did. III. Mephibosheth stands for the **DISABLED HUMAN SOUL SAVED FOR THE SAKE OF ANOTHER**. Mephibosheth would never have got into the palace on his own account. Why did David ransack the realm to find that poor man, and then bestow upon him a great fortune, and command a farmer by the name of Ziba to culture the estate and give to this invalid Mephibosheth half the proceeds every year? Why did King David make such a mighty stir about a poor fellow who would never be of any use to the throne of Israel? It was for Jonathan's sake. It was what Robert Burns calls for "auld lang syne." David could not forget what Jonathan had done for him in other days. Now, it is on that principle that you and I are to get into the King's palace. The most important part of every prayer is the last three words of it—"For Christ's sake." They

are the most important part of the prayer. When in earnestness you go before God and say, "For Christ's sake," it rolls in, as it were, upon God's mind all the memories of Bethlehem, and Gennesaret, and Golgotha. If there is anything in all the universe that will move God to an act of royal benefaction, it is to say, "For Christ's sake." If a little child should kneel behind God's throne and should say, "For Christ's sake," the great Jehovah would turn around on His throne to look at her and listen. No prayer ever gets to heaven but for Christ's sake. No soul is ever comforted but for Christ's sake. The world will never be redeemed but for Christ's sake. IV. Mephibosheth stands FOR THE DISABLED HUMAN SOUL LIFTED TO THE KING'S TABLE. It was more difficult in those times even than it is now for common men to get into a royal dining-room. The subjects might have come around the rail of the palace and might have seen the lights kindled, and might have heard the clash of the knives and the rattle of the golden goblets, but not got in. Stout men with stout feet could not get in once in all their lives to one banquet, yet poor Mephibosheth goes in, lives there, and is every day at the table. Oh, what a getting up in the world for poor Mephibosheth! Well, though you and I may be wofully lamed with sin, for our Divine Jonathan's sake, I hope we will all get in to dine with the King. O, my soul, what a magnificent Gospel! It takes a man so low down and raises him so high! What a Gospel! Come, now, who wants to be banqueted and empalaced? I come out now as the messenger of the palace to invite Mephibosheth to come up. I am here to-day to tell you that God has a wealth of kindness to bestow upon you for His Son's sake. The doors of the palace are open to receive you. The cupbearers have already put the chalices on the table, and the great, loving, tender sympathetic heart of God bends over you this moment, saying: "Is there any that is yet left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jesus' sake?" (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *Kindness to Jonathan's son*:—It appears from the story that David had never known of his existence, or had forgotten it in the stress of his anxieties and struggles. The boy was born after he and Jonathan parted from each other in the wood at Ziph, and so completely had he been kept out of the way that the courtiers at Jerusalem could only summon Ziba—a prosperous servant of Saul's family—to ask him the question David proposed. There was every reason for keeping him in concealment. Oriental fashions would have prompted a new king to kill all surviving members of a rival household, and David might destroy the possible claimant. David, no doubt, looked forward with tremulous eagerness to the coming of Jonathan's son. He already loved him. He looked eagerly upon the cripple prostrate before him, "longing for the touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is still." It requires no stretch of imagination to see in Mephibosheth many excellent qualities. This modest, humble, loyal youth had inherited something of his father's generous spirit. He was perfectly content to be as his father, in a place second to David's. He was, in a sense, entitled to the throne. He might easily have been made a claimant for it by soured politicians, who would have rallied round his supposed interests to advance their own. History is full of such instances. Mephibosheth chose, and kept in perfect obscurity. Physical deformity has a varied effect upon the sufferer. It embitters some against God and man. Lord Byron seems to have been made miserable by his lameness. Shakespeare represents King Richard III. as full of rage at his misfortunes, and determined to work mischief.

"I, that am curtailed of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
Have no delight to pass away the time,
Unless to spy my shadow in the sun,
And descant on mine own deformity.

I am determined to prove a villain."

But, on the other hand, grace sometimes compensates for nature's lack. Multitudes will approach the study of this chapter, wondering what there is in it worthy their time and of the Bible itself. But it teaches us a few valuable lessons. Let us note among them how—I. IT CORRECTS OUR ESTIMATE OF WHAT WE CALL SMALL DEEDS. David did a great many notable things that impress

us far more than this one; but it is just here that we see far into his true character. The Bible makes this record because of its importance in the portraiture of a great character, and our estimate of it will be a test of our own spirit. Is there not something here worth remembering and copying? What is to come up at the judgment-day as the ground of our acceptance, but trifling deeds of love done spontaneously and soon forgotten, simply because they were the natural outworking of our dispositions? The story is told of a Russian soldier exposed to intense cold while on duty as a sentinel. A poor working man, going home, took off his coat and gave it to him for his protection. That night the sentinel perished. Not long after the working man was brought to his death-bed, and fell into a slumber, in which he dreamed that he saw Jesus wearing his old coat. "You have my coat on," he said to him. "Yes," was the answer of the Lord. "You gave it to me the cold night I was a sentinel in the forest. Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." II. THIS STORY ILLUSTRATES THE HUMANENESS OF THE WHOLE BIBLE. It balances some of the recorded cruelties of the early ages. Now, the world is full of inequalities, selfishness, and strife for place and power and of forgotten friends. Hence it needs, early and late, the lessons of love, the lessons that show us the obligations of friendship, no matter what the relative position of the friends may come to be, and the claims of the children upon the friends of their parents. This, the Bible tells us, was one of the great acts of David's life. The whole world responds to a touch of humanity, and the Bible is for the whole world. That spirit is cultivated by it which led Webster to remember his early neighbours when he came to greatness and power; which led Governor Andrew to say, "I never despised a man because he was ignorant or because he was poor or because he was black." No one illustrates it as Christ Himself does, in Whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead. This narrative proves that—III. THE KINDNESS OF MAN TO MAN IS A GODLIKE QUALITY. David gives two reasons for finding Jonathan's son: first, his old covenant, which included the children of both parties; and, second, the Divine law of love. He wished to show "the kindness of God" to Mephibosheth. The phrase, "kindness of God" may be taken to mean either the kindness God requires of man or shows to man. Robertson Smith says ("Prophets of Israel") that it is not necessary to distinguish between Jehovah's kindness to Israel, which we should call his grace, or Israel's duty of kindness to Jehovah, which we should call piety; and the relation between man and man, which embraces the duties of love and mutual consideration. To the Hebrew mind these three are essentially one, and all are comprised in the same covenant. As Portia says:—

" We do pray for mercy,
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy."

IV. CHRISTIAN LOVE ALONE WILL ENABLE US TO SHOW ONE ANOTHER THE "KINDNESS OF GOD." David uses this beautiful expression, "kindness of God;" but his ideas of it were extremely limited as compared with those we find all through the Gospels. He showed kindness towards his old friend's son. There is pathos and gentleness and a right royal spirit in his act. We cannot, with Christ on the cross before us, construe our duties and our privileges as men once did before he read the law anew and told us its real meaning. In Christ God Himself has come down. He has sought out the lame, the halt, the blind, the paralytic, the forgotten, the dead in trespasses and sins. A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoking flax He will not quench. He devises means by which His banished may not be expelled from Him. This is God's kindness, leading to sacrifice for the fallen and the perishing. This is the love of God towards men. By the work of the Holy Spirit this love becomes the possession of men. (*Monday Club Sermons*.) Mephibosheth:—Mephibosheth resembles the sinner and his salvation:—I. HE WAS AN ENEMY TO THE KING, NOT THE KING HIS ENEMY. II. WAS SOUGHT IN HIS INDIFFERENCE. III. RECEIVED IN HIS DEFORMITY. IV. RECEIVED FOR THE SAKE OF ANOTHER. V. RECEIVED A RICH INHERITANCE. VI. RECEIVED INTO DAILY FELLOWSHIP WITH THE KING. (*Homilist*.) The kindness of God:—I. In the first place, we have here a splendid instance of that "CHARITY WHICH SUFFERETH LONG, AND IS KIND." This is certainly not the manner of men, not the rule of the world, as we have to deal with it, and as we note its character and

policy from day to day. It was the manner of Christ, who commanded only that which He Himself performed, whose worshipper David then was, and who had received into his heart the disposition of charity, which must be found with every true follower of the forgiving and merciful Saviour. II. We cannot hide it from our reflections that this purpose or act of David was UNDERTAKEN AT A LATE PERIOD IN HIS HISTORY. A long interval had passed since his escape out of trouble, by the death of Saul—fully fifteen years; and eight of these were spent in possession of the throne of Israel, as well as that of Judah. After so long a time, at the very least eight years of perfect freedom from all the emergencies which arose from the pretensions of Saul's family to the government—after so long a time it is that he enters upon the work of charity. Here was no false shame, but diligent and anxious inquiry, proving that necessity alone had caused the previous delay of kindness. If we doubt this, be it remembered that the law of common life is to forget favours, but never injuries; seldom to requite the former, but most usually the latter. "Nevertheless the chief butler remembered not Joseph, but forgot him." We may take this passage as a general expression of human deportment. In the present case, time had not effaced the memory of Jonathan's friendship, nor did any extraordinary incident cause its sudden revival. Hence we must view it as an act of serious deliberation, and, in this form, it speaks to us with much solemnity. There are many stirring persuasives, and imperative compulsions to Christian piety, which carry us along, perforce, in the way of obedience. But here was no immediate appeal to passion, no interposition of witness, none to applaud, none to condemn—calmly, deliberately, on principle alone, the past is considered, and the duty is determined on. 1. So should we meditate and act as rational Christians. We may possess true piety, but yet a piety which is nourished by continual excitement, by a restless temperament, which seeks insatiably after enterprise and events, to maintain its own fire of enthusiasm. 2. We must be Christians on principle, and when the world is shut out, and every external persuasion to godliness removed, we must find the soul within determined on the service of the Lord. 3. We must be deliberating Christians. We should trace over the years that are past, to mourn for our positive transgressions, to derive from them fresh abhorrence of evil. III. We may now take into account the reference made in the text to THE EARLY FRIENDSHIP WHICH EXISTED BETWEEN JONATHAN AND DAVID. Some fifteen or sixteen years had elapsed since the interruption of that friendship occurred, by the unhappy death of Jonathan. Yet David's heart yearns after his departed friend, his love is as ardent as ever. 1. True friendship—Christian friendship, must suffer nothing from time, or absence, or separation. It must outlast all, and if it experience any change—change only to improvement in strength and purity. 2. Next, it must bear upon and include all relations. It is but a mockery of friendship, if we pretend to love a man in one consideration alone, and will not serve him in all his wants and circumstances. If he need our labour for his temporal good, he must have it as well as our spiritual kindness. IV. In the text we have THE QUALITY AND DEGREE OF THE FAVOURS WHICH WERE INTENDED. 1. Primarily, the phrase signifies that here was no spontaneous movement of generosity, but the fulfilling of a bond—the observance of an obligation mutually imposed between David and his friend, prior to his final flight from the house of Saul. 2. The kindness here mentioned requires some farther notice with regard to its extent, as it is called the kindness of God. His kindness extends from generation to generation, even to a "thousand generations of them who love Him and keep His commandments. After looking thus closely on holy friendship as enduring and extensive, we must not omit its quality, the regulation of its acts, prescribed by the expletive—the "kindness of God." Its acts are like the acts of Divine benevolence, ever for the true good of the object. This you understand by the contrast which the false friendships of the world present. Men make leagues and covenants of amity offensive and defensive, for mutual advantage, the furtherance of gain, the increase of pleasure, the successful prosecution of guilty purposes. There is a friendship here, no doubt, and sometimes a durable one, but it is like the wisdom of this world, earthly, sensual, devilish. Finally, we may take the phrase as the Hebrew form of the superlative degree, signifying the utmost kindness, and here our research upon the subject must end. This sacred friendship sanctions such a kindness, such an extreme or superlative one, when occasion requires it. (C. M. Fleury, A.M.) *Mephibosheth*:—1. We have no

reason to think that Mephibosheth had any special ability to advise in affairs of state, or that David needed any adviser. He had done nothing to attract the king's notice, and in fact his very existence seems to have been unknown to him till special enquiry was made for any representatives of the fallen house that had survived the fatal day. He certainly was no ornament at the king's table. But he was there (1) Because of the covenant David had made with Jonathan. Jonathan, knowing well that David would reign, had secured his oath in favour of his seed. That oath David held sacred, and now upon the poor cripple he lavished the love that used to be given to Jonathan. (2) Because of the abounding grace of David. The letter of the covenant might by many have been thought sufficiently kept in merely sparing the lives of Jonathan's descendants, but as David had made the covenant in love he now fulfils it with love. Going far beyond the letter he restores to Mephibosheth the estates which had belonged to the house of Saul; thus securing to him a princely revenue. Then he set him among princes by appointing him a position at the royal table. So should it be done to the man whom the king delighted to honour! In this honoured cripple we may see ourselves, lost and ruined by the fall, helpless, unworthy, living quietly without God, fearing Him rather than desiring Him, till divine mercy sought us out and found us. Not for our sake but for Christ's sake, for the Covenant's sake, sealed with the blood of atonement, mercy has been extended to us; and this in no grudging spirit. 2. What return Mephibosheth made for his privileges. What silver and gold he had derived from the king's bounty. He was incapable of military or state service. He could only love the king, and this he did. When David fled from Jerusalem he left at least one true heart behind him, and when he returned a pitiful spectacle met his eyes. Mephibosheth had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor changed his clothes, since the king fled; the days of the King's absence had been to him days of mourning. If he could not show his love in one way he could in another. What return are we making to our King? We may often vainly wish that we were able to do something really great for Him. But from Mephibosheth let us learn—

“To do what we can, being what we are.

To shine like a glow-worm, if we cannot like a star.”

Let us love our King with our whole heart, and that love will be ingenious in finding its own modes of expression. It is not want of opportunity or ability, but too often want of real love that occasions so great a lack of the ready service that should be rendered to our King. (*C. O. Eldridge, B.A.*) *Early friendship remembered*:—Agrippa I. (Acts xii. 1) had been in earlier years on terms of friendship with Caligula, the grandson of Tiberius, and having offended the emperor, thereupon was thrown into prison and a chain put upon him. When Caligula became emperor, he not only released and promoted Agrippa, but gave him a golden chain equal in weight to the one he had worn in prison. Lord Grey and the Rev. Sydney Smith had long been friends; but the latter was very poor, and his noble friend was unable to secure for him a better living. As soon, however, as Lord Grey became Prime Minister, he is said to have exclaimed, “Now, I can do something for Sydney Smith!” And he did. *Kindness shown for the love of another*:—In the late Crimean War, I have heard that a New York merchant helped every youth that might come to him bearing the uniform of his son. This he had, however, to stop, but on one occasion a young man walked into his office, at first to receive a blunt refusal, but the youth produced a note and handed it to the merchant, which ran something like the following: “The bearer of this note has come home to die. He has been fighting in the front with me. Do all you can for him. Call in a nurse, and let him have my room. Engage the family physician. For Charlie's sake.” Needless to say that the father's heart was opened at once. What he had done brought but the plea of the boy. So it is, through the plea of God's son, we have been spared, and mercy and forgiveness are offered. (*Newton Jones.*) *Grateful memories expressed in deeds*:—An interesting story is told of Dr. Livingstone and of the respect which his courage in going about unarmed inspired among the Arabs. “On one occasion,” a traveller says, “I was for two days the guest of an Arab chief near the south end of Tanganyika, who had formerly been a famous slave-trader. I had a good deal of conversation with him regarding Livingstone, whom he had known intimately. In taking leave of him I thanked him for his hospi-

talities, when he replied, 'For the sake of the Doctor.' " *For Christ's sake*:—Sir Henry Burdett, perhaps the greatest living authority upon hospitals and their working, has recently said concerning nurses:—"Those trained in religious institutions are the best from the patients' point of view. The religious idea embodies devotion to duty, abnegation of self, concentration upon the case in hand, and a determination to do everything possible for the patient's welfare. To such a nurse the patient is always a human being, not merely a case—which makes all the difference. They are women, and not mere money-making machines." Is not this the secret of all true helpfulness to others? "For Christ's sake" is the only motive that will outlast all temptation to weariness, to abandoning our service in disappointment or despair. The service of man is, in its highest and best, only possible as it is also the service of God. (H. O. Mackey.) *For another's sake*:—In a historic sketch of Robert Bruce, king of Scotland, occurs this paragraph: King Robert was now alone, and he left the cottage very sorrowful for the death of his foster-brother, and took himself in the direction toward where he had directed his men to assemble after their dispersion. It was now near night, and, the place of meeting being a farmhouse, he went boldly into it, where he found the mistress, an old true-hearted Scotch-woman, sitting alone. Upon seeing a stranger enter, she asked him who and what he was. The king answered that he was a traveller, who was journeying through the country. "All travellers," answered the good woman, "are welcome here for the sake of one." "And who is that one," said the king, "for whose sake you make all travellers welcome?" "It is our lawful King Robert the Bruce," answered the mistress, "who is the rightful lord of this country; and, although he is now pursued and hunted after with hounds and horns, I hope to live to see him king over all Scotland." "For the sake of one," and that One Jesus, as a motto in our Church life. How it would smooth the way for doing effective work for God and souls, if for His sake we would be charitable, long-suffering, kind, not criticising, but helpful. *Physical imperfections*:—In Count Tolstoi's "Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth," he tells us that he felt deep pain when at the early age of six years he heard his mother confess that he was only a plain homely boy. "I fancied," he says, "that there was no happiness on earth for a person with such a wide nose, such thick lips, and such small grey eyes as I had: I besought God to work a miracle, to turn me into a beauty, and all I had in the present, or might have in the future, I would give in exchange for a handsome face." Yet there is something far more beautiful than these in that rugged face: the deep impress of great moral and spiritual power.

Ver. 9. I will give unto thy master's son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house.—*A lost inheritance recovered*:—When Warren Hastings was a boy he had to grieve at the fact that his family had lost their paternal estate at Daylesford, and he formed an early resolution of bringing it back once again into the family. To purchase that forfeited estate became to him a great ambition of his life, and he ultimately succeeded: he bought back the estate, and died at Daylesford. But no such possibility lay before the disinherited prince Mephibosheth. As far as his own achievements go, he must live and die alienated from his ancestral possessions. What, however, is impossible to Mephibosheth to achieve is not beyond the grace of David freely to bestow, and thus the grant of Saul's patrimony to his forlorn and impoverished grandson is analogous to the method of Divine grace whereby, in Christ, the lost station and purity of Adam are restored to us who have inherited his fallen condition (Charles Deal.)

CHAPTER X.

Vers. 2—19. I will show kindness unto Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father showed kindness unto me.—*David and Hanun*:—Powerful though David had proved himself in every direction in the art of war, his heart was inclined to peace. The position which he had gained as a warrior would

naturally have made Hanun more afraid of David than David could be of Hanun. The king of Israel could not have failed to know this, and it might naturally occur to him that it would be a kindly act to the young king of Ammon to send him a message that showed that he might thoroughly rely on his friendly intentions. The message to Hanun was another emanation of a kindly heart. It is a happy thing for any country when its rulers and men of influence are ever on the watch for opportunities to strengthen the spirit of friendship. It is a happy thing in the Church when the leaders of different sections are more disposed to measures that conciliate and heal than to measures that alienate and divide. In family life, and wherever men of different views and different tempers meet, this peace-loving spirit is of great price. Men that like fighting, and that are ever disposed to taunt, to irritate, to divide, are the nuisances of society. Between the Ammonites and the Israelites collisions had occurred on two former occasions, on both of which the Ammonites appear to have been the aggressors. The former of these was in the days of Jephthah. The second was the collision at Jabesh-gilead at the beginning of the reign of Saul. When the men of Jabesh, brought to bay, begged terms of peace, the bitter answer was returned that it would be granted only on condition that every man's right eye should be put out. It was then that Saul showed such courage and promptitude. In the briefest space he was at Jabesh-gilead in defence of his people, and by his successful tactics inflicted on the Ammonites a terrible defeat, killing a great multitude and scattering the remainder, so that not any two of them were left together. After such a defeat, Nahash could not have very friendly feelings to Saul. And when Saul proclaimed David his enemy, Nahash would naturally incline to David's side. It was long, long ago when it happened, but love has a long memory, and the remembrance was still pleasant to David. And now the king of Israel purposes to repay to the son the debt he had incurred to the father. Up to this point it is a pretty picture; and it is a great disappointment when we find the transaction miscarry, and a negotiation which began in all the warmth and sincerity of friendship terminate in the wild work of war. The fault of this miscarriage, however, was glaringly on the other side. Our difficulty is to understand how sane men could have acted in such a way. It is hardly necessary to say a word to bring out the outrageous character of their conduct. (1) There was the repulse of David's kindness. It was not even declined with civility; it was repelled with scorn. It is always a serious thing to reject overtures of kindness. Kindness is too rare a gem to be trampled under foot. (2) But Hanun not only repelled David's kindness, but charged him with meanness, and virtually flung in his face a challenge to war. To represent his apparent kindness as a mean cover of a hostile purpose was an act which Hanun might think little of, but which was fitted to wound David to the quick. Unscrupulous natures have a great advantage over others in the charge they may bring. In a street collision a man in dirty clothing is much more powerful for mischief than one in clean raiment. Rough, unscrupulous men are restrained by no delicacy from bringing atrocious charges against those to whom these charges are supremely odious. They have little sense of the sin of them, and they toss them about without scruple. Such poisoned arrows inflict great pain, not because the charges are just, but because it is horrible to refined natures even to hear them. (3) To these offences Hanun added yet another—scornful treatment of David's ambassadors. In the eyes of all civilised nations the persons of ambassadors were held sacred, and any affront or injury to them was counted an odious crime. Very often men of eminent position, venerable age, and unblemished character were chosen for this function, and it is quite likely that David's ambassadors to Hanun were of this class. When therefore these men were treated with contumely—half their beards, which were in a manner sacred, shorn away, their garments mutilated, and their persons exposed—no grosser insult could have been inflicted. It is a painful moment when true worth and nobility lie at the mercy of insolence and coarseness, and have to bear their bitter revilings. Such things may happen in public controversy in a country where the utmost liberty of speech is allowed, and when men of ruffian mould find contumely and insult their handiest weapons. In times of religious persecution the most frightful charges have been hurled at the heads of godly men and women, whose real crime is to have striven to the utmost to obey God. 3. The Ammonites did not wait for a formal declaration of war by David. Nor did they flatter

themselves, when they came to their senses, that against one who had gained such renown as a warrior they could stand alone. Their insult to King David turned out a costly affair. 4. It requires but a very little consideration to see that the wars which are so briefly recorded in this chapter must have been most serious and perilous undertakings. The record of them is so short, so unimpassioned, so simple, that many readers are disposed to think very little of them. But when we pause to think what it was for the king of Israel to meet, on foreign soil, confederates so numerous, so powerful, and so familiar with warfare, we cannot but see that these were tremendous wars. They were fitted to try the faith as well as the courage of David and his people to the very utmost. (W. G. Blaikie, D.D.) *Ungenerous judgments*:—In thousands of men, the mind, if unveiled, would be found to be a star-chamber filled with false witnesses and cruel judgments. If you were to go back into the old star-chamber of England, and read the records made of testimony given and sentences passed by men of partial information, what a literature of hell those records would be! But worse than these are the cruel, rash, hateful judgments which men form of each other in the silence of the mind, simply because they follow their interests, their feelings, their prejudices, and not their conscience, in ascertaining facts and coming to conclusions. (H. W. Beecher.) *Two aspects of David*:—In chapters x. and xi. we see king David at his best and also at his worst. The second verse of the tenth chapter opens almost in the same spirit as the first verse of the ninth. In both instances David is determined to "show kindness." In the first instance he would show kindness to any survivor of the house of Saul, as we have just seen, and now he will show kindness unto Hanun the son of Nahash, because Hanun's father had shown kindness to David in the old times of distress. In both these historical instances David acts retrospectively, in the sense that he is not proposing to show kindness to living men for their own sakes but on account of some virtue or goodness on the part of their ancestors. A merely technical or literal nature would have been content with contemporary action—that is to say, would not have troubled about going back into yesterday in order to honour the memory of a dead man. But even in this generous retrospection David is faithful to his poetic nature and his religious enthusiasm. David is to be credited with good intentions in this case, as he was in the case of proposing to build the temple and to do kindness to any survivor of the house of Saul. Even good intentions have a distinctive value of their own. Sweet waters do not rise from bitter fountains. To have one good wish, one unselfish desire, one generous impulse, is to have some degree of divine influence operating upon the heart, and so far is to show that the heart has not been given over to utter reprobation. This is a comforting thought for ourselves. Hanun responded to the counsels of his advisers in a manner which he supposed would increase his own popularity with his subjects. He "took David's servants, and shaved off the one half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the middle." It is little to the honour of human nature that there are not only insults which men can hurl at one another in moments of passion and defiance, but there are studied insults which are elaborated in cold blood and inflicted with a sense of enjoyment by the cruel men who have fashioned new modes of social humiliation. The insult inflicted upon Israel was not only personal, it was deeply religious. Not only was David dishonoured, but God Himself was defied. In Leviticus xix. 27, we see how stringent was the law regarding this matter of shaving the head. It is not for us to enter into the value of any such ordinances; suffice it to say that they were the distinct ordinances of the people of Israel, and as such had religious value and significance. There is a cruelty in our own day which seeks to injure men through the medium of their religious convictions. To-day men are kept out of pecuniary positions because of their religious faith. Social advancement is barred to not a few persons on account of their religious convictions. Were such men without conviction, light-headed, and light-hearted, ready to adopt any form or ceremony as they might adopt a change of garments, their course in life would be much smoother; but because they are earnest, even to agony, their convictions are made into so many stumbling-blocks by which their progress is hindered. The counsellors of Hanun the son of Nahash were too blinded by their own passion to foresee the results of their foolish policy. What was a practical jest to them was an occasion of just anger to the king whom they had insulted. It is well to take some account of the resources of the enemy

before being too defiant or adopting a course of lofty superciliousness. But folly seldom sees both sides of a question. It is a notable characteristic of the genius of history that it is always faithful to its own time. As the action of David would now be out of place as between Christian nations, so any other course than that which he adopted would have been out of place in relation to his particular injury. Read history in its own light. It is essential to adopt this canon of interpretation in reading many portions of the Old Testament; otherwise the mind will be thrown often into a state of moral bewilderment, and be ready almost to cry out against the Spirit of God. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *A father's kindness repaid to his son*:—A good man of my acquaintance died very suddenly the other day, and when it came to settling up the account, it was found that, while with his presence and work he was able to get a living for his family out of his share in the business, with him gone there was nothing left. All the children were grown up and able to support themselves, with the exception of one young man who had two years yet to spend in the medical school before he would be able to take up his profession as a doctor. It seemed at first that he must drop out, and work his way for awhile saving up money to go on. But just then a man came forward, who said: "Some years ago I was in a difficult place and needed a friend very much. Just at the critical time your father stepped into the breach, and in the gentlest, cheeriest way helped me out. I said then if ever I had a chance I would pay that kindness back. Now is my chance. You go back to the medical school and finish your course, and I will take care of the expenses. You can charge them up to your father's kindness account." He who sows a kind deed may be sure that it is a long-lived, hardy crop, and certain to bring in its harvest by and by. (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*)

Vers. 11, 12. **If the Syrians be too strong for me, then thou shalt help me.**—*Pious patriotism*:—I. **MUTUAL HELPFULNESS.** As occasion demands, says Job, you will help me, or I will help you. Now, this is a word for us all. God has so ordained that we are mutually dependent on one another; and I hardly know which of the two is worse, the self-conceit of the man who imagines he can stand alone, or the selfishness of the man who has no instinctive desire to help his neighbour when in trouble. Why, away from religion altogether, it is our duty both to lean and to carry; for it is seldom indeed that there is not a stronger than ourselves, who can render us aid; and equally seldom that there is not a feebler than ourselves, to whom we may do a service. Too often the sentiment of the world is, "every man for himself"—the survival, if not of the fittest, at least of the strongest. Let the bold and lithe push to the front, and the weak go to the wall. There is a great deal of this in business, as some of you well know; certain men, elbowing and driving forward, not caring whom they push over or trample under their feet, if only they are successful themselves. The result is that many a good, able worthy fellow, simply because he has not the audacity, the impudence, of others, is left behind and gets disheartened. Now it is here that Christian principle should come in, balancing and regulating the various elements at work, giving confidence to the weak and generosity to the strong, and so securing the largest amount of success and happiness. II. **MANLY HEROISM.** "Be of good courage, and let us behave ourselves valiantly." Never on field of battle did officer shout across to brother officer a nobler sentiment. The army has, indeed, produced some grand men, heroes in the truest sense of the world. But I would not for a moment wish to convey the impression that heroes are confined to campaigns and battlefields. I venture to assert that in the commonest spheres of civil and prosaic life may be found instances of an equally noble, though less showy, heroism. There are heroes of the workshop, of the counter, of the office, of the market-place, on whose courage may be put as severe a strain as though they stood upon the field of battle, amid the glitter of cold steel and the rattle of musketry. When a man has to fight with poverty, with losses, with bad debts, with disappointments, with temptations; and still keeps his head to the wind, battles on bravely, refuses to knock under, vows still to "trust in God and do the right," I say, though he has no epaulettes on his shoulders, nor medals on his breast, he is as truly a man and a hero as though he had stormed a citadel. "Be of good courage, and let us behave ourselves," would be an excellent motto for the employees in many a London establishment. You want the "courage" of your

principles, and then no fear of your "behaviour." When a man's life is dominated by the one aim, not to make money, not to find idle pleasure, but to please his Master in heaven, it is wonderful how much respect he commands, and how much pure inward happiness he enjoys. III. TRUE PATRIOTISM. Listen again to General Joab: "Be of good courage, brother, and let us behave ourselves valiantly for our people, and for the cities of our God." Now you will notice the motive which he adduced. Bravo! ye sons of Zeruiah! "God and our country" was their cry. It was no empty, silly Jingo shout, like that which we have heard in our own day from a hysteric rabble that clamour for glory, but would turn tail with the first shot that whizzed about their ears; it was a call to action and to danger, impelled by love to Israel, and to Israel's God. Sirs, patriotism is one of the noblest sentiments that can occupy the human breast: but there is no patriotism so pure and disinterested as that which is kindled at the altar of love to God. Never was there a more remarkable instance of it than the dauntless British officer to whom I have already adverted. Self-negation characterised his whole career. After all his great work in China, General Gordon left the country as poor as he entered it, having refused all rewards. When a sum of £10,000 was forwarded to him by the Emperor, he divided it all amongst his troops. On his arrival in England he declined every honour, preferring to bury himself in obscurity. The very medals that were showered upon him he put no value upon, and would even have them melted down to provide relief for those who were in want. GENUINE PITY. "And let the Lord do that which is good in His sight." I do not venture to say that Joab was a saint, nor would I like to answer for many things which he did: but on this occasion, certainly, his conduct and language were admirable, and worthy of imitation. "Abishai," he seems to say, "you and I shall do our best, and leave the issue with God. We cannot command success, but we can do our duty, and leave the result in higher hands than our own." It is a fine thing to see a God-fearing soldier. It is an interesting feature of our time that there is in the British army a very considerable amount of deep and unaffected piety. Some of our highest officers, some of our most distinguished generals, both abroad and at home, are real men of God. They are none the less, but all the more, valuable as soldiers. They have more pluck and less fear than the others. A man is all the braver soldier for being a Christian. When true piety is engrafted on a fearless and gallant nature, it forms a splendid character. For a noble and beautiful Christianity, commend me to a converted soldier. "General Gordon," says one of the morning papers, "is not a man whose actions or whose fortunes can be estimated by the ordinary standard to which human affairs are submitted. His singularly pure and lofty character impresses every one with whom he is brought into contact. He believes himself to be always fulfilling a mission from a higher authority than any earthly government. A man of this heroic mould, who combines no small share of worldly wisdom with the integrity of a saint and the simplicity of a child, may walk securely in places where any other foot would slip. But, on the other hand, General Gordon would march quietly on to what he knew was certain destruction, if he believed that to do so was his duty." (*J. Thain Davidson, D.D.*) *Mutual helpfulness—great need of society*:—The true and only cure for the misery and discontent that exist in our country seems to me to lie in the personal and regular communion of the better with the worse—man with man—until each Christian, like his Saviour, becomes one with those who are to be saved; until he can be bone of their bone, sympathise, teach, weep, rejoice, eat and drink with them as one with them in the flesh. The world will not believe because it cannot see that Christianity is true, by seeing its reality in the marvellous oneness of Christ and His people. (*Norman McLeod, D.D.*) *Mutual aid*:—A book has been published, written by Prince Kropotkin on "Mutual Aid," in which he maintains that there is far more evidence in nature of "mutual aid" than of "the ruthless struggle of each against all." He makes out a very strong case for the statement "that mutual aid between members of the same species has had much more to do with their survival than selfish struggle." We recognise at once that a world evolved by means of the struggle of each against all. Prince Kropotkin maintains that care for others is at the very heart of things; the world has been built on this principle. The late Professor Drummond recognised "the struggle for the life of others" in the world, and he tried to reconcile this with Darwin's "struggle

for existence " or for one's own life, by suggesting that the altruistic principle appeared with the mother in her concern for her offspring. Kropotkin denies this, and produces a wonderful mass of evidence to show that the struggle for the life of others is a natural instinct implanted in nature herself. God did not merely work up to it in motherhood: He based all progress upon it. (*David Walters*.) *Joab's soldierly qualities*:—Danger woke the best of Joab. Fierce and truculent as he often was, he had hero's metal in him, and in that dark hour he flamed like a pillar of light. His ringing words to his brother as they parted, not knowing if they would ever meet again, are like a clarion call. They extract encouragement out of the separation of force, which might have depressed, and cheerily pledge the two divisions to mutual help. What was to happen, Joab, if the Syrians were too strong for thee, and the Ammonites for Abishai? That very possible contingency is not contemplated in his words. Rash confidence is unwise, but God's soldiers have a right to go into battle not anticipating utter defeat. Such expectation is apt to fulfil itself, and, on the other hand, to believe that we shall conquer goes a long way towards making us conquerors. Does not Joab's pledge of mutual help carry in it a lesson applicable to all the divisions of God's great army? In the presence of the coalition of evil, is not the separation of the friends of good madness? When bad men unite, should not good men hold together? The defeat or victory of one is the defeat or victory of all. We serve under the same banner, and, instead of shutting up our sympathies within the narrow limits of our own regiment, and even having a certain satisfaction at the difficulties which another has got into, we should feel that if "one member suffer, all the members suffer with it," and should be ready to help all our fellow-soldiers who need help. Self-preservation as well as comradeship, and, above all, loyalty to Him for whom we fight, should lead to that; for, if Abishai is crushed, Joab will be in sorer peril. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Bond of union*:—The old Theban regiments fought with such desperation upon the field or battle because it was the principle of Theban military science that those who stood next each other in the rank should always, if possible, be bosom friends. Let us, in our great battle of life, learn the secret of affection and mutual trust. (*David Walters*.)

Ver. 12. Be of good courage and let us play the men.—*Of courage*:—In those words you have these two parts: the braveness of his resolution: "Be of good courage and let us play the men." The humbleness of his submission: "And the Lord do that which seemeth him good." Or, if you will, thus: an exhortation to true noble valour in the former part, "Be of good courage," &c.: and, secondly, an humble resignation of himself and cause and success into the hands of God; "And the Lord do that which seemeth him good." His exhortation is strengthened with divers arguments: "It is for our people." The Ammonites and Syrians are now about us, if you do not behave yourselves valiantly your people are pillaged, plundered, captived, murdered; and therefore "be of courage, and let us play the men." And for the cities of our God. I. FOR THE DESCRIPTION OF GOOD COURAGE you may take it thus: Good courage is that gracious disposition of heart whereby a man, being called by God unto any service, does adventure upon difficulties either in doing good or enduring evil, and that without fear. 1. Here are four or five things considerable in this description. 1. Good courage is a gracious disposition. There is a moral boldness and a natural audacity, and this is not good courage, for the former is in heathens, and the latter is in brute beasts. 2. Again, there is a sinful desperation whereby men are apt and ready to rush upon all that is evil, and are sinfully bold, and they think him a fool or a child that will not drink, and be drunk, and whore, and run into all kind of evil: this is not good courage. Good courage is hemmed in with waiting upon the Lord. 3. Again, there is a vaunting, bragging, boasting cavalierism which hath no true courage. Such a cavalier was Rabshakeh, who said, "With us is valour and courage:" when he defied the hosts and servants of the living God. Good courage is the health of the mind; this vaunting, bragging, boasting is the swelling of the mind, not courage. 4. Again, there is a fierce, angry, revengeful disposition, whereby men are ready to run upon cruelties: this is no good courage. "The righteous is as bold as a lion." The lion himself is merciful, not revengeful; if a creature lies down before him he will spare it. It is a gracious disposition of heart. The truth is, the heart of man is

the artillery yard where all the thoughts of courage train continually. 5. Again, I say, whereby a man being called by God unto any service. God's call is the ground of a Christian's courage. This was pretended in Rabshakeh's speech; "Hath not the Lord sent me?" And this was, in truth, the ground of Joshua's courage: "Be of good courage, have not I commanded thee?" I add, all this must be done without fear; and therefore in Scripture these go together: "Be of good courage: fear not, neither be dismayed." The more a man's fears are enlarged, the more his courage is lessened; and the more a man's courage is enlarged, the more his fears are lessened. II. IN EVIL TIMES, IN TIMES OF DANGER, GOOD COURAGE IS VERY REQUISITE. In time of danger good courage is the strength of a man, it is the spirits of a man, it is the sparkling of a man's heart, it is the life of one's life. Saith Solomon, "The spirit of a man shall sustain his infirmity." Without strength there is no bearing of burthens. Now this is the way to be strong, to stand under burthens in evil times: "Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart." 1. Again, evil times are full of changes, and good courage will keep us from the power of those. It is a good speech Seneca hath: He is a stout man whom prosperity doth not allure; but he is most stout of all whom the change of things doth not disturb. And in another place, saith he, He hath no great mind that can be bent by injuries. And evil times are full of injuries. Without courage a man will easily be bent by them; bent unto sin and bent unto what is evil. 2. Again, evil times are very expensive. Then a man shall be called to lay out much: his estate, his house, his liberty, his body, his all: and no affection, no disposition so spending as courage; good courage will make a man spend and be spent for God. III. If this be so, you see what OUR DUTY is: to be of "good courage, and play the men." (W. Bridge, M.A.) *Four pillars of national strength*:—I. There must be a GENERAL INTELLIGENCE in order to conserve the best interests of popular government. We have never as yet been able to measure the elevating power of a common or general intelligence upon communities, and nations. Some one has said that "a spelling book and a copy of the New Testament dropped into a land, will lift up millions of tons of ignorance and superstition. They will widen the streets, pile up the palaces of trade in every mart, lift up the roof of the poor man's cottage, and drive the ghosts and demons from every forest and mountain solitude." Would you know the power of a well-equipped intellect, and the multiplying forces of education, sit for a moment at the feet of the statistician. Here you will learn that only one-fifth of one per cent. of our population graduate from our colleges, yet this little handful of men have furnished thirty per cent. of all congressmen, fifty per cent. of all our senators, sixty per cent. of all our presidents, and over seventy per cent. of all our supreme judges. See that inspiring host leading in the van of the armies of our civilization. There they come with stately tread, three hundred thousand strong; trained men and women who have passed satisfactory examinations, and whose province it is to disseminate a more general intelligence among the people, and train our children for efficient citizenship. We have ten times as many teachers as Athens has inhabitants when she was mistress of Greece, and legislator of the world. We have more than thirty times as many teachers as Xenophon had in the immortal legion. We have more than twelve times as many teachers as there were soldiers in the army of Hanibal, when he descended from the Alps into the plains of Italy, and shook the inhabitants with mortal fear. We have more than fifty times as many teachers as there were soldiers who followed Caesar over the Rubicon to the conquest of the world. We can depend upon these cultivated and trained men and women for much in the way of strengthening the empire of thought. The magnificent possibilities before them are manifest when we consider the fact that they have under their tutelage more than twelve million students, four times as many as there were inhabitants in the thirteen colonies when our fathers won liberty for mankind. But what signifies intelligence, mere mental power or school drill if there be lacking the element of heroic courage? Devoid of this the scholar becomes a mere pigny; coupled with it he becomes a giant. II. "BE OF GOOD COURAGE," shouts the heroic Joab. Much need of courage, you say, on the field of battle. Yes, and there is none the less need of courage in the every-day struggles of life. There are evils to be exterminated and abuses to be corrected. The sanctity of law must be maintained, and our free institutions perpetuated and defended at all hazard. We want men who are awfully in earnest. William Lloyd Garrison touched the keynote of success when

he said: "I am in earnest. I will not equivocate. I will not excuse. I will not retreat a single inch, and I will be heard. The apathy of the people is enough to make every statue leap from its pedestal, and hasten the resurrection of the dead." It is the man of heroic enterprise who will hew his way through the sable walls of ignorance, opposition, and prejudice, and create for himself and his coadjutors a new world. We need courage in the everyday conflicts of life. No coward can successfully contend with poverty, with bad debts, unscrupulous associates, failures, and temptations. He must have courage to stand fire, stand firm, and, if need be, stand alone. It takes manly courage to stand alone in the face of opposition. Every man needs courage when he goes to exercise the sacred office of his franchise; and he should put as much conscience into his vote as he does into his prayers. Do not become dispirited because you are not on the popular side. With three hundred men on the side of right, Gideon put to flight one hundred and thirty-five thousand men of war.

III. BE LOYAL TO YOUR OWN CONVICTION OF DUTY AND RIGHT. It is said of the last and greatest apostle of our Lord that he "conferred not with flesh and blood." He sacrificed whatever he had prized of an earthly character in order that he might be loyal to his convictions of duty. When he was apprised of the fact that the way which he had marked out for himself was beset with difficulties, and that "bonds and imprisonments awaited him," his reply was plain and emphatic: "None of these things move me." Give us a few more men who would rather be right than popular, who would rather be in harmony with God and conscience than with party or party declarations. You may not be called upon to prove your loyalty as did the heroes at Gettysburg, Atlanta, and the wilderness, but there are formidable enemies yet to meet and conquer. These will test your mettle. Think of the forces of intemperance, the growing evil of gambling, unchastity, infidelity, and the appalling array of unscrupulous politicians and demagogues. Never did loyalty mean more than it does now. The long-suffering wifehood, sisterhood, and motherhood of the nation is calling aloud for redress. The oppressed are looking to us for alleviation and help. To disappoint them is to prove recreant in the most important trust, and suffer defeat in the greatest battle ever fought.

IV. The fourth pillar we mention is EVANGELICAL RELIGION. Science and art have wrought wonders. The world stands amazed at their achievements. They have tamed fierce beasts of prey and brought the elements of nature into subjection. They have spanned the ocean, annihilated distance, joined continent to continent, given life to steam, a tongue to the wire, and a voice to the lightning. But these fierce passions in the human heart are more fierce than beasts of prey, and disturbing forces more tumultuous than nature's stormy winds and tempests and more difficult to control than the most subtle elements. No mere human skill can master these. Christian science as taught in the school of Jesus Christ alone can enable man to obtain the mastery over these. There is a broader field for the Church to-day than ever before. "Egypt and Ethiopia" are not only reaching out their hands to us, but Europe and Asia are clasping ours, and instead of being under the necessity of crossing the restless Atlantic, our work is facilitated by their coming to our own doors. Finally, religion wipes guilt from the conscience and drives darkness from the mind. It gives hope to the heart, light to the eyes, and strength to the hand. It will make life pleasant, toil sweet, and death triumphant. It gives faith to the fearful, courage to the timid. It robs the grave of its terrors, and death of its sting, and gilds the pathway to man's future abode with an eternal brightness. (*G. W. Shepherd.*) *Playing the man*:—

I. THE MOTIVES BY WHICH WE SHOULD BE ACTUATED. Joab appealed to (1) the patriotism of the people. This was a tender chord, and would at once respond in tones of strongest sympathy. What wonderful things have been done in the name of patriotism! The record of the doings of Hereward, the last of the English, of Hampden, Cromwell, Pym, of Washington, Tell, Garibaldi, etc., what illustrations they furnish of the power of love of "our people." Christ came to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and He commanded His Apostles to "begin at Jerusalem;" and, although all the world claims our sympathies and help, yet our first and ever increasing claim is our own people; and for them we are to ardently fight and pray. Joab appealed to (2) the philanthropy of the people. The soldiers were to remember the centres of population, the great hives of industry, "the cities" with their teeming thousands; and as they thought of women and children, they were to "play the men" in the day of

battle. All large-hearted men have love for their race, as well as for their own country and countrymen; and such men as Wilberforce and Howard, and Moffatt and Livingstone, have shown us what can be endured and accomplished where philanthropy takes strong possession of the human breast. Joab appealed to (3) the piety of the people. "Cities of our God." When we put forth any effort to lighten and elevate men, we ought to remember that we are laying ourselves out for those whom God has created, and preserved, and redeemed; all souls are His. They may be in the hands of aliens; a diabolical power may have usurped the place of the rightful king; but we are to go forth, armed with the whole panoply of God, to fight the battle of the Lord and win the world for Him.

II. THE SPIRIT BY WHICH WE SHOULD BE ANIMATED. The moral quality of any work we do resides in the intention; and the success in any work we attempt depends mainly upon the spirit in which we prosecute it. Joab inculcated (1) a magnanimous spirit. It was not enough that the soldiers be armed, that they be great in number, and march against the foe; they must have love to God and their country, large-heartedness, and noble-mindedness, or they would not succeed. They must have soldier's hearts as well as soldier's dress: "Be of good courage." Joab inculcated (2) manliness. "Play the man." There are some men who are hosts in themselves; such men as Alexander and Wellington reckoned among their soldiers for thousands. Joab felt he did not want invalids, cripples, or children in the battle, but "men,"—men who would strike and stand in the hour of conflict; not cowards nor slaves, but brave, free men, for the army of Israel. This is the great want of this and every age. In our churches, holding the various offices, we want men of sound judgment and manly hearts; in our schools, and in every department of Christly labour, we want manliness, not puerility, not namby-pambyism, not sentimentality nor effeteness. The gentleness of women and the masculinity of man combined—then we have true manliness. (3) Resignedness. "Let the Lord do as seemeth Him good." This would inspire and sustain the men; they were to do their best, to be brave and manly, and leave results with God. When we go forth in our holy crusade against sin, and endeavour to win renown for the name that is above every name, we should go forth in a resigned spirit, in submission to the power and wisdom and goodness of God. For "the battle is the Lord's," and He knows best what amount of success it will be best to let us secure and see. (F. W. Brown.)

Elements of true manhood:—I. COURAGE. Courage is not mere fearlessness. There is in many natures a stolid indifference to danger. It is said that Nelson never knew what fear was. True courage always implies a supreme love for right. Right is appreciated more than ease, comfort, property, health, even life itself, and for it all are willingly sacrificed when necessary. The finest example of true moral courage, you have in Paul who for the sake of what he believed to be right, braved the greatest perils, and with a daring valour confronted his greatest enemies. He did not count his life dear to him so that he might discharge his obligations.

II. GENEROSITY. "Let us play the men for our people and for the cities of our God." The selfish man, the man who lives to himself, and for himself alone, is destitute of the chief element of true manhood. We do not "play the men," when we fight for our own little interests, or battle for our own little sect, but when we stand up from the dictates of pure generosity and struggle for the good of others.

III. PIETY. "The Lord do that which seemeth Him good." True piety is a devout acquiescence in the will of the great God, and without this there can be no greatness of character. It is not until we feel his will to the supreme rule of our life that we experience the pulsation of a true manly heart. (Homilist.)

Religion and patriotism the constituents of good soldiers:—"Be of good courage, and let us play the men." Courage is an essential character of a good soldier—not a savage, ferocious violence; not a fool-hardy insensibility of danger, or headstrong rashness to rush into it; not the fury of inflamed passions, broken loose from the government of reason; but calm, deliberate, rational courage; a steady, judicious, thoughtful fortitude; the courage of a man, and not of a tiger; such a temper as Addison ascribes with so much justice to the famous Marlborough and Eugene:—

Whose courage dwelt not in a troubled flood
Of mounting spirits and fermenting blood;—But
Jodg'd in the soul, with virtue over-ruled,
Inflamed by reason, and by reason cool'd.

THE CAMPAIGN.

This is true courage, and such as we ought all to cherish. This will render men vigilant and cautious against surprise, prudent and deliberate in concerting their measures, and steady and resolute in executing them. But without this they will fall into unsuspected dangers, which will strike them with wild consternation; they will menially shun dangers that are surmountable, or precipitantly rush into those that are causeless, or evidently fatal, and throw away their lives in vain. There are some men who naturally have this heroic turn of mind. The wise Creator has adapted the natural genius of mankind with a surprising and beautiful variety to the state in which they are placed in this world. He that winged the imagination of a Homer or a Milton; he that gave penetration to the mind of Newton; he that made Tubal-Cain an instructor of artificers in brass and iron, and gave skill to Bezaleel and Aholiab in curious works; nay, he that sent out Paul and his brethren to conquer the nations with the gentler weapons of plain truth, miracles, and the love of a crucified Saviour; he, even that same gracious power, has formed and raised up an Alexander, a Julius Cesar, a William, and a Marlborough, and inspired them with this enterprising, intrepid spirit; the two first to scourge a guilty world, and the two last to save nations on the brink of ruin. There is something glorious and inviting in danger to such noble minds; and their breasts beat with a generous ardour when it appears. "The Lord do that which seemeth Him good." This may be looked upon in various views; as:—

I. **IT MAY BE UNDERSTOOD AS THE LANGUAGE OF UNCERTAINTY AND MODESTY.** Let us do all we can; but after all, the issue is uncertain; we know not, as yet, to what side God will incline the victory. Such language as this becomes us in all our undertakings; it sounds creature-like, and God approves of such self-diffident humility. But to indulge sanguine and confident expectations of victory, to boast when we put on our armour, as though we were putting it off, and to derive our high hopes from our own power and good management, without any regard to the providence of God, this is too lordly and assuming for such feeble mortals; such insolence is generally mortified; and such a haughty spirit is the forerunner of a fall. II. This language, "The Lord do as seemeth Him good," may be looked upon as **EXPRESSIVE OF A FIRM PERSUASION THAT THE EVENT OF WAR ENTIRELY DEPENDS UPON THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD.** Let us do our best; but after all, let us be sensible, that the success does not depend on us: that it is entirely in the hands of an all-ruling God. That God governs the world is a fundamental article of natural as well as revealed religion: it is no great exploit of faith to believe in this: it is but a small advance beyond atheism and downright infidelity. I know no country upon earth where I should be put to the expense of argument to prove this. The heathens gave striking proofs of their belief of it, by their prayers, their sacrifices, their consulting oracles, before they engaged in war; and by their costly offerings and solemn thanksgivings after victory. And shall such a plain principle as this be disputed in a Christian land? No; we all speculatively believe it; but that is not enough; let our spirits be deeply impressed with it, and our lives influenced by it: let us live in the world as in a territory of Jehovah's empire. III. That these words, "The Lord do what seemeth Him good," **MAY EXPRESS AN HUMBLE SUBMISSION TO THE DISPOSAL OF PROVIDENCE,** let the event turn out as it would. We have not the disposal of the event, nor do we know what it will be; but Jehovah knows, and that is enough: we are sure He will do what is best, upon the whole; and it becomes us to acquiesce. IV. These words, in their connection, may intimate, that, **LET THE EVENT BE WHAT IT WILL,** it will afford us satisfaction to think that **WE HAVE DONE THE BEST WE COULD.** We cannot command success; but let us do all in our power to obtain it, and we have reason to hope that in this way we shall not be disappointed. (*S. Davies, A.M.*) *Trust in God, and exertion of courage, our duty in times of national danger:—*I. **THE INTERESTS WE HAVE AT STAKE.** OUR PEOPLE AND THE CITIES OF OUR GOD: in other words, our civil rights and our religion. The defence of their persons and possessions against lawless power, and the secure enjoyment of the means of happiness here and hereafter, were the great motives that induced men to submit originally to government. And every particular government is good or bad, as it answers or fails of answering these purposes. II. **THE SPIRIT WITH WHICH WE OUGHT TO DEFEND OURSELVES AGAINST THEM.** "Let us be of good courage, and play the men." These words may seem to express the duty of the soldiery alone; and, without question, they express that peculiarly; and, joined with the following ones, clearly show that a strong sense of religion and a virtuous concern for the common welfare are the true

principles that will give military persons bravery and success, as they did to those whose history the text relates. But still the more literal translation is, "Be strong, and let us strengthen one another." III. AN HUMBLE DEPENDENCE ON HEAVEN FOR THE EVENT OF ALL. (*T. Secker.*) *Growth of loyalty, heroism, and patriotism*:—As the maternal instinct had been cultivated for thousands of generations before clanship came into existence, so for many succeeding ages of turbulence the patriotic instinct, which prompts to the defence of home, was cultivated under penalty of death. Clans defended by weakly loyal or cowardly warriors were sure to perish. Unflinching bravery and devoted patriotism were virtues necessary to the survival of the community, and were thus preserved until at the dawn of historic times, in the most grandly militant of clan societies, we find the word "virtus" connoting just these qualities, and no sooner does the fateful gulf yawn open in the forum than a Curtius joyfully leaps into it, that the commonwealth may be preserved from harm. (*Fiske, "Through Nature to God."*) *Publicity in religious life and deed*:—Joab says to his brother Abishai: "Let us play the men for our people," recognising that they two, as champions in the host, will be seen and noted; that they will be more than seen, that they will be imitated, and that their courage will stimulate the courage of others. Joab may therefore be said to recognise the duty of acting so as to be seen. But there is a wide distinction between this and the desire of the later Pharisees, who did their religious deeds in public on purpose to be seen of men. Compelling imitation is a better and a more difficult thing than winning applause. It is easier for a man to get two hundred to applaud him for some superficial virtue than to get two to follow him in the exercise of some obscure one. The man that ruleth his spirit may be greater than he that taketh a city, but he will not therefore fill as large a place in the world's thought, or be as widely talked about. (*Quiver.*)

Ver. 13. And Joab drew near, and the people that were with him unto the battle.—*Victory*:—It is one thing, when men may either fight or fly, and another when they must either fight or die. The Syrians in the battle referred to in the text had their option to fight or fly, for that otherwise they must either fight or die. Hard-pressed by the valour and obstinacy of the forces of Joab, they fled back into their own city Medeba, a town in their borders, before which they pitched to guard their coast. What was the result of the victory over the Syrians referred to in the text? What but the fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham (the fifteenth chapter of Genesis and the eighteenth verse), and repeated to Joshua (first chapter and the fourth verse) that the borders of Israel should extend to the river Euphrates? "From the wilderness and this Lebanon," said God, "even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast." Little did the Syrians know, and little knew the Ammonites, and faintly also must David have known the purposes of the Almighty that were bound up in the war. Still those purposes were fixed, and the Lord in His own good time proved that Himself had gained the victory: for on the banks of the Euphrates, as by the sides of Jordan, were hallelujahs raised to the King of Israel, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who above all reigns and will reign omnipotent, making the wrath of man to praise Him. But the flight of the Syrians and their discomfiture at Medeba did not immediately, as we might imagine, result in peace. They were like most other barbarous and rapacious nations, dogged, infatuated, and obstinate to the last. We would have thought that the defeat they experienced, even in their own country and before their stronghold, would have taught them a lesson, and induced them to make overtures of peace. But no; they make a new attempt to recover their lost honour, and to check the progress of David's victorious arms. The forces that were lately dispersed rallied again, and as we read in the fifteenth verse, "gathered themselves together." Again, we have seen that Joab, before the battle, supposed the worst, that one of them should be obliged to give back; and in that case that the other, upon a given signal, should send a detachment to relieve it: "If occasion be, thou shalt help me, and I will help thee." Here is an acknowledgment of mutual helplessness and mutual helpfulness. Are the soldiers of Christ strengthening one another's hands in their spiritual warfare—the strong succouring and helping the weak? Are those who through grace have been conquerors over temptation, counselling, comforting, and praying for those who are tempted? "I have prayed for thee," said Christ to Peter, "that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." (*G. M. Irvine, M.A.*)

CHAPTER XI.

Ver. 1. **The year was expired.**—*The end of the old year: a help to begin the new one:*—I. **THE END OF THE YEAR PRESENTS A FIT OPPORTUNITY TO ENQUIRE HOW WE REGARD THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT.** God governs the world according to natural and moral laws, through the medium of the Gospel, and by the arrangements of His providence. Let us try ourselves in relation to each. 1. Natural law, as seen in the works of His hands. That is not religion, but fanaticism, which pours contempt on these works. Every man should seek them out, and find pleasure in them. His eternal power and Godhead are declared thereby. The whole year, by night and by day, has been teaching you; "day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge." If you have been an attentive student of these great works, you have bowed with lowlier reverence at His footstool, confessing, "In wisdom hast Thou made them all." If you have not, then go and learn with the little child. 2. Moral law. There was a law given from Sinai which has since been repealed; but that which substantially is understood by the moral law never has been, and never can be, abrogated. It is the law of this and all other worlds—the law for angels and men—the law of love. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and soul, and strength; and thy neighbour as thyself." 3. The Gospel. First, the Gospel is free. You need nothing to qualify you to receive its blessings; you may receive them freely, as you are. "All things are ready." The second thing is, the Gospel is full. You need nothing else. "My God shall supply all your need out of His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." 4. God governs the world by the arrangements of His providence. These try and determine the temper of our mind very decidedly. 5. But there are other arrangements of God's providence which surround us as individuals, and which try us more accurately. II. **THE END OF THE YEAR SUGGESTS THE IMPORTANCE OF TRYING OUR MORAL CONDITION.** 1. If we are going to heaven, we are nearer there than ever; and this night reminds us how very soon we shall pass the portals of glory. Are we better prepared than at the commencement of the year for the employment of heaven? 2. Has the experience of the year taught us our weakness and worthlessness, and humbled us to repentance? "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent." "Unprofitable servants!" 3. Are we distinctly conscious of pardon for the past? 4. Are we sure there is within us a disposition opposed to all sin? Can we say with the holy Mr. Corbett, "Upon the best judgment that I can make of the nature of sin, and the frame of my own heart, and course of life, I know no sin lying upon me which doth not consist with habitual repentance, and with the hatred of sin, and with an unfeigned consent that God should be my Saviour and Sanctifier, and with the loving of God above all." 5. Has the year left us earnestly and sincerely desiring the accomplishment of all good in us and by us? III. **THE END OF THE YEAR SUGGESTS THE PROPRIETY OF EXAMINING AND REVISING OUR PLANS FOR THE EMPLOYMENT OF OUR TIME.** 1. As to our devotional habits. 2. As to our walking with God. 3. As to our work. Are all our talents employed for God? "Occupy till I come." "The time is short." "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do—do it." 4. As to our amusements. "Use no recreation or delight of sense, but thou canst at that very time desire of God, that it may be sanctified to spiritual ends." IV. **AND LASTLY, THE END OF THE YEAR REMINDS US OF THE "END OF ALL THINGS," AND BIDS US PREPARE FOR IT.** 1. Look forward to death. 2. Anticipate the coming of the Lord and the future judgment. (*T. E. Thoresby.*) **The flight of time:**—When Michael Faraday, the celebrated man of science, was a poor apprentice, he used every spare moment for making experiments. In a letter to a boy friend, after telling one of these experiments, he added: "Time is all I require. Oh, that I could purchase at a cheap rate some of our modern gents' spare hours—*day, days!* I think it would be a good bargain, both for them and for me." The youth had learned the first secret of success—not to waste time; not to throw it away on useless persons or useless pursuits. The frivolous think of nothing but pastimes and modes of "killing time;" but a day will come to even the most frivolous when they will value time as much as our own impetuous Queen Elizabeth did when she exclaimed on her death-bed, "My kingdom for a moment." (*Quirer.*) **The time when kings go forth to battle.**—*A summons to battle:*—There seems to have been in the olden times, among the petty sovereigns of the East, regular seasons for warfare:

perhaps they marched forth in the spring, when the grass would afford food for their horses, or possibly in the autumn, when the troops could forage upon the standing crops. These sovereigns of small territories were little better than the captains of hordes of robbers, and their revenues were rather derived from plunder than from legitimate taxation. We may thank God that we live in a happier era, for the miseries of nations were then beyond imagination. Desolating as war now is, its evils are comparatively little compared with those days of perpetual plunder. But I am not about to talk of kings. I must transfer the text to some other and more practical use. There is a time in our hearts when the inner warfare rages with unusual violence. At certain seasons our corruptions break forth with extreme violence; and if for awhile they appear to have formed a truce with us, or to have lost their power, we suddenly find them full of vigour, fierce, and terrible; and hard will be the struggle for us, by prayer and holy watchfulness, to keep ourselves from becoming slaves to our inward enemies. I thought of using the text in reference to Christian activities. There are times when Christians, all of whom are kings unto God, should go forth to battle in a special sense. I. **THE TIME FOR THE KINGS TO GO FORTH TO BATTLE IS COME.** The special time for Christian activities is just now. In some sense, nay, in the highest sense, believers ought to be always active. There should never be an idle day, or a wasted hour, or even a barren moment to a servant of God. 1. The time for kings to go forth to battle will be always when the king's troops are fit for battle; I mean, the time for spiritual work is when the worker is especially fit for it. 2. Another season of especial work should be, when discerning Christian men feel the motions of the Spirit of God calling them to unusual service. "When thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, then thou shalt bestir thyself," said God to David, and then David did bestir himself, and the Philistines were smitten. Do you not, some of you, hear the sound of the going in the tops of the mulberry trees? 3. One other mark of the time for kings to go forth to battle is surely when the Lord Himself works. The presence of good men with us is encouraging, but oh, the presence of the God of good men should much more stimulate us. Mahomet in one of his first famous battles, stimulated his soldiers to the fight by declaring that he could hear the neighing of the horses of the angels as they rode to the conflict to win the victory for the faithful. We speak not so, but surely the horses of fire and the chariots of fire are round about the faithful servant of God, and faith's discerning eye can see the God of providence moving heaven and earth to help his church, if his church will but arise from the dust and put on her beautiful garments, and resolve to conquer in her Master's name. II. **Since the time for battle has come, IT BEHOVES EVERY SOLDIER NOW TO GO TO THE WARS.** 1. All believers belong to Christ. You are His bond servants, you bear in your bodies His brand, the marks of the Lord Christ, for "ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price." 2. I will add, all of you believers love Christ. Your belonging to Him has wrought in you a true affection for Him. 3. Moreover, let me remind you that there is strength promised for each of you. "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." Shall I say that there is work for all of us to do which lies very close to hand? The preacher will never be without his. God will take care to furnish all His servants with sufficiency of work. I remember to have read in Cotton Mather's book upon plans of usefulness, that he remarks that sometimes at the expense of a shilling, under God's blessing, a soul has been converted. Such books as Alleyne's "Alarm," Baxter's "Call to the Unconverted," and Doddridge's "Rise and Progress," have wrought wonders in years gone by; and at this hour you may have for a penny or less, truths so set forth as to ensure the reader's attention. Mr. Cecil says he had to be very grateful to God for his mother, not so much because she pressed him to read good books, as that she took care to put good books where he was likely to take them up. III. **THERE ARE GREAT MOTIVES TO EXCITE US TO FIGHT EARNESTLY FOR CHRIST.** The motives gather round five points. 1. The first is our King. 2. Remember next the banner under which we fight—the banner of the truth, of the atoning blood. 3. Remember, next, another word—the captives whom it is your home by the Holy Spirit's power to redeem from the slavery of sin. How our soldiers of the Indian mutiny advanced like lions against the mutineers when they remembered Cawnpore and all the cruelties to which their brethren had been exposed! How unweariedly they marched, how sternly they fought when they were within sight of the foe! After this sort should we fight with those who have enslaved and in-

jured our brethren. 4. Remember, again, and this word ought to stimulate us to fight well, the enemy, the black and cruel enemy. 5. Yet one more encouragement, and that is our reward. "They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever." IV. **THE HIGHEST ENCOURAGEMENTS READILY PRESENT THEMSELVES TO INDUCE YOU TO JOIN THE WARRING ARMIES.** 1. It is quite certain that God has an elect people still upon the earth; then see ye not that it is hopeful work to find out these elect ones by the preaching of the word? 2. Remember, also, that God has never failed a true worker yet. 3. Remember, too, that if you did not see any souls converted, yet God would be glorified by your exaltation of Christ, and your talking of Christ, and your earnest prayers and tears for the good of others. IV. **THE SOLEMN DANGER OF INACTION.** (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Glad response to the battle call:*—Even the most disagreeable duty, if done in love, may be a means of blessing. When we come really to believe this great truth we shall seek for no other reward for our service than Christ's glad presence at the goal. We shall go to every task with eager joy, because Christ will await us in it. We shall grow to be like that English soldier in India. The doctor was inspecting the troops to see who were fit to join in the attack of Delhi, and passed by this youth, who looked sick. "Don't say I am unfit for duty," exclaimed the young hero; "it's only a touch of fever, and the sound of the bugle will make me well." Such is the ardour with which we Christians should leap forward at Christ's summons. *The Divine presence an incentive:*—"As soldiers fight best in their general's presence, and scholars ply their books most attentively when under their master's eye, so, by living always in the sight of God, we are the more studious to please him. The oftener we consider the Lord, the more we see that no service can be holy enough or good enough for such a God as He is." This needs no comment, but it needs to be realised. See, soldier of the cross, the eye of the Captain of our salvation is fixed upon thee! Jesus cries, "I know thy works." Will not this incite thee to valorous deeds, and make heroes of them? If not, what will? (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Vers. 2—24. **And it came to pass in an eventide.**—*The fall and punishment of David illustrated:*—I. **THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF DAVID PREVIOUS TO HIS FALL.** For several years he had been in a state of great trouble. But it was not in this state of trial and affliction that he offended. During this period we see him exercising, in a remarkable degree, the faith, the resignation, the humility, the patience, the meekness of the servant of God. But now God had brought his troubles to a close. For some years he had been the most powerful monarch in that quarter of the world. These were his circumstances when he fell. II. **CONSIDER THE PECULIAR TEMPTATION WHICH IS STEFFERED TO PRESENT ITSELF TO DAVID, AND THE WAY IN WHICH HE ENCOUNTERED IT.** The temptation arose, a temptation sudden and great. He gives way to the seduction. He calmly descends from his palace with a determination to bring the evil of his heart into act, and to perpetrate the crime which the tempter had suggested to him. This we may conceive to have been the turning point in David's career. Oh! had David paused but for one moment; had he retired a while to deliberate upon his conduct; had he put up one prayer for Divine help; had he passed on even to the duties of his kingly office so as to divert his thoughts into a different channel; the snare might have been broken, and he have escaped. But, alas! David is left a melancholy monument of what the best man may become when he forsakes his God, and when his God, in consequence, abandons him. III. **THE STATE OF DAVID AFTER HIS FIRST SIN, AND HIS PROGRESS TO NEW OFFENCES.** What must David have felt after the perpetration of the first crime? Immediately the sense of the Divine presence, the inspiring hope of Divine favour and eternal glory, would withdraw from him. The consequences of his crime were becoming visible, and the once noble and generous David now resorts to low artifices to conceal his guilt. He sends for the injured husband. He treats him with a subtlety unworthy both of himself and of his loyal subject, endeavouring to impose upon him a spurious offspring. When deceit, however, would not prevail on Uriah, a fresh crime must compel him. Crime leads on to crime. David, therefore, urged by a dread of detection, determines to add murder to adultery. IV. **THE CRIMINAL SCHEMES OF DAVID HAD NOW TAKEN EFFECT,** and Uriah could no more disturb the bed of his seducer and murderer. But when there remained no obstacle to enjoyment, the Divine Hand suddenly arrested him in his guilty career. God sent Nathan the Prophet to convince him of his guilt. V. **THE DREADFUL CONSEQUENCE**

OF THIS TRANSGRESSION. Where God forgives, He does not always wholly spare. He may so pardon the sin as not to inflict upon the sinner eternal condemnation, and yet punish him severely. And such was the case of David. Besides the wound his soul had sustained, and which, perhaps, might never afterwards be entirely healed, we find the remainder of David's life harassed by perpetual sorrows. 1. It may teach us to guard against declension in grace, and watch against temptation. If temptation is urgent flee from it and think of the fall of David. 2. Charity and tenderness in judging of those who fall. Call them not, as the world are too apt to call them, hypocrites. David was no hypocrite—but David fell. 3. Finally, let us beware of employing the fall of David as a plea for sin, and of presuming that such a restoration as his to favour and holiness will be granted to ourselves. Before we can build upon the hope of a restoration such as his our circumstances must be those of David. (*J. Venn, M.A.*) *David's great trespass*:—How ardently would most, if not all readers of David's life have wished that the first verse of this chapter had been—"And David died, and was gathered unto his fathers; and his son reigned in his stead." The golden era of his life has passed away; his sun has begun to go down; and what remains of his life is chequered with records of crime and chastisement, of sin and sorrow. What we now encounter is not like a spot but an eclipse; it is not a mere pimple that slightly disfigures a comely face, but a tumour that distorts the countenance and drains the whole body of its vigour. There is something quite remarkable in the fearless way in which the Bible unveils the guilt of David; it is set forth in all its enormity, without an attempt to excuse or palliate it; and the only statement introduced in the whole narrative to characterise his proceedings are these quiet but terribly expressive words with which the chapter ends—"But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord." In the bold and fearless march of Providence, we often see the hand of God. What mere man, framing the character of one designed to be a pattern of excellence, and to bear the designation—"the man after God's own heart"—would have dared to ascribe to him such wickedness as this? The truth is, that though David's reputation would have been far brighter, if he had died at this point of his career, the moral of his life, so to speak, would have been less complete. In some way that we cannot rightly explain, he does not appear to have been duly sensible either of the guilt or of the danger of this tendency. He does not appear to have watched against it as against other sins, nor to have taken the same pains, through grace, to subdue it. In the passage now before us we find a catastrophe, resulting from this state of things, which was truly the beginning of sorrows. The king of Israel becomes familiar with sorrows and trials, compared to which any that he had suffered when flying and hiding from Saul were light indeed. The lust which he has spared and indulged, re-appearing in his children, introduces incest and murder into the bosom of his family; it violates the sanctity of his home; and in place of the comely order, and the sweet tranquility of brothers and sisters dwelling together in unity, his palace becomes an abode of brutal appetites and murderous passions—the stain and horror of which time can neither lessen nor remove. Such a fall as David's could not have been altogether instantaneous. It must have been preceded by a spiritual declension, probably of considerable duration. The likelihood is that the great prosperity that was now flowing in upon David in every direction had had an unfavourable effect upon his soul. For a long period the very extremities of his situation had driven him to dependence on God—necessity was laid upon him; but now that necessity was removed. Add to this the fact mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, and so mentioned as to imply that it is a significant one—that at the time when kings go forth to battle, David allowed his army to go without him, and "tarried still at Jerusalem." This seems to imply that the king had fallen into a luxurious, self-indulging mood; that he was disposed to sit still and enjoy himself rather than accompany his brave soldiers to the self-denying labours and dangers of the field. Next, let us notice the manner in which David was led on from step to step of sin. His first sin was—suffering himself to be arrested by the sight of the woman: his fall began with a sin of the heart; had he made a covenant with his eyes, like Job, he would have nipped the temptation in the bud; he would have been saved a world of agony and sin. Let us try to gather up briefly, first, the principal kinds of sin of which David was guilty on this occasion; and then, their chief aggravations. (1.) There was the crime of adultery, including, as it always does, the sin of robbery, and the murder of character, and constituting, according

to the criminal law of the Jews, a capital offence, the punishment of which for both parties was death. (2.) Attempted deception, in his efforts to prevent his crime from being known. (3.) Tempting Uriah to drunkenness—braving the curse afterwards denounced by the prophet. (4.) Ingratitude and injustice to Uriah, whose noble services in the cause of his king met with a cruel return. (5.) Meanness and treachery; it was mean to take advantage of Uriah's absence in the first instance; it was mean to attempt, through him, to conceal the crime; it was mean to try to intoxicate him; and it was incredibly mean to make him the bearer of a letter detailing a plot for his death. (6.) Commanding another person (Joab) to do an unjust and atrocious action. And, (7) The crowning sin of murder—slightly masked, no doubt, and less atrocious in appearance as the mode of death was what every soldier was exposed to, but, in substance, deliberate murder. The aggravations of these sins were great. (1.) All this was done by the king of the nation, who was bound not only to be an example to his people in general, but especially to discountenance crime, and to encourage and reward bravery in his service. (2.) God had shown singular goodness to David; he had been rescued by God from all his enemies, placed upon the throne, and surrounded with every species of lawful enjoyment. (3.) The very profession made by David, and for the most part so consistently—his reputation as a good and holy man—made his offences the greater. (4.) He had reached a mature or almost advanced age; he was long past the boundary of youth, and therefore the more inexcusable in giving way to youthful lusts. And (5.) There was the example of Uriah—so eminent a pattern of faithfulness to his duty as a soldier—of firm aversion even to lawful indulgences that might indispose him for the hardships of a soldier's life, or be unsuitable in the comrade of brave, self-denying men. Such was the labyrinth of guilt and wickedness into which King David was now betrayed. How, then, it may be asked, can the thing be accounted for at all? It may serve, in some slight degree, to account for it, if we bear in mind the source of the spiritual life and the mode of its operation. When a man is converted, two opposite principles begin to struggle in his heart—the old man and the new: “The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit lusteth against the flesh.” In some natures, both the old man and the new possess unusual vehemence; the desperate energisings of the old are held in check only by the still greater vigour of the new; and if by any means the new man lose his vigour for a time—if the communication with the great Source of that vigour be interrupted, frightful havoc may be wrought by the old. Some men are giants every way: Luther, for example, was a giant in intellect—a giant in animal force and power—a giant in gracious affections; and when in such men the native inclinations burst the restraints of the new nature, it is no common wickedness that may be looked for. It was so with David. But it is one thing to account for David's sin—it is another to excuse it. These remarks are designed for the one purpose, not the other. The whole transaction bears the character of a beacon, and the beacon is one of the darkest even in the faithful records of Scripture history. (1.) First of all, it shows the frightful danger of interrupting, however briefly, the exercise of watching and praying—of discontinuing communion with the great Source of spiritual strength, especially when the evils that first made us pray earnestly are removed. An hour's sleep may leave Samson at the mercy of Delilah, and when he awakes his strength is gone. (2.) Further, it affords a sad proof of the danger of dallying with sin even in thought. Admit sin within the precincts of the imagination, and there is the utmost danger of its ultimately mastering the soul. The outposts of the spiritual garrison should be so placed as to protect even the thoughts, and the moment the enemy is discovered there the alarm should be given and the fight begun. (3.) Still further, his fall exemplifies the frightful risk of tolerating anywhere in our hearts a single sin. One sin leads on to another and another; especially if the first be a sin which it is desirable to conceal. (W. G. Blaikie, M.A.) *Transgression: its progress and consummation*:—I. THE ORIGIN OF DAVID'S TRANSGRESSIONS. Seldom, if ever, is it the case that crime, to any enormous extent, is perpetrated by men even of the common stamp, upon sudden and momentary impulse. There is almost invariably to be observed a regular gradation in sin, until it towers in all the fierce and frightful ascendancy of open guilt. Thus was it here. Despire not the fear of extreme iniquity, as if you were incapable of such a thing. If David fell, who once stood so high and holy in Christian character, to what a depth among we yet fall, we who have never yet attained to any thing like his early piety, his primi-

tive godliness. II. **THE PROGRESS OF SIN NOW OPENS BEFORE US.** Indolence and sensuality worked out their regular and invariable effect upon the erring monarch. He rises from his bed in the evening time—the bed of luxury, every passion pampered, every avenue to sin wide open, nothing further necessary to bring about his ruin than some external object to move the overt act of evil. The wife of Uriah, one of his principal and most faithful generals, becomes the object of temptation. The temptation triumphs, and the first work of iniquity is accomplished. Sin now becomes compulsory; the fear of detection and infamy, perhaps of personal danger from the just wrath of Uriah, drives the royal culprit to every mean and despicable expedient in order to conceal his transgression. Sin now drives on the soul to violence; and with cold and unfeeling treachery Uriah is made the innocent messenger of his own destruction. What a series of close-linked iniquities—indolence, luxury, lust, adultery, hypocrisy, falsehood, treachery, murder! And this is not all; we have here but the single series of crimes; there is a complication likewise which we must not overlook if we would read off the history in all its forcible and solemn instructiveness. Bathsheba is made an accomplice in sin, a moral victim to the guilty passion of the king, while her husband is sacrificed to his fears. Here are souls and bodies of men, precious lives, sported away under the hellish dominion of triumphant guilt! What complicated crime! What an awful history! III. **THE CONSUMMATION OF EVIL.** All that we have hitherto looked at belongs only to substantial guilt; guilt branded, it is true, with atrocity, but the consummation of evil still remains for our reflections. Many months had elapsed since the commencement of this wretched business, and a long period of time, too, had intervened between the death of Uriah and the visit of Nathan, to awaken the royal transgressor to repentance. Throughout this whole interval, there was no movement of remorse towards heaven in the heart of the king; he feared the reproof of man, and the wrath of man, as we have seen, and laboured by murderous efforts to avoid them; but there was yet no remorse towards God, no recognition of his turpitude, as viewed by the Most High, no fear of Divine censure, of Divine indignation, no effort to arrest or even deprecate the wrath of Jehovah. Thus, then, David had fallen into practical infidelity; every active consideration of God's existence, omniscience, and justice had vanished away. What a mystery is sin; it possesses us to self-destruction, while it diminishes nothing of our sagacity or skill in arraying and condemning the guilt of others. It is enough for satanic malice and purpose, if the soul be filled with every holy sentiment, and wisdom, and quality for external occupation, provided it remain dead to its own interests, unmoved by its own guilt! This prostration of judgment, this death of conscience, consummated the spiritual misery of the fallen monarch. How long should such a state have lasted, if God had not specially recalled the sinner to repentance? For ever! There was no human power, no natural remedy left for his restruction. To reclaim him, fear had failed, and conscience had failed, and memory of past obedience had failed. Reason was stupified, and stupified for ever, if God had not, in his faithfulness and mercy, sent a special warning to his soul, calling forth repentance. Let us pause here one short moment, while we collect together the admonition, which may be adduced from what we have now perused. 1. And first, as we saw the steady, onward progress of sin, from the almost imperceptible germ of indolence and luxury, to the actual crime of murder, and the utter infatuation of all spiritual sense and judgment, let us hence, I say, beware of the least compliance with iniquity. We often trifle with sins of small account, set limitations to our compliance with the follies or luxuries, or harmless indulgences of the world, as they are termed. 2. Reflect with horror on the complication of sin. For our self-gratification alone it is that we are led on to crime at first; that gratification must have victims; aye, if the besetting evil within us be but pride or covetousness, it must have victims. Some must suffer for our indulgence, many will become hardened by our example in guilt; for often the man who is called, in the false language of the world, his own enemy alone, will have to answer, perhaps, for the eternal death of others. 3. Trust nothing to your own shrewdness of discernment between good and evil, your own spiritual-mindedness and holiness, about the external objects and other men. Our profession is worth nothing, our spiritual attainments no proof of personal approbation with God, of personal holiness, while they range beyond self. We must deal with self, prove self, pass judgment on self, and live in communion, secret union with Christ, or our religion is but sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. IV. **THE**

RETURN TO VIRTUE. Mark the proof; here is a king, with all the powers of life and death over his subjects, in his own will, in his own hands. He is confronted by a man of humble state, of lowly lot, a man devoid of any earthly influence. By this man he is accused of a grievous murder, and that, too in broad noon day, before his courtiers and counsellors, on his very throne of judgment; and so far from yielding to resentment at so daring an intrusion, or expressing the least displeasure at the abrupt and public accusation with which he is so assailed, he sinks at once into contrition, and confesses his iniquity—"I have sinned against the Lord." This is what we need, a thorough conviction of our sins now; we shall have it certainly in the world to come, if it be not here attained. But conviction there is too late for anything but eternal torment; we must have it here, that under a thorough sense of our lost condition, we may apply to the rich mercies of the Redeemer for pardon. V. PARDON! And may pardon be had for such iniquities as adultery and murder—for such extremes of crime? Yes, for all transgressions; the vilest may hope; this history is for our encouragement, to seek that grace which never was denied to suppliant man—"Christ is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him." VI. NO ENCOURAGEMENT TO CARELESS SIN, and fruitless admission of criminality, with the secret or avowed purpose of continuance in crime. That from which nature shrinks with more alarm than all the threatenings of eternal misery can inspire is present suffering; that was inflicted, in all its severity, upon David. (*C. M. Fleury, A.M.*) *Sloth and sin*:—I. DAVID AT THIS TIME ENJOYED GREAT PROSPERITY. The promises made in adversity have not been forgotten. His devotion to God is fervid and growing. There were no rebellions at home. The land was quiet. The great wish of his heart had been formed into an avenue through which the service could be rendered to God. 1. Prosperity enervated him. Prosperity is a danger to men of David's mould. Contrast the readiness with which he went forth in the old days when Saul hunted him as a bird! He was standing in high places! He needed clinging grace. 2. Prosperity induced sloth. Our inner life is very responsive to our outward condition. II. WHEN OPPORTUNITY AND TEMPTATION MEET THERE IS STRUGGLE. Without reserve the Bible tells the shameful story—shows how one sin drags after it another until it compels you to write against the name of the man (not free from the weakness of human imperfections, yet sincere and upright)—to write against that man the horrible list of crimes, deception, adultery, injustice, treachery, and murder. III. THE INFLUENCES WHICH SAPPED THE WALL OF HIS WILL. You feel instinctively such a fall could not have been instantaneous—fifty years old, a devoted, upright man of God to so fall. The tempest has not strength in it to snap such an oak if the heart of the tree is sound. The sacred narrative shows the weakness, reveals the secret decay. 1. Close the doors of imagination against carnal imagery; make a covenant with your eyes and keep it. There was a "prepared plate" in the camera of David's mind, or the beauty of Bathsheba had been as nought to him. Take heed where you go for your recreations. Idle strolling may in some moods lead to pitfalls. He concealed when he should have confessed. Better to have crept to the mercy-seat covered with his filth than, as he did, wait in the palace with his sin. (*H. E. Stone.*) *David and Bathsheba*:—After so many splendid victories achieved by David, after such frequent triumphs over his enemies, nothing remained but the subjugation of those passions that are excited by prosperity and wealth: but these were enemies more difficult to subdue than the Philistines and the other powerful nations whom this valiant warrior had vanquished. "He that ruleth his spirit is stronger than he that taketh a city." David was smitten with the charms of Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, a brave and generous soldier, who was at that time fighting the battles of his country, and engaged at the siege of Rabbah. Contrary to the laws of God, to every sentiment of honour, and every dictate of generosity, he led her to violate her nuptial engagements. What shall we say to this conduct? Shall we with some well-intentioned but injudicious commentators extenuate the crimes of David? No; he himself, when his eyes were opened to behold the depth of the abyss into which he was fallen, would not attempt to diminish the horror of his transgressions. He was guilty of crimes than which none more enormous are to be found in the black list of sins. 1. Are there any who are ready to justify their enormities from the example of David? Who are saying to themselves, "If David, notwithstanding these enormous crimes, was a saint of God, and obtained pardon, I am safe?" Let such consider his habitual conduct, his splendid virtues, and his deep repentance. In examin-

ing his habitual conduct, we behold a heart devoted to God. He fell into acts of the greatest wickedness; but these were not permanent, but diametrically opposite to his general walk and conversation. Justice requires also that we should contrast his murder and adultery with the splendid actions of his life. "David," says the sacred historian (1 Kings xv. 5) "did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." Think of his confidence in God; of his trust in the everlasting covenant; of the magnanimity and clemency that he so often displayed; of his zeal for the glory of God; of his humility; of his acquiescence in the severest dispensations of providence; of the pious emotions which glow in his psalms, and were felt in his heart; and after taking this general review of his life, say if there are many who from the bed of death can look back to more numerous or more splendid monuments of piety and virtue. Consider, too, the depth of his repentance. Behold him prostrate in the dust, dissolved in tears, pleading for the life of his soul; looking back with unutterable anguish to his conduct; bearing the agonised remembrance of it to the grave; never palliating his crimes; fleeing for pardon to unmerited grace.

2. This subject teaches us that one sin gradually leads us to another: that he who enters upon a criminal course knows not where he shall stop in his course; that he who indulges impetuous passions and inordinate appetites will shortly be deprived of the power of saying to them, "Hitherto shall ye come and no farther;" and that, therefore, our only safety is to be found in resisting the first approaches to crime, and "abstaining from all appearance of evil." Oppose, then, the beginnings of evil; beware of cherishing one sinful thought; you know not to what lengths of guilt and shame it may carry you; you cannot tell where its destructive consequences will end.

3. This subject addresses those who, like David, have departed from the ways of the Lord; have violated their engagements; have wounded their consciences; have grieved the Spirit of God and His saints. There is a sacrifice which has sufficient virtue to expiate all your accumulated guilt. By the application of the blood of Jesus, and the communication of his Spirit, you shall obtain the restoration of peace with God, and strength to serve Him in time to come; like David and like Peter recovered from your falls, you shall again participate of his favour and love.

4. In reviewing this history, we are naturally led to ask, Why did Providence permit this shameful fall in David? or, to extend the question, Why does God allow sin to remain, and sometimes to break out forcibly in his regenerate children? This question cannot easily be answered. It is not for want of power to prevent it; for He could perfectly sanctify them. It is not for want of hatred to their sin; it appears as odious, more odious in them than in others. It is not for want of love to them; he regards them as his friends and his children. Why, then, does he not render them immaculately holy? The following are, perhaps, some of the reasons of this dispensation. These do not at all justify the offender, though they vindicate the providence of God, and show its omnipotence in educing good from evil itself.

(1.) By them, the grace of God, in justification, is illustriously, and will be eternally magnified. (2.) They are thus taught the depth of that iniquity which is in them, and rendered humble and dependent. (3.) Thus they are taught to value more dearly the advocacy and intercession of the Lord Jesus. (4.) The remembrance of the anguish of soul which they endured before God restored unto them the joy of His salvation; the recollection of "the wormwood and the gall" inspires them with additional fear of sin, and makes them more studious to mortify it. They tremble at the disease they have already felt, and walk in holy fear. (5.) They are thus, by the wonderful providence of God, fitted for service. "When thou art converted," says Christ to Peter, after predicting his fall, "strengthen thy brethren." By the bitter experience of the power of sin they can admonish others against it. (6.) The sins of believers make them long for heaven. They are made ready to drop this body of flesh if with it they may drop the body of sin and death. "They groan, being burdened," and sigh for that land of perfect holiness, where they shall no longer offend their God.

(H. Kollock, D.D.) *David's fall*:—What led to David's great sin? He did by another what he ought to have done himself. Notice verse 1, "When kings go forth;" "David sent Joab;" "David tarried still." 1. The indulgence of the flesh in a little thing led to indulgence in a greater. (Rom. xiii. 12-14; viii. 12, 13; Gal. v. 16.) 2. One sin leads to another, or requires another to cover it. 3. See the hardening effect of sin! The tender-hearted David becomes a monster

of cruelty! (Read, after verse 26, xii. 26 to end.) 4. The degradation of sin! Joab taken into counsel. 5. The Lord's unseen contemplation of man's actions. (Verse 27. Heb. iv. 13; Prov. xv. 11.) I. THE GREAT ONUS OF THE CRIME. For Christians the terrible ingredient of wilful sin is this: They crucify Christ afresh. They cause His name to be blasphemed. (Rom. ii. 24.) This makes our responsibility; hence 1 Peter ii. 12; 2 Cor. vi. 3. II. DAVID'S REPENTANCE. Notice immediate confession on conviction of his sin. His confession brief, heartfelt, going to the root of the matter. (R. E. Faulkner.) *David's dark days*:—If the heart is lifted up, if pride and self-conceit take the place of humility and manly self-forgetfulness, the soul is likely to lose its hold upon God and its close communion with Him, and there is danger of temptation prevailing over high principle, danger of the "natural man" usurping the place of the "spiritual man," danger of a fall. So it was with David. The height of his success and the splendour of his triumph may have thrown him off his guard. He was a strong man with a passionate nature, and through his passions he fell. It was a true instance of St. James's awful statement. He was "drawn away of his lust, and enticed;" and when lust had conceived it brought forth sin; and sin, when it was finished, brought forth death. One deliberate sin has this terrible property about it, that, unless checked at once, by honest confession and return to God, it is sure to lead on to other sins. Such was the case with David. He tried to cover up the crime he had committed by various efforts to deceive Uriah, and make it impossible for the dark secret to be known. 2. A year had passed away since David's fall. He had returned to Jerusalem in triumph. The dead Uriah was probably forgotten. The child of guilt was born, and loved by David with a passionate tenderness. The dreadful story, however, was not, we may be quite certain, all forgotten by the king himself. However much the commission of the crimes of adultery and murder had injured or blinded his conscience—as wilful sin always does—still, "the man after God's own heart," the man who had shown through many temptations "an honest and good heart," the man who had loved and trusted God so faithfully, could not have rested quite at his ease under the terrible memory that he had allowed base passion to conquer his better self. 3. God was looking in mercy upon His servant, and Nathan was sent to him to bring him to the fulness of a sincere repentance, and to restore him to peace with God. Nathan did his duty fearlessly and completely. Whatever sorrows there are and must be to penitents who have deeply fallen, still "God is the God of comfort," and He comforted David. Bathsheba was now his wife. Another child was born to them and David—with the sense of restored peace with God—called him Solomon, "the peaceful." (W. J. Knox Little, M.A.) *David's downfall*:—This chapter holds out the history of David's soul downfall from the very pinnacle of the highest prosperity to which God raised him. David's downfall was double, into two sins (without repentance), namely, the sin of adultery and the sin of murder. I. REMARKS UPON THE CONCOMITANT CIRCUMSTANCES ARE:—1. The time of David's adultery. This has a three-fold description, as (1) The time of the year, at springtime; (2) The time of war, when David had renewed his war against the Ammonites; and (3) The time of the day, in an eventide (ver. 1, 2.) To which may be added (4) The time of David's age and reign. Common computation makes it David's seventh year, the forty-ninth of his age, and the nineteenth of his reign. But learned Dr. Lightfoot computes it to be the twenty-sixth of his reign and so the fifty-sixth of his age, seeing he was thirty years old when he began his reign in Hebron, being in the tenth year of Samuel. 2. The place of David's sin; it was his own palace where he was indulging himself to ease and pleasure, when he should have been fighting the Lord's battles in the field with his army against the Ammonites. While he kept abroad in the wars in his own person he was safe enough. It was at evening tide when David should have been at his devotion, as had been his custom (Psalm 55, 17), seeing he would not be in the field to fight. 3. Upon the third circumstance, the person, the sight whereof was the occasion of David's soul fall. She is described here divers ways: (1) A woman washing herself, to wit, from her legal uncleanness (Lev. xv. 19, xviii. 19.) Possibly some window was carelessly left open for air in her chamber, that was near the palace royal, where she could espie no beholder; but lust, being quick sighted, lustful David espied her through the casement that then was casually or carelessly left open. (2.) "Very beautiful to behold." This was a strong bait to David, who had been indulging himself with some excess of eating and drinking. (3.) She is described by her name, as well

as by her beauty (ver. 3.) David enquired after her, who she was, when he should rather have reproved himself for looking and lusting after a forbidden object; more especially when he found she was a daughter to one and a wife to another of his famous worthies (2 Sam. xxiii. 34, 39.) (4.) "David sent messengers to fetch her." Unbridled lust, like the wild vine, will ramble over the hedge. (5.) She came from her own house into his palace, not by force but by persuasion, pretending only to speak with her; but she came not so well fortified for resisting a temptation as she should. II. Let us turn aside with Moses to take a LITTLE PROSPECT OF THIS, A GREAT WONDER. 1. As to David, "A man after God's own heart," yet his unbridled lust had metamorphosed him into a beast, He might now well say in the words of Asaph, "So foolish was I and ignorant, and even as a beast before Thee." (Psalm. 73, 23.) This teacheth us, that the best of men are but men at the best; and who art thou, O man, that thinkest thou art safe and secure enough from acts of sin? "Surely thou knowest not the plague of thine own heart" (1 Kings, viii. 38.) 2. As to Bathsheba, some do say she was not free from faultiness upon several accounts. (1.) That she bathed herself in her garden, so nigh to the King's court, for Uriah, being one of David's worthies, had his house assigned him near to the royal palace. (2.) That she so willingly came with the first messenger without any jealousy of a snare to her, after such too open a washing herself in the view of the court. (3.) That she so easily yielded unto David's tempting her without any reluctance, forgetting her fidelity to her honourable husband, choosing rather to be a base harlot to a king than an honest wife to a good subject. III. DAVID'S ADDING MURDER TO HIS ADULTERY, INSTEAD OF REPENTING FOR HIS SIN. 1. First, David's contrivement to conceal his sin from the eyes of men, in the meantime not regarding the all-seeing eye of God, etc. (1.) He sends for Uriah, that he, returning home and lying with his wife, might believe this now begotten child, to be of his own begetting. (2.) The discourse betwixt David and Uriah upon his return at royal summons (v. 7.) (3.) David deals still with Uriah while sober, and dissemblingly gives him an amicable dismissal (v. 8) bidding him go home and refresh thyself after thy travail, "and rejoice with the wife of thy youth" (Prov. v. 18.) Not doubting but he would converse with his wife, and so cover both their sin and their shame. (4.) David's expostulation with Uriah, occasioned by his not embracing the King's leave to go to his house, but sleeping all night among the king's guard (v. 9.) (5.) Uriah still holds his resolution (v. 11) neither the dignity of the king (saith Peter Martyr) nor the beauty and importunity of his wife could reclaim him from his refractory humour. Thus the providence of God did counter-work all the policies and projects of David, who designed all along to have his sin concealed, when the most wise God will have it revealed; and lest the king should think it was too saucy a sullenness in a subject to be thus peremptory he renders a most pregnant reason for so persisting in his resolve. (6.) Still David, instead of repenting, proceeds from bad to worse (vers. 12, 13), when he found himself crossed in his former contrivances with Uriah while sober, he will try one trick more in making Uriah drunk, that when intoxicated he might forget his oath and lie with his wife, putting off all his former austerity. 2. The last, but worst link of that doleful chain of David's lust: So far was David still from repenting of his sin that, seeing his craft (for concealing his adultery he failed him in all the other fair means he contrived, now) resolveth upon cruelty in the use of foul methods to get this good Uriah cut off insensibly, and so to cover his adultery with murder, that so he might not live to accuse the adulteress. (1.) In order hereunto he wrote a letter to Joab (v. 14), not with black but rather with blood, and Uriah must carry this sword to Joab for the cutting of his own throat. (2.) Uriah must be set in the hottest battle, and then lured (v. 15). Joab must believe this most excellent person had some way deserved death, and he must be the executioner; yet could he not be ignorant of the law, that no criminals should die without two or three witnesses against them; therefore, he was too obsequious in obeying so tyrannical a command (v. 16, 17), but Joab haply hoped thereby to ingratiate himself with David for the murder of Abner, which he had not yet answered, for now David was like to be no less guilty than himself. Right or wrong, he'll please the king. (3.) Tidings hereof are dictated by Joab in what order the messenger must tell David (v. 18, 19), and if the king object any rashness in the enterprise, he must answer "Uriah is slain also," and that answers all objections. (4.) David was pleased, saying "Let not Joab be displeased," etc. (v. 25), where he smootheneth up his general, slighteth the

slaughter of so many gallant men, and deeply dissembleth with the messenger, that so neither his bloody command nor Joab's fawning obedience might be discovered to him. David had been still striving against the stream in the use of fair means, and none would do to his content; but, having found success in this foul policy, oh how he hugs himself under hardness of heart. (5.) Bathsheba mourned for the death of her husband (v. 26), and no doubt it was a feigned and a merry mourning. She was inwardly pleased, both as freed from fear of his rage and punishment of an adulteress, and as hoping now to be made a queen. Had she been sensible of her sin (afterwards doubtless she was) she would have mourned like a dove, as Queen Huzzah did (Nah. ii. 7.). But after seven days of mourning (saith Josephus) the ordinary time (Gen. l. 10, 1 Sam. xxxi. 13) the adulterer married the adulteress; and probably more haste might be made here, that she might be thought to be with child by David after they were married (v. 27.) "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord," which was not simply his marrying of her, for that is nowhere forbidden in Scripture, but for his alluring her to adultery, and for murdering her husband after it. (*C. Ness.*)

Susceptibility to sin.—Professor George Lincoln Goodale, speaking of the cultivation of plants, said: "It is impossible for us to ignore the fact that there appear to be occasions in the life of a species when it seems to be peculiarly susceptible to the influences of its surroundings. A species, like a carefully laden ship, represents a balancing of forces within and without. Disturbances may come through variation from within, as from a shifting cargo, or in some cases from without. We may suppose both forces to be active in producing variation, a change in the internal condition rendering the plant more susceptible to any change in its surroundings. "Under the influence of any marked disturbance a state of unstable equilibrium may be brought about, at which times the species as such is easily acted upon by very slight agencies." Analogous to the learned scientist's observation of growing plants is the experience of every growing human life. We cannot pass over its ever-repeated evidence that there are occasions when character, to use Dr. Goodale's phrase, "seems to be peculiarly susceptible to the influence of its surroundings;" and disturbances, whether from within or without, produce such a state of "unstable equilibrium," that the character is "easily acted upon by any very slight agencies." Then is it that, by the merest little only, life's important steps are taken, and lead to either success or failure. (*Homiletic Review.*)

A man's weak hours.—A man is weak, not by the power that assails, but by the want of defensive power. It made no difference where the assault was made at Gettysburg on the third day, by the adversary that attempted to pierce the centre of the lines; and it made no difference that they came after a perfect whirlwind of cannonading; for the resisting power was greater than the attacking power. That is an hour of weakness when the resisting power is weak. Now, nothing is weaker than the conscience when it is paralysed by the touch of avarice. There is such an appetite in some natures for gold that, although at times they are manly and good in a thousand respects, at other times, when avarice dominates, their moral sentiments are paralysed by it; and those are their weak hours. There are some men whose weak hour is connected with their passions. There are some men whose weak hour is in the lower grade of pleasures. There are some men whose weak hour is in eating. There are other men whose weak hour is in drinking. Oh, how many noble men have been girdled, how many men of genius have been utterly destroyed, how many persons of hope and promise have been completely overthrown, by intemperance! (*H. W. Beecher.*)

Watchfulness against riotous appetites imperative.—The fleshly passions are like mutinous sailors, to be kept below deck. "Never allow your lower nature anything better than a steerage passage. Let watchfulness walk the decks as an armed sentinel and shoot down with great promptness anything like a mutiny of riotous appetites." Says the apostle: "Mortify—literally, kill your members which are upon the earth." (*E. P. Thwing.*)

Sin, a malicious guest.—"Sin is an ill guest," says Manton, "for it always sets its lodgings on fire." Entertained within the human breast, and cherished and fondled, it makes its host no return but an evil one. It places the burning coals of evil desire within the soul with evident intent to fire the whole man with fierce passions. Let these passions be suffered to rage, and the flame will burn even to the lowest hell. Who would not shut his door on such a guest? Or, if he be known to be lurking within, who would not drag him out? How foolish are these who find delight in such an enemy, and treat him with more care than their best friend.

(C. H. Spurgeon.) *Looking at a wrong thing perilous*:—Weak dallying with forbidden desires is sure to end in wicked clutching at them. Young men, take care! You stand upon the beetling edge of a great precipice, when you look over, from your fancied security, at a wrong thing; and to strain too far, and to look too friendly, leads to a perilous danger of toppling over and being lost. If you know that a thing cannot be won without transgression do not tamper with hankering for it. Keep away from the edge, and shut your eyes from beholding vanity. (A. Maclaren, D.D.) *Satan ever near the idle*:—David's giving himself to ease and pleasure was the root of all his wretchedness. Standing waters gather filth. Flies settle upon the sweetest perfumes when cold, and corrupt them. As the crab-fish seizeth upon the oyster gaping, so doth Satan upon the idle. No moss sticketh to the rolling stone: which if it lay still would be overgrown. The rankest weeds grow out of the fattest soil. The water that hath been heated soonest freezeth; the most active spirit soonest tireth with slacking. The earth standeth still, and is all dregs; the heavens ever move and are pure. Beware of ease and idleness: here began David's downfall. Say not of this, as Lot did of Zoar, "Is it not a little one?" The parvity of a sin taketh not away the pravity of it: and a less maketh way for a greater, as wedges do in wood-cleaving. Pompey desired that all his soldiers might come into a certain city; when that was denied he said, "Let my weak and wounded soldiers come in;" they did, and then soon opened the gates to all the army. (J. Trapp.)

Ver. 13. **And when David had called him . . . he made him drunk.**—*The sinfulness of causing drunkenness*:—It is a very wicked thing, under any design whatsoever, to make a person drunk. Woe to him that does so. (Hab. ii., 15-16.) God will put a cup of trembling into the hands of those who put into the hands of others the cup of drunkenness. Robbing a man of his reason is worse than robbing him of his money, and drawing him into sin worse than drawing him into any trouble whatsoever. (M. Henry.)

Ver. 14. **David wrote a letter to Joab.**—So in the Greek story, Proetus sent Bellerophon to Jobates with his own death warrant. (Cp. Hom. *Il.* vi. 168, 169.) "Slay him he would not, that his soul abhorred; but to the father of his wife, the King of Lycia, sent him forth, with tokens charged of dire import, on folded tablets traced, poisoning the monarch's mind to work his death." (A. F. Kirkpatrick, M.A.)

Ver. 27. **But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.**—*The universal insecurity of religious perseverance*:—The transaction is recorded at length in the chapter which contains the text; and the conclusions which we may draw from a review of it are numerous. 1. The first, and by no means the least important of these, is the proof which hence arises that none of us can lay claim to any constraining grace, which, in despite of ourselves, shall compel us to holiness and to salvation. That David enjoyed the grace of God in a very especial degree, is what no Christian can deny: and few, it is to be expected, will suppose themselves to be more highly favoured than he was in this particular. Yet here we have a melancholy, but still a most positive and salutary proof that no portion of the grace of God, however considerable, will protect man from the most fearful enormities, unless he will employ it when given him. Our faith is not to be confidence that we shall be saved, but confidence that, if we obey God to the best of our power, we shall be saved: and our hope must be that we may render that obedience which may be accepted through Christ; while our lives must be such as are worthy of such an hope; we must prove that we have this hope in us, by purifying ourselves, even as He is pure. 2. The next consideration which forces itself on our attention is the difference of David's circumstances at the time of his fall from those in which he is placed, when he had the best of all testimonies, that "the Lord was with him." We now see that, however prosperity and leisure are in themselves desirable, they have dangers, which to resist, requires all the strength which God has put at our disposal. David was not a novice to their blandishments. For ten years he had been in undisputed possession of the splendour and luxuries of the kingdom of all Israel. All this period had been as remarkable as the darkest days of his adversity for the most religious fulfilment of the two great comprehensive duties, the love of God and the love of his neighbour. Offensive, therefore, as the

thought may be to him who feels himself secure in his own righteousness, or who imagines himself to be so firmly in the hand of the Lord that nothing can pluck him thence, it is, nevertheless, the inevitable conclusion from the melancholy truth now under consideration that no man, whatever his real holiness, or whatever his opinion concerning the decision of his future fate, is secure from the stains of even the most deadly sins. David, it appears, had hitherto been as holy in prosperity as in distress; and, it might be supposed, was now so intimate with grandeur and power as to have nothing to fear from their influence, especially when it is considered that it was by habitual religion that he had supported himself inviolate amidst the trials of persecution and the temptations of luxury. But at this crisis there was one remarkable circumstance. He had already done all that was required of him in active life, and there seemed nothing now remaining but to turn his thoughts towards the interests and good government of his kingdom. When his pillow was the rock and his curtain the cave; when his sword, under Providence, procured him his daily bread from the foes of his country, and the means of existence formed the object and pursuit of life—he was pious and immovable; he must have been active, or he must have resigned his life. But now the case was widely different; he had not only all the necessities, but all the luxuries which the most refined voluptuousness could devise, attending in profusion round him: he had certainly the duty of his charge, to impress its importance on his mind; but then he had the opportunity of neglecting it; and even David, it appears, was not proof against the solicitations of this opportunity! To all of us is this example fraught with materials for the most serious personal application. The flesh itself works along with us so long as we toil for its support; but when we have once accomplished this it ungratefully turns upon us and endeavours to enslave us to its dominion. Where the necessities of life do not compel him to labour there is great danger, even to the confirmed Christian, lest the value of time and the necessity of improving it, should not be always present to his mind; while the temptations arising from the very nature of his situation are such as at all times require the very closest and most diligent circumspection. And when the unguarded moment and the temptation coincide, as they are wont to do, the example before us is a terrible demonstration of the ruin which must follow. The crime of Bathsheba cannot be long concealed: the punishment was death; either, therefore, Bathsheba must be sacrificed to the law, or her husband removed in time to allow her to become the wife of David before suspicion could arise. David no longer hesitates: the fatal order is deliberately sealed, and put into the hands of the generous, unsuspecting victim, who immediately is placed by his commander in the post most congenial to his feelings, the forefront of the hottest battle, and betrayed by his cowardly companions into the hands of an unsparing enemy. Such is the natural uniform progress of sin, wherever it takes root, though the soil be the heart of David. (*H. Thompson, M.A.*)

Two aspects of David:—1. This chapter reveals the character of David in its most distressing aspects. From end to end it is a production worthy only of the very genius of perdition. His very greatness becomes the measure of his sin. All his senses are set on fire of hell. The spirit of generosity is dead within him. The spirit of justice is exiled from his nature. How is the star of the morning dashed from heaven! How is the fine gold become dimmed! How are the mighty fallen! It is almost impossible to believe that this is human nature at all. Let us not seek to excuse David. We injure the Bible, and the whole purpose of the inspired volume, if we speak so much as one word in defence of a series of actions which might have been conceived by Satan and executed within the darkness of perdition. 2. The all-important sentence is the last: "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord." Without that sentence the chapter would have been intolerable. From this time forth David must bear the judgment of the Lord. Do not let it be supposed that even king David could perform such a series of wrongs and cruelties, and play as skilfully on his harp as ever, and sing as jubilantly before Heaven as he ever did. David's harp acquired a new tone after this infamy. Psalms were written by David after this great transgression which could not have been written before its commission. Years were added to the life of the king; he was bent down under an invisible load; his face was wrinkled with grief, and his eyes were dimmed by contrite tears. 3. We see now something of what human nature is when it is left to show itself. We are bound to go to history as the one revelation of human nature. It is in vain to invent and discuss theories of psychology; it is in vain

to look upon one aspect of human nature, and to judge the whole by the part; it is in vain, too, to fix upon any given date in human history and to judge men by that standard of civilisation. The one inquiry is what men have done in their very worst moods. An answer to that inquiry will settle the whole question respecting human depravity. We are bound to look at such a chapter as the first in the epistle to the Romans, if we would see what human nature is in its innermost and largest possibilities. Nor must we shrink from dwelling upon the hideous spectacle. To speak of revolted sensibilities, highly excited prejudices, and to declare that such instances are beyond the range of careful study, is simply to deprive ourselves of some of the most solid lessons of human history. We must know what sin is before we can have any adequate idea of the Divine relation to it. Sin explains the cross, sin explains the atonement, sin explains Christ. 4. The Bible is to be judged by what God would have done, not by what man would have done. Find a single sentence which approves of David's guilt. Happily, there is no such sentence in the whole record. The spirit of the Bible, therefore, is not seen in what David did, but in the judgments which followed him and darkened his day with tremendous thunder-clouds. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The aggravation of David's sin*:—As for David's fall, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints. David's fall was such as is not so much as named among the Gentiles. But, past speaking about as David's fall was, it was what followed his fall that so displeased the Lord. In the words of Butler's latest editor, "it is safer to be wicked in the ordinary way than from this corruption lying at the root." As Thomas Goodwin points out in his great treatise on the "Aggravation of Sin," it was the "matter of Uriah," even more than the matter of Bathsheba, that awakened the anger of the Lord against David. That is to say, it was David's sin of deliberation and determination, rather than his sin of sudden and intoxicating passion. It was both matters; it was both sins; but it cannot be overlooked that it was after a twelvemonth of self-deceit, internal hypocrisy, and self-forgiving silence on David's part that Nathan was sent to David in such Divine indignation. How a man like David could have lived all that time soaked to the eyes in adultery and murder and not go mad is simply inconceivable. That is to say, it would be inconceivable if we had not ourselves out of which to parallel and illustrate David, and make David both possible and natural to us. (*Alex. Whyte, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XII.

Vers. 1—14. And the Lord sent Nathan unto David.—*Nathan reproving David*:—I. DAVID'S SIN. David, it appears, to avenge the outrage which had been perpetrated on his ambassadors by Hanun, the king of the Ammonites, invaded that king's dominions, and, in two pitched battles, defeated both him and his allies with great slaughter. In the following year, as soon as the season permitted, he had renewed the war, and followed up his successes still further by sending Joab, and all Israel with him, to lay siege to the royal city of Rabbah, the metropolis of Hanun's kingdom. Instead, however, of accompanying his army on this occasion, according to his usual custom, David unhappily "tarried still at Jerusalem;" and, whilst there, he appears to have given himself up to a life of sloth and sinful indulgence. "For it came to pass," says the sacred historian, "in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed," where, perhaps, he had been dozing away the afternoon in idleness, instead of spending it in some useful occupation, "and walked upon the roof of the king's house." From this elevated position, David saw a woman of great beauty washing herself. But instead of "turning away his eyes from beholding vanity," and thus acting the part of an honourable and a modest man, he allowed lust to gain an entrance into his heart, and at last to take full possession of it. Oh, such is the seductive influence, such the tyrannical nature of sin, that, let a man give it but the least encouragement, and it is sure to lead him on, step by step, almost imperceptibly, till at last it compels him, whether he wills or not, to do its bidding. Do you, then, take the advice of a friend, and have nothing to do with "the accursed

thing." Leave it off, before it be meddled with. For now, mark the next step in his downward career. He sent and inquired after the woman. And although he was plainly told that she was already a married woman; the wife, too, of one of his own best and ablest generals, Uriah the Hittite, and who was actually, at that very moment, jeopardising his own life in the high places of the field to sustain the safety and honour of David's crown; yet such was the hold which sin had now taken of him that he persisted in sending for her, and at last, after a brief interview, persuades her to forsake the guide of her youth, and to forget the covenant of her God. Oh, who could have thought that David, the man after God's own heart, would ever have been guilty of such a crime as this. Little did David think, when he was committing this shocking crime, that his sin would so soon find him out. But so it was; for scarcely had a few months rolled by before Bathsheba perceived that she could no longer conceal her disgrace, and consequently she sends to David, acquainting him with her situation, and in all probability, reminding him of his promise to protect her; for, according to the law of Moses, the adulterer and the adulteress were both to be put to death. And now, what is to be done? The same evil spirit that prompted him to commit the crime soon suggests a plan for concealing it. II. WHAT WERE THE MEANS WHICH GOD TOOK TO AWAKEN DAVID TO A SENSE OF HIS WICKEDNESS AND DANGER? Did He raise up enemies round about him to lay waste his country and destroy his people? or did He rain down fire and brimstone from heaven, as He once did upon the guilty cities of the plain, in order that He might sweep this wretched monarch from off the earth? Or did He send terrors to take hold of him, and the messengers of death to arrest him? No; He sent to him one of his own humble and faithful ministers, in order that he might reason the matter over with him, call his sin to remembrance, and convince him of his guilt. For nearly two full years David appears to have thought nothing more about Uriah. Perhaps he may have thought that, as he had since married the widow, he had made all the reparation that was required of him. Or he may have supposed that as no other person beside himself was privy to the part which he had taken in Uriah's death, there was no use troubling himself further about the matter. If so, David was greatly mistaken. Yes, there was One Witness to the whole transaction, whom David seems to have lost sight of altogether. III. WHAT EFFECT GOD'S MESSAGE PRODUCED ON DAVID. Did he fly into a rage with the man of God for thus faithfully discharging his duty? Did he exclaim, with an outburst of angry passion, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" Or did he call to the governor of the city, and say unto him, "Take this fellow away, and put him in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and water of affliction?" Or did he, like his father Adam, try to shift the blame from himself, and lay it upon the woman? David was so horrified at the picture which Nathan had drawn of his own conduct, and so convinced of its truth, that he exclaimed without a moment's hesitation, "I have sinned against the Lord." IV. WHAT LESSONS WE OURSELVES MAY GATHER UP FROM THE CONTEMPLATION OF THIS PAINFUL SUBJECT. 1. In the first place, then, we may learn that there is no sin beyond the reach of God's mercy. 2. And, lastly, let no notorious sinner be emboldened, from David's unhappy fall, to presume on God's mercy. Let such a one remember that David's sin was committed but once: he was no habitual transgressor. (*E. Harper, B.A.*) Nathan sent to David:—I. WHEN? 1. When he had fallen into grievous sin—such sin as, we might well suppose, if we did not know how "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" is the human heart, he would have been incapable of committing. 2. When he was blind, and insensible to his sin. And I think this is something more surprising than even the sin itself. It seems to prove more convincingly the deep depravity of our nature. It is the stamp of a lower humiliation. II. WHEREFORE? What was the object of his mission? 1. What might have been expected? Why, surely, that it would be to declare the Divine displeasure—to announce God's sentence of condemnation against the royal transgressor—to warn him of approaching retribution—to tell him that he had sinned beyond the hope of mercy, and the possibility of restoration, and that there was nothing for him now but a prospect of changeless despair. Gracious and long-suffering as the Lord is, as He is always declared to be in His Word; much as He delights in messages of mercy to His creatures, there have not been wanting in the history of mankind instances of the other kind. 2. But no: it was not as a herald of vengeance that Nathan was sent to David, but as a reprover and convincer of sin, to bring him to repentance, by

showing him the baseness of his conduct, the aggravation of his crimes, and the danger to which they had justly exposed him. III. WITH WHAT RESULT? I. I answer, first, with but a more startling illustration of the blinding power of sin. We might have thought that, with his ordinarily quick apprehension, David would have perceived at once the point and force of Nathan's parable. We should have looked for an immediate self-application of it, and the proper effect thereof; but in doing so, we should only have miscalculated the influence of sinful indulgence in blunting the faculty of moral perception, and deadening all the sensibilities of the soul. 2. The bringing him to a sincere acknowledgment of his offence. This only followed, however, upon the prophet's faithful home-thrust—"Thou art the man!" "This story concerns thee. It needs but to put in the name, and it is then a narration of thy own guilty and heartless conduct towards thy faithful servant Uriah. Thus hast thou sinned against thy unoffending neighbour. Oh! wicked king, there is no excuse for thee." And then David saw himself as the prophet saw him; as, at that moment, God saw him. 3. The leading him to an experience of God's pardoning grace. For no sooner had David acknowledged his sin, taken to himself the blame of his guilty acts, and prostrated himself a weeping penitent at God's footstool, than the prophet was commissioned to absolve him from his offences by a declaration of the Divine forgiveness. "A God ready to pardon." That is one of the names given to the Lord in the Bible. Was there ever a completer illustration of it than is here supplied? (*C. Merry.*) *David's fall*:—I. THE PERIL OF SELF-INDULGENCE. The heart-rotted tree may stand long in the golden light and summer calm, and crowned with some garniture of green its true condition be unguessed. But let the stormy wind blow and beat upon it, and quickly it will fall. For many years David had been "like a tree planted by the rivers of water than bringeth forth his fruit in his season." He had stood many a blast of temptation unrooted, the more deeply rooted. But self-indulgence, like a permitted rot, had slowly, insidiously, wrought ruin within him, and the strength of his soul became weakness and succumbed to sudden tempestuous temptation. There is ever a sad though secret preparation for such a fall as David's. There is an inner before an outer fall. II. THE IMPERATIVE IMPORTANCE OF WATCHFULNESS. Surely, if any man could have dispensed with watchfulness David was the man. And yet he—patriarch, prophet, saint—fell into the defiling pool of sensuality. We have watchful against us a malignant and pitiless enemy. He has no reverence for the silvered head; for the honour that has gathered to the hoar-haired believer. We need all—and the aged saint, too—to watch against him. We need well to know ourselves. Our physical and mental temperament may expose us to special dangers. Our very excellencies may become our snares. We must watch over them. We dare not glory in them. III. THE DREADFUL CONNECTION OF SIN WITH SIN. If David had made a covenant with his eyes he had not looked. But he looked, and the look was sin. And that one sin opened the way for many. To lust he added craft, to craft treason, to treason murder. And this is David! "Lord, what is man?" No sin stands alone. Admit one, a whole brood presses urgent, irresistible upon its heels. It is the "little rift" that widens till the music of a holy life is mute. It is the "little pitted speck" that, rotting inwards, slowly spoils the fruit of useful character. Lie darkens into lies. The one theft into another. David's one sin into many. IV. THE AWFUL POSSIBILITIES OF SELF-DECEPTION. For months, for a year, David went on unconscious of his guilt. How blinding is self-partiality! "It is really prodigious," as Bishop Butler says, "to see a man, before so remarkable for virtue and piety, going on deliberately from adultery to murder with the same cool contrivance, and, from what appears, with as little disturbance, as a man would endeavour to prevent the ill consequences of a mistake he had made in any common matter. That total insensibility of mind with respect to those horrid crimes, after the commission of them, manifestly shows that he did some way or other delude himself, and this could not be with respect to the crimes themselves, they were so manifestly of the grossest kind." Oh, the possibilities of self-deception! The liar may appear true, the dishonest honest, the vile pure. So for awhile; but not for long. The day of self-revelation is at hand. "There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid that shall not be known." V. THE BLESSEDNESS OF TRUE REPENTANCE. "The Lord sent Nathan unto David." By a touching apologue the wise prophet drew David to pass unconscious verdict upon himself. VI. THE IRREVOCABLE CHARACTER OF A SINFUL DEED. David was forgiven.

But he could not escape the bitter temporal fruit of his sin. To life's very end it was as gravel in his teeth, as acrid ashes in his mouth. A sinful deed may be pardoned; but it cannot be recalled, and on it will go its desolating way. No tears of David could wash away the guilty past. Bad deeds live when the doer is dead. This sin of David has caused from age to age the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. "Stand in awe and sin not." "The lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin; and the sin, when it is full grown, bringeth forth death." (G. T. Coster.) *David's sin and Nathan's parable*:—I. THE OCCASION UPON WHICH THE MONARCH DISGRACED HIMSELF. II. THE UTTERANCE OF THE PARABLE. The touching beauty of this little apologue cannot be passed carelessly by. Its appeal forces its way to the most sensitive centres of our feeling. But the general shrewdness of its conception is heightened by the fact that it entered at once into the historic experience of this king. He knew what it was to be poor; he knew what it was to have and to love one little ewe-lamb. And when Nathan told him that the rich, mean neighbour had stolen and killed the creature which the poor man cherished in his bosom as a daughter his anger was at its height. III. THE EXPLICATION OF HIS SKILFUL PARABLE WAS INSTANTANEOUS: "And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man." The king must have been startled beyond all power of self-control. How rapid was the transition of feeling through which he passed! One minute he was on his feet in all the flush of indignation at another's sin, fairly exulting in the proud sense of unutterable contempt at injustice so apparent and so unmitigated in its foul stroke. The next minute he perceived the countenance of Nathan changing towards him. Around came that long scornful finger, which had been pointing at an imaginary offender; and now in reply to the implied inquiry for that offender's name, its index slowly reached his own face, and then the sober words were spoken: "Thou art the man." Could his discomfiture have been more complete? Could Nathan's triumph of rebuke have been more successful? IV. LESSONS OF PRESENT INSTRUCTION FROM THIS PARABLE. Sin levels the loftiest man to the lowest rank. Zeal for God lifts the lowliest man into a vantage unquestioned. 1. Observe, then, that in all cases conscience is the arbiter in the wrong, and must be the centre of aim in the reproof. 2. Observe, that absolute rectitude is the only standard to be admitted in all processes of rebuke. 3. In the third place, observe that tenderness is the dominant spirit in all truly Scriptural, or even successful, rebuke. 4. Observe, in the fourth place, that courageous fidelity is the measure of all Christian duty in administering rebuke. Are we up to this standard in helping each other? Has not the day of honest fraternal rebuke pretty much passed by? And are we not ourselves to blame for many of those defections to the common cause which make such sudden scandal? Another question, quite akin to this, is likewise suggested by this theme: What ought to be expected of every faithful ministry in a time like that we live in? Is there any sin so peculiarly delicate that the messenger of God is debarred from saying, "Thou art the man?" (C. S. Robinson, D.D.) *The parable of Nathan*:—The introduction to the parable must not be overlooked, for in it we are taught that the first step to repentance springs from the Divine favour. "The Lord sent Nathan." The man who has fallen into a pit and broken his limbs must have help from without. It is useless for him to talk of climbing out unaided, somebody must come and lift him out and place him again upon the spot from which he fell. The first step towards recovery must come from above him. In considering the parable itself, notice:—I. THE ANALOGY AND CONTRAST WHICH IT SETS FORTH AS EXISTING BETWEEN DAVID AND URIAH. 1. The analogy. (1.) The men in the parable were on an equality; in some respects they were fellow-men and fellow-citizens. "There were two men in one city." So David and Uriah, although one was a king and the other a subject, were on a level on the common ground of humanity, and were both subject to the laws, political, social, and religious, which had been given by God to the nation which regarded Jerusalem as the seat of government. (2.) David was by birth a member of the highly-favoured nation to whom God had given laws, and Uriah, by choice, was a citizen of the city where dwelt David the king, who, more than any other man, was bound to obey the law of his nation and of his God. (3.) There is analogy in their qualities. They were both courageous, valiant men. David had, from his youth, been noted for this characteristic; from his shepherd-day when he slew the lion and the bear, up to the present time his bravery had been unquestioned. Uriah the Hittite was a man of like spirit in this respect, and his very bravery had been used by his master to compass his

death. It was well known to David that if Uriah was placed in the forefront of the battle he would hold his post or die. 2. The parable also sets forth the contrast in the two men—"the one rich and the other poor." (1.) The king's position made it possible for him to indulge his unlawful desires without hindrance. The position of Uriah obliged him to submit to his master's will. This inequality aggravated David's crime. (2.) The parable seems to hint at a further contrast. "The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: but the poor man had nothing save one little ewe lamb." David had many wives; the narrative implies that Uriah had but one. His love was therefore deeper, because purer, than that of David. His strong affection was an emotion to which the king was a comparative stranger, even as the rich man in the parable could not estimate his poor neighbour's affection for his only lamb. For the lawless passion of David cannot be placed upon a level with the pure love of Uriah. The one is life and the other death. The river which keeps within its channel is a blessing to the country through which it flows; but the same river, when it bursts its banks and overflows the land, becomes a means of desolation and destruction. So it is with lawful affection and lawless passion. II. THE EFFECT OF THE PARABLE AND ITS APPLICATION UPON DAVID. 1. It awakened strong emotion: "David's anger was greatly kindled against the man." (v. 5.) This effect was the result of looking at the crime from a distance. 2. It revealed great self-ignorance. The knowledge most indispensable in life is self-knowledge; a man who does not possess this is an ignorant man, whatever are his other requirements. Knowledge is said to be power, and the knowledge of oneself is the greatest power. 3. But the effect of the application of the parable is a remarkable illustration of the power of conscience. Some men do everything upon a large scale. Their emotions are deep, their sins are great, and so are their virtues. The captain of a vessel of large dimensions which carries a rich cargo, has a heavier weight of responsibility than he has who has only the charge of a small craft. If he pilot the vessel safely into harbour he has the more honour, but if she gets wrecked the disaster makes a deeper impression. III. THE EFFECT OF DAVID'S CONFESSION UPON GOD. Confession of sin to a human friend against whom we have offended will often bring an assurance of forgiveness. The good parent makes it indispensable before the child is restored to its position and favour. So is it in the government of God. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (John i. 9.) 1. The path of duty is the path that "leads not into temptation." If David had been at the head of his army at this time it is likely that he would have escaped this dark stain upon his life. A brook is kept pure while it is in motion, but if its waters were to be stopped from flowing they would become stagnant. 2. That tendencies to sin, though not on the surface, are yet latent in the depths of the heart. To the eye of a stranger a powder-vessel may look very trim and clean and safe, but the black powder is there in the hold, only needing a single spark to make its awful power felt. 3. Impurities in the springs of thought will be revealed in the streams of action. 4. Although sin is forgiven, some of its consequences must remain. "The Lord hath put away thy sin," but "the sword shall never depart from thine house." 5. The parable, and the fact that gave rise to it, lead us to observe—(1.) That impartial reason is ever ready to condemn any flagrant iniquity. There is as discernible a difference between good and evil as between white and black, when nothing interposes to obstruct the sight, or misrepresent the object. (2.) The prejudices of interest and lust may, and do hinder men from discerning, or at least distinguishing in practice between right and wrong, even in the plainest cases. Such was most apparently the case with David. (3.) Although men do sometimes suffer themselves to commit gross sins, in open contradiction to their own inward light, yet all notorious iniquity stands condemned by the universal verdict of mankind. (*R. Moss, D.D.*) *Awakened and awed*:—We see here—I. THE MAN LEFT TO HIMSELF. Like other servants of God whose lives are recorded in the Scriptures, we find David in times of sin withdrawing from communion with God, loving his own way, hugging his pet sin. David estranged himself from his God, and he soon sinks lower and lower. Sinful weakness he had been shown before, but this is a mean, selfish crime. No one withdraws trust from God and prospers. As flowers live in and by the rays of the sun, so the graces of the soul need the favour of God. No agony of remorse is so keen as that of the child of God over sinful pleasures indulged. More helpless than a rudderless vessel in the Maelstrom is the Christian

who abandons himself to serve sin even for a season. 1. David left to himself makes a sorry self indeed. A further evidence of increasing guilt is the manner of his treatment of the prisoners of war (v. 31.) It was cruel in the extreme, unnecessarily cruel. So unlike David. Ah! biting, goading him was that sense of sin which he could not shake off. Ill at ease, he cares not what suffering he causes. His temper unrestrained, any savage cruelty is possible. These excitements so eagerly sought only serve to show the unceasing demands conscience made upon him. Can any man venture to say David was happy? We are not left to conjecture. Psalm li., written twelve months after his sin, reveals his inmost thoughts at this time (as also Psalm xxxii.), and this psalm was delivered to the chief musician for public use before the sacred history was written. 2. David is yet in his sin. How dulled his vision, or the parable had needed no explanatory application! How forcibly this fatal power of sin is brought home to us, and daily! Illustrations of this deceitfulness of sin abound. Judges pronounce sentence on poor fallen girls while indulging in the sin themselves! Workmen pronounce hard, biting sentences upon those who bring down prices by undue competition, yet go and take the situation offered by the foreign competitor without a thought of the inconsistency. Nothing blinds like self-love. II. THE CURSE NATHAN UTTERS, AND CHASTISEMENT. Former gracious dealings are brought to mind. There was nothing which God withheld from David. He came to the kingdom when God saw wise, and with unsparing hand had God dealt out blessing. He had disregarded the responsibilities which his office brought and despised the commandment of the Lord! 1. The adaptation of the retribution to the offence is noticeable—a principle in the moral government of God of which there are many instances in Scripture. Jacob deceived his father, and his sons deceive him. He cheats his brother, and is cheated by his uncle Laban. This is remarkably seen in the after-days of David; and while the form of the chastisement appears arbitrary, it is not, for it comes by way of natural consequence of the sins itself. 2. "The babe dies." There was wise reason why it should. That David, whose parental love was strong, felt this blow keenly the history reveals. He watched the child die, knowing it would die, knowing it would die because of him. (*H. E. Stone.*) *David's great sin, and God's greater grace*:—When Alexander, King of Macedon, and one of the few conquerors of the world, had his portrait taken, it is said, he sat with his face resting on his fingers, as though he were in a profound reverie, but really that he might hide from the observer's vision an unsightly scar. Our Bible always keeps the sinner's finger off the scars. It paints the full face with flawless detail—beauty and blotches, saintliness and scare, all, and in all. But, after all, is it not a true human instinct and a healthy canon of art that puts the finger on the scars of the face? Why perpetuate the memorials of deformity? What need to recite the repulsive story of human wrongdoing? Is it not far saner, as our Emerson maintains, to sing the glories of the good, and sink the bad; to chant the praises of virtue, and cover vice with the mantle of concealment? Why should the artist dip his brush in undiluted ugliness, when so many pictures of finished beauty invite his skill? Surely it is no sign of force of intellect or kindness of spirit to explore the warts on a face radiant with beneficent expression! Besides, may you not multiply iniquity by exhibiting it, palliate wrong by disclosing its riotous growths in men of exceptional holiness, and weaken the yielding spirit in combat with temptation by supplying excuses for self-indulgent failure, and elastic resistance to desired defeat? All that depends first, upon the spirit in which the biographer conceives and carries out his design; and next, and mainly, upon the purpose which dominates every part of his painting. You may tell a man's faults for the mean end of gratifying a prurient and debased curiosity; or to palliate and excuse a biting sense of personal wrong-doing; or to compel a low and despairing view of human life; or to give food to a jaundiced and self-condemned egotism that cannot sit still in the presence of greatness, but must, perforce, pelt it with any discoverable stones, picked up with facile fingers out of any mud, by that envy which finds such hospitable entertainment in most of our minds. But the Hebrew historian's account of David's great sin is at once lifted far away, and beyond the touch of all such criticism, by the strenuous and insistent moral purpose of the writer. by his clear consciousness that he is narrating a part of the real, though sad, history of the Kingdom of God; and so forcing a series of foul and atrocious crimes into the ranks of the preachers of righteousness, the beneficent angels of warning and rebuke, hope and courage; the trumpet-tongued heralds of human repentance and

Divine forgiveness, perfected and crowned by merciful renewal and enlargement of soul. (1.) It has set in the irrefutable logic of facts the truth, that increasing and incredible mischiefs follow the violation of the laws of social purity, in monarch as well as subject, in the high-placed as well as the lowly, in the children of genius and of goodness as well as in the offspring of sensualism and vice. (2.) It has proclaimed that woman is not a satanic bait for man's soul, but a minister to his purity and happiness, and that the saintliest men imperil their slowly built integrity, and fling into the depths of the sea the precious jewel of their character, if they fail to maintain an exalted conception of woman as woman, and to pay to her individual soul the homage of a genuine reverence and an inflexible justice. (3.) In the lengthened tale of the consequences of this trespass, and the series of awful tragedies crowded into David's life from this fatal hour, it has revealed the essential falseness of the polygamous basis of family life, repeated the Divine decree that true marriage is of soul with soul, and not of flesh with flesh, and that disaster sooner or later must come to the home and the State of the people who fly in the face of that eternal rule. (4.) It is also a pathetic and powerful enforcement of the law discovered in the dawn of the world's life; that it is "impossible to hush up a solitary lapse." Sin finds us out, if only by dragging other sins in its train. David adds lying to lust; treachery to lying; and murder to all, and at the last, is all but drowned in the swine's trough of sensualism and iniquity. (5.) But the principal message of this chapter in the life of Israel's greatest hero is that David's great sin is met and mastered by God's greater grace. "Where sin abounded, grace much more abounds." But after the best is said that can be said for these fruitful issues, effected by the dews and rains and sunshine of redemption, from such sorry seed by a wonder-working God, still the sin itself is so bad, so heinous, so despicable and aggravated, that it will not bear telling with any sort of patience and ordinary self-control. It makes one's blood boil that a man such as he, so strong and self-disciplined in his youth, heroic and magnanimous in his manhood, fervid and original in his love and worship of the Eternal, wide in his culture, and clear in his vision—that be, David, the poet, the prophet, the patriot, the soldier-king, the saint, at fifty, or maybe at fifty-eight years of age, should slip back into such foul mire, and bedabble and bedraggle his soul through such diabolical vices! It fairly takes one's breath away! Why! he breaks nearly all the commands of God at once! He, a man and a father, forgets his duty to himself as a ruler, and permits the furious steeds of passion to ride rough-shod over all the sanctities of the home! He, a king, commits treason against a subject he is bound to protect! He, a soldier, once so sensitive that he would not touch the skirt of the king with his sword, pens a letter that takes the life of one of his most chivalrous comrades! He, the shepherd and leader of his people, lifted out of the sheepfold to the throne, to guide God's flock, plunges headlong into the lowest of villanies! Oh! "how are the mighty fallen!" "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Undisturbed prosperity for a score years has relaxed the king's vigilance, shrivelled and shrunk his moral fibre, lulled his conscience to sleep, enervated his dedicated and disciplined will. "He has had no changes," and so has forgotten God and his vocation. Ease has made him effeminate. Luxury has generated idleness, for even now he is exposing himself to temptation by "tarrying at Jerusalem," when he should be at the "wars." Reiterated excuses for slight neglects of duty, and satisfaction with a withered ideal, have prepared for this awful catastrophe. It is not well for any of us to escape difficulty, combat, and criticism. We must not forget the perils of advancing years. Age has its dangers not less than youth. Necessity is a better servant to virtue than we usually imagine. Few of us can resist the seductions of ease and affluence, or conquer the fearful temptations born of having "nothing to do." A man should bear the yoke in his youth, and if he is wise he will not be in a hurry to put it off, but will die under its tightening grip. The true soldier aims to be faithful unto death. Age is no dispensation from watchfulness, and length of years no guarantee of safety. The oldest of us must watch and pray, lest we blunt the spiritual sensibility, become the prey of vulgar ambitions, and allow the cleansing fires of self-risking enthusiasms to die down and die out. If David falls after half-a-century's experience of God's mercy, who is safe? But sad as all this is—and we make no apology whatever for David's sin; he does not; Nathan does not; the most distressing and deadly feature of these revolting transgressions is not the plot to murder; the cold-blooded treachery; the gross lust; black and

hideous as they are, but his callosity, his hardness of heart, his seeming supercilious consciousness of no sin. Think of it. For a whole year the guilty monarch lives on and on, face to face with the memorials of his sin; remorse mostly asleep; dull torpor occupying the contested throne of his heart: his bruised soul unrelieved by the throes of a genuine repentance and a full confession. Surely the heart is deceitful above all things, and capable of desperate wickedness, and inexpugnable stolidity! Who can know it! Its self-delusions are unsearchable, and its devious diabolical ways past finding out! But David's superficial apathy and coveted hardness cannot last. God will not let it. He will bring the evil to the light, and pierce the sinner's soul through and through with the two-edged sword of many sorrows, that He may cast out the deadly iniquity. The king's secret crime leaks out: That much decried Minister of Justice, "Gossip," passes along the bazaars, and on to the palace, and to the schools of the seers, until it startles and shocks the soul of the young prophet of God, Nathan. He cannot rest. The bitter tidings fill him with sorrow. The burden of the Lord is upon him. God's anointed must be rebuked, and his fearful doom declared. There can be no paltering with evil because it is done by a king, no truckling to wrongdoing because he who commits it has the power of life and death, no veiling a monstrous iniquity from sight because it is committed by one of exalted place and of exalted character. God and His prophets are no respectors of persons. They witness for stern justice and for rigid and inflexible law; and the higher the rank of the sinner the more urgent the swift exposure of his sin. Strange brain-book this of ours! It seems as though we wrote a page in our life, and then the wind of circumstance rose high and blew it over, and hid it from our sight, never again to be read by us or ours; but God comes by His prophet, His Nathan, His "gift" of Revelation, and His strong fingers open the sealed leaves and turn them back, and the blotted register is held before our startled eyes, and we are compelled to look straight on what we have written, until it seems as though the flashing light of God would burn it into our souls, and make us feel the horrible meanness and bald baseness of our low lives. That penitence was no cheap and easy lip-cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." It was the agony of an inexorably tortured soul; incensed against himself as one who had nourished a serpent in his heart, only that it might discharge its full venom upon him. Bitterly he cries and sobs out his grief, writhes and groans under the intolerable pressure of his sin, reels and staggers from the successive shocks of his anguish, his very bones wasting away amidst his moaning, his life-juices drying up through the burning fevers of his soul, his days wretched, his nights sleepless, his prayer one moan; O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this sin and death. God creates such penitence for sin by Revelation. Sin does not of itself generate repentance. It warps the judgment, hardens the heart, distorts the vision, shrivels the will, slays the man. It is not in sin to cure itself. Nor will penalties redeem and restore. Punishments do not of themselves beget soul-agony for sin—for sins of the thought and the imagination, the will and the affections. George Eliot says in "Daniel Deronda": "Lives are enlarged in different ways. I daresay some would never get their eyes opened if it were not for a violent shock from the consequences of their own actions." Thank God that does happen sometimes, but human story tells us they are extremely few who are chastened and enriched merely by suffering the penalties of their own wrongdoing. Such issues beget despair, and lead a Judas to suicide; but alone, they rarely, if ever, lead to life. They may accumulate self-reproach, discover the blundering stupidity of all sin, sour and embitter the temper, and crush and grind the man to powder; but it is God in His prophets Who begets a divinely cleansing repentance, a fierce and pure hatred of wrong as wrong, and a renewed dedication to goodness and righteousness. It always takes a gospel to make a penitent. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses." The vision of Divine love breaks the hardest heart. The infinite pathos of the Cross touches the spirit with softer power for contrition and for comfort than the song of the angels at Bethlehem. God quickens and enlarges a thorough repentance with His free and instant forgiveness, and crowns it with swift peace, soul enlargement, and hallowed progress. "A broken and a contrite spirit" is His most coveted home, and the souls of the penitent have been His chosen dwelling-place in all generations. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth;" then how glad and full and deep the delight, when the heart of

a David sobs with grief over his sin; the long estrangement from God is ended, and the right spirit is once more supreme! "The Lord hath also put away thy sin." But note, although God forgives the sin, He does not remit the penalty. He cannot. Infinite in power and resistless in will, He does not. He cannot cut off, at once and for ever, the issues of David's iniquities. Wrong has an indestructible vitality, and a prodigious reproductiveness independently of him who did it. Most appalling is this tragic feature of our mysterious life! Never is that penalty lifted wholly out of David's career. It dogs him to the very end. It is there in the death of Bathsheba's child. It is there in the thickening plots of the palace; in the crime of Ammon; in the revolt of Absalom; and in the wickedness of his children. It is there in the air of the court laden with his infecting impurity; there in the "whips" to scourge him, made of the knotted cords of his "pleasant vices." But forgiveness is not all David seeks; nor is it all he obtains. The greater grace of God triumphs over the great sin of David in making it contributive to his spiritual enlargement, the clearing and expansion of his conceptions of sin, of responsibility, of personality, of God, and of holiness. He recovers his original attitude of sincerity and simplicity, of uprightness of purpose, and of straight and steadfast vision; and from his own failure gains the clearest expressions of personal and individual sin the Bible contains. His sin accentuates his sense of personality in God and in self. "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight." Let us adore the grace of God that carries on the upbuilding of men, not alone by shepherds' tasks and patriots' perils, courtiers' duties and singers' psalms, but also, and surprisingly by the ministry of sin, converting failures in human purpose and foibles in human lives, into goads and beacons, and transmuting even the victories of low animalism and blinding sense into whips and thongs driving the offending Adam out of the swine's field and into the pastures of the flock of God. The fact is as undeniable as it is glorious. Speaking to M. de Lesseps on the occasion of his admission to the Academy, M. Renan said: "You have that supreme gift that, like faith, works miracles. And the reason of your ascendancy is this—that men see in you a heart that sympathises with all that is human, and a veritable passion for ameliorating the lot of all mankind. They find in you that pity for the multitude which is the mainspring in all men of great practical talent. . . . You are a master of the supreme art which consists in knowing how to do good with evil, and get the great out of the little." And is it not also one of the chief problems of science to convert the waste products of the world into the service of mankind? Has not chemistry, within the last thirty years, coaxed a whole world of beautiful colours out of the refuse of coal-tar? But in all this, man is only the imitator of Him Who makes the wrath of men to praise Him. "He saveth to the uttermost." Limit, there is none to His forgiveness. Barrier does not exist to His conquering grace. David is the Saul of Tarsus of the Hebrew Church. It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that turn to Him with a broken and contrite heart, showing mercy to the penitent, be they never so guilty; and saving David, that in him as chief, God might show forth His long-suffering for an ensample to them that should hereafter believe on Him to eternal life. Let no man despair. (*J. Clifford.*) *Of self-examination:*—Self-examination may be called an arraignment of ourselves at our own bar, according to that word of our Eucharist Service: "Judge, therefore, yourselves, brethren, that ye be not judged of the Lord." It is easy—fatally easy—with self-examination as with prayer, to allow the exercise to be drawn down from its high moral and spiritual aim to the level of a form. But while we continue it, let us strive to throw reality and life into it by regarding the great duty on a large, comprehensive, and spiritual scale. Consider, first, the necessity for all of us, in respect both of our sins and of our good works, of an exercise of like self-examination. This necessity arises from the fact, so distinctly stated in Scripture, that "the heart is deceitful above all things," and that "he that trusteth in his own heart"—in its dictates respecting himself and his own spiritual condition—"is a fool." It has pleased God to illustrate this cardinal truth by two grand examples, one in the Old and one in the New Testament. It must have been by trust in the subtle evasions and plausible shifts of his own heart that David, after committing two of the worst crimes of which our nature is capable, so long contrived to keep his conscience quiet, but at length was convicted of the desperate folly of severely condemning in another man the very faults which, in an infinitely aggravated

form, he had been palliating and excusing in himself. And it was by trusting in the assurances which his heart gave him of his own strong attachment to his Master, that St. Peter, secure of himself, was betrayed into the weakness and folly of denying Christ. May we say that, while all characters are liable to the snare of self-deception, those are more particularly exposed to it who, like St. Peter and David, are persons of keen sensibility, warm temperaments, quick affections? But how shall we bring home to ourselves the dangerousness of trusting, without due examination, to the verdict of our own hearts? We will do so by supposing a parallel case in a matter, where we are all peculiarly apt to be cautious and suspicious—the goods of this world. Suppose, then, that the chief agent in some great speculation is a man who, though most untrustworthy, has all the art of conciliating trust. Suppose him to be fluent, fair-spoken, prepossessing in manners and appearance, and to be especially plausible in glossing over a financial difficulty. Advance one more step in the hypothesis, and suppose him to be a private friend of many of those who are embarked with him in the same speculation; allied to some of them by marriage, and, more or less, in habits of intimacy with all. If such a person is at the head of affairs, and entrusted with the administration of the funds contributed by all, it is evident that he might impose upon the contributors to almost any extent. Now the peril of such trust in worldly matters supplies a very fair image of the peril of a still more foolish and groundless trust in spiritual things. Our hearts are notoriously most untrustworthy informants in any case where we are ourselves interested. It is not only Scripture which assevers this. We confess it ourselves, and re-echo the verdict of Scripture, when we say of any slight matter, with which we happen to be mixed up, “I am an interested party, and therefore I had better not be a judge.” What frightful arrears may we be running up, unawares to ourselves, if we do not sharply check and suspiciously watch this heart, who administers for us the account between us and God! The first step in real self-examination is to be fully aware of the deceitfulness of the heart, and to pray against it, watch against it, and use every possible method of counteracting it. But what means can we use? We offer a few practical suggestions in answer to this question.

1. As regards our acknowledged sins. We must remember that their hatefulness, and aggravations, if they were publicly confessed, might very probably be recognised by every one but ourselves, the perpetrators. There are certain loathsome diseases, which are offensive and repulsive in the highest degree to every one but the patient. And there is a close analogy between the spiritual frame of man and his natural; if the moral disease be your own—rooted in your character, clinging to your own heart, it never can affect you with the same disgust as if it were another man’s.

2. But the probe of self-examination needs to be applied to the better, as well as to the worse parts of our conduct. The natural heart is an adept in flatteries, not only suggesting excuses for the evil, but also heightening the colours of the good which, by God’s grace, is in us. Where conduct stands the test of self-examination, the motives of it should be called in question. We must do in regard of ourselves what we may never do in regard of others—suspect that an unsound motive may underlie a fair conduct. Certain proprieties and regularities of behaviour, whether devotional or moral, are secured by deference to the prevailing opinions and habits of society, as is shown sometimes by the fact that, when we are in foreign parts, and no longer under this restraint, those proprieties and regularities are not so carefully maintained. Many good actions are done, more or less, because they are in keeping with a man’s position, conciliate credit to him, gain him the praise of others. Works of usefulness and social (and even religious) improvement may be undertaken, more or less, from that activity of mind which is inherent in some characters, because naturally we cannot bear to be standing still, and are constitutionally unfitted for a studious, contemplative life. To have probed their own wounds, and pored over their own inflamed and envenomed frames, would have availed the poisoned Israelites nothing, unless, after such a survey of their misery, they had lifted their eyes to the brazen serpent. “Look unto Him,” therefore, “and be ye healed.” (E. M. Goulburn, D.D.)

Nathan’s parable:—I. THE PARABLE AS BASED UPON FACT. There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had many flocks and herds: the poor man had one ewe lamb. And the rich man, in a case of emergency, instead of taking a lamb out of his own flock, killed the one ewe lamb of the poor man. If that never occurred we must know it. Did it ever occur? It is the thing that is occurring every day. It is the infinite danger

of wealth that it becomes oppressive, cruel, thoughtless, selfish. There is a sanctified wealth; there is a gracious social position; there is a condescending royalty. But why should it be remarked that such should be the case? Simply because of the almost innate tendency of men to use wealth with cruelty and selfishness. The poor man feels the cold wind first. The destruction of the poor man is his poverty. Wealth when it oppresses carries with it its own condemnation. Wealth when it is used as a means of succouring men, helping the true and the good is doing the work of God. But we are dealing with something below all that we now know as personal facts—namely, with principles, mysteries, with that whole region, almost undiscovered, of motive, passion, impulse that never can be explained adequately in words. On the other hand, a man is not necessarily a virtuous citizen because he has only one ewe lamb. Let us be impartial.

II. **THE PARABLE AS A METHOD OF TEACHING.** The parable was a favourite educational instrument in Eastern nations. There were many parable-makers in Oriental lands. But where are the parables equal to those which are to be found in the Bible? Balaam had a parable, Jotham had a parable: Nathan has a parable, and others in the Old Testament now and again come very near to the line of parable, but in proportion as we discover the parable to be beautiful and true we see in it the Spirit of the living God—the Eternal Force—the Divine Quantity. But when we come to the teaching of Jesus Christ all the other parables fall off into dim perspective; and after he laid down that instrument was it ever taken up again? Jesus Christ often fetched a compass—and he fetched it by such a sweep, by such a reach of mind, that the men upon whom his attention was fastened little suspected, until after the completion of the parable, that they were the objects of his judgment and condemnation. This is masterly preaching—to be personal without the individuals knowing that we are such: to get up a whole statement, coloured in every hue of heaven, sharp with all the pungency of criticism, and for men afterwards to wake up to the fact that the preacher was meaning none other than themselves. What applies to Christ's parables, and to all others of the same quality, applies to the whole revelation of God.

III. **THE PARABLE AS A PRACTICAL REVELATION OF GOD'S JUSTICE.** We have seen that the thing which David did "displeased the Lord." Does God treat the sin lightly? He says: "The sword shall never depart from thine house;" across every bright summer that shines upon thee there shall be a great bar of blackness; when the birds sing to thee thou shalt be constrained to punctuate their songs with memories of remorse; when thou dost lift the flagon to thy lips the wine shall leave behind it a poisonous taste; when thou liest down a thorn shall puncture thee: thou shalt never escape from this deed of wickedness. Whilst, therefore, the mocker is eager to quote as against the Bible the sin of David, if he be a just man as well as a jiber he ought to quote the judgment pronounced by God, and to see how true is the doctrine of eternal torment even in relation to this life. This parable, too, shows us man's responsibility. David is not allowed to escape on the ground of being overtaken in a fault. Kings ought to be their own subjects. The greater the man, the greater should be the saint. The greater the opportunities we have had of education and culture of every kind, the severer should be public criticism upon our lapses and iniquities. To whom much has been given, from him shall much be expected. He who knoweth his Lord's will and doeth it not shall be beaten with many stripes. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Nathan as a true prophet*:—Nathan here presents the image of a prophet in its noblest and most attractive form. Boldness, tenderness, inventiveness, and tact were combined in such admirable proportions that a prophet's functions, if always discharged in a similar manner with equal discretion, would have been acknowledged by all to be purely beneficent. In his interposition there is a kind of ideal moral beauty. In the schools of the prophets he doubtless held the place which St. Ambrose afterwards held in the minds of priests for the exclusion of the Emperor Theodosius from the church of Milan after the massacre of Thessalonica. (*W. Smith, D.D.*) *Nathan the parabolist*:—Krummacher tells us how the wise Nathan learned the benefit of parables. He sought to instruct men by putting on coarse garments, and using harsh words; but men ran from him and left him vexed and alone. After a miserable night he was led by the spirit of God to a pomegranate tree, bearing flowers and fruit at the same time. He contemplated it, and saw the fruit concealed among the leaves. Then the word of the Lord came from the pomegranate tree, saying: "Behold, Nathan! thus nature promises the delicious fruits

by the simple flower, and offers it from the shade of the leaves concealing her hand." Nathan was cheered, and henceforth taught by parables, winning many to the ways of truth. *Reproof by portrait*:—Leech, the celebrated artist and caricaturist, is said to have had an effective method of reprimanding his children. If their faces were distorted with anger, or a rebellious temper, or a sullen mood, he took out his sketch-book, transferred their lineaments to paper, and showed them, to their own confusion, how ugly naughtiness was. (*Sunday Companion*.) *The force of private admonition*:—Great is the benefit of conference and private admonition. Luther was much helped this way by Staupicius; Galeacius by Peter Martyr; Junius by a countryman of his not far from Florence; Senarclæus by John Diazius; Latimer by blessed St. Bilney, as he styleth him; Dr. Taylor by that angel of God, John Bradford, who counted that hour lost wherein he had not done some good with his hand, pen, or tongue. Private admonition, saith one, is the pastor's privy purse, as princes have theirs, besides their public disbursements. It repented good Mr. Hiron, and troubled him on his deathbed, that he had been so backward to it, and barren of it. (*J. Trapp*.) *Definite teaching as to sin*:—Delivering publicly a charge to a newly-ordained minister, Robert Hall said to him: "Be not afraid of devoting whole sermons to particular parts of moral conduct and religious duty. It is impossible to give right views of them unless you dissect characters, and describe particular virtues and vices. The works of the flesh and the fruits of the Spirit must be distinctly pointed out. To preach against sin in general without descending to particulars may lead many to complain of the evil in their hearts, while at the same time they are awfully inattentive to the evil of their conduct." How wise is this! We need to be specific as to home-sins, business-sins, social-sins, church-sins, pew-sins, and pulpit-sins; for to lay bare definite evil is half-way towards its removing. No preaching was ever more pointed and personal and practical than that of our Lord Jesus Christ, and those who heard Him knew He meant themselves if no other. (*H. O. Mackey*.) *Reproving without offending*:—It is told us of Henry Martyn that he was a man with a wonderful power of telling men of their faults, and bringing them to a right mind, and yet never offending them. Someone said to him: "How do you manage to tell them their faults without offending them?" He replied, "I never go to another to tell him his fault, until I have been down on my knees before God, and seen that, but for His present grace, I should be in the same fault myself." That is the spirit of meekness. Yes, blessed are the meek who will get down, just as Henry Martyn did; he got down on to his knees, and that is the best way to get to the ground, and then from that level he spoke to the one who was in fault. When he got up he lifted his brother with him. (*H. Brooke, M.A.*) *Preaching to the conscience*:—Robert Wodrow tells a story of a certain merchant who "came from London to St. Andrew's in Fife, where he heard first the great and worthy Mr. Blair preach, next he heard the great Rutherford preach, and afterward Mr. Dickson. When he came back to London his friends asked him what news he had from Scotland. He answered, he had very great and good news to tell them. They wondered much what they could be, for he was before that time a man altogether a stranger to true religion. He told them he heard one Mr. Blair preach at St. Andrew's; and describing his features and the stature of his body, he said, "That man showed me the majesty of God"—which was Mr. Robert Blair's peculiar talent. "Then," added he, "I afterwards heard a little fair man preach"—Mr. Rutherford—"and that man showed me the loveliness of Christ. Then I came and heard at Irvine a well-favoured, proper old man, with a long beard"—which was the famous Mr. Dickson—"and that man showed me all my heart;" for he was most fond of any man of his time to speak to cases of conscience. (*Alexander Smellie*.)

Ver. 5. David's anger was greatly kindled against the man.—*The self-deception of sin*:—You do not know the strength and poison of sin till you resist it. It was this want of resistance that led David into such depths of humiliation and degradation. He was allowed, of course, by the law of Moses to have as many wives as he pleased. His great victories over the Syrians at Helam had given him an inflated sense of self-importance and power. He had slain the men of 700 chariots of the Syrians and 40,000 horsemen, and had killed Shobach himself, the general of King Hadarezer. The shepherd-boy who had become king was delighted with himself. He thought he could do anything. His

conscience was lulled to sleep. He broke the seventh commandment. But he went on in his easy slipping away from rectitude. He resisted nothing. So it was with St. Augustine of Hippo, the greatest of the Fathers of the Church. He had a Christian mother of eminent piety and noble character, and the idea of God and the love of the name of Christ never entirely left him; but all through his youth he behaved as he saw others doing. He resisted no inclination. He gave himself up to all the sins of his heathen companions, and placed no restraint on himself of any kind; not till long years afterwards did he see the hideousness of his conduct. "Woe is me," he cries in his Confessions, "and dare I say that Thou didst hold Thy peace, O my God, while I was straying further from Thee? Didst Thou, then, indeed hold Thy peace from me? And whose but Thine were those words which by my mother, Thy faithful one, Thou didst chant in my ears? Nothing whereof sank into my heart so as to do it. They seemed to me womanish advices, which I should blush to obey. But they were Thine, and I knew it not; and I thought Thou didst hold Thy peace, and it was she who spoke; by whom Thou didst not hold Thy peace; and in her Thou wast despised by me, I knew it not; and ran headlong with such blindness that among my equals I was ashamed of being less vicious, when I heard them boast of their vices, yea, boasting the more the baser they were; and I took pleasure not only in a wicked act, but in the praise of it." And again in another place:—"I have loved Thee late, Thou Divine Beauty, so old and so new; I have loved Thee late! And lo! Thou wast within, but I was without, and was seeking Thee there. And into Thy fair creation I plunged myself in my ugliness; for Thou wast with me, and I was not with Thee. Those things kept me away from Thee, which had not been except they had been in Thee. Thou didst call, and didst cry aloud, and break through my deafness. Thou didst glimmer, Thou didst shine, and didst drive away my blindness. Thou didst breathe, and I drew breath, and breathed in Thee. I tasted Thee, and I hunger and thirst. Thou didst touch me, and I burn for Thy peace. If I, with all that is within me, may once live in Thee, then shall pain and trouble forsake me; entirely filled with Thee all shall be life to me." Not till he resisted sin in the strength of the grace of his conversion and baptism did Augustine see the enormities of his past life, which till then had seemed excusable as the life of other young men of his age and time. "It is impossible to estimate the strength of the principle of evil in the soul till we begin to struggle with it; and the careless or sinful man—the man who is not striving with sin, but succumbing to it—cannot know its force." It is a law of Nature that resistance is the best measure of force. Look at the stream of that calm, majestic river; it is sweeping along silently, with hardly a ripple. Its surface is so smooth that you would hardly know that it was moving at all. Suddenly it comes along its course to a place where rocks stand up from its bed and oppose its current. At once it is torn by resistance into waves and foam. All its strength and swiftness are revealed as it lashes itself against the opposing masses. Think of the wind rushing over a wide plain. As long as it meets no obstacles, you cannot measure its strength. But as soon as it leaps on the trees of the forest, and wrestles with their giant arms, and tosses and writhes them about in the air; as soon as it flings itself upon houses and streets and towns, as soon as it reaches the sea, and beats and pushes its deep waters into towering mountains of top-heavy billows; then you hear it shriek and howl, and you know its power by its results. Think, again, of some still, ice-bound region, locked in silence, over which the long months of a sunless winter have lain heavy. There is a quiet as of death. But at length the warmer currents of spring make themselves felt below the deep vast covering of ice that seemed so immovable; and the sun comes up at last from his protracted exile, and then the forces of nature burst forth, the ice is cracked and torn with a thousand fissures, as by the invisible blows of giants, the boom and roar of breaking and colliding masses deafen the whole air with ceaseless thunder, and you know at length the strength of that long tyranny that has been overthrown. So it is in the moral and spiritual world. The power and nature of sin are only seen when you begin to resist it. You only know what you are escaping from when you begin to wrestle against the ropes that bind you. That is the reason why so many men and women of the world, with a low standard of conduct, seem to have no remorse. They make no struggle. They have little or no happiness, because the consequences of sin are so unsatisfying. But they do not at present know anything better. Wordliness and evil sweep over their natures like the smooth current of the river, like

the silent wind over the unresisting plain, like the deadly frost crushing the life out of the Arctic Sea. It is astonishing how far men will go in these unconventional aspects of conduct. A Neapolitan shepherd came in great anguish to his priest. "Father," he cried, "have mercy on a miserable sinner! I should have fasted, but while I was busy at work, some whey, spurring from the cheese-press, flew into my mouth, and—wretched man—I swallowed it! Free my distressed conscience by absolving me from my guilt!" "Have you no other sin to confess?" said his spiritual guide. "No, I do not know that I have committed any other." "There are," said the priest, "many robberies and murders from time to time committed on your mountains, and I have reason to believe you are one of the persons concerned in them." "Yes," he replied, "I am; but these are never accounted a crime; it is a thing practised by us all, and there needs no confession on that account." That is only an instance of the low depths to which conventionality may sink. No doubt his adviser taught him to begin to resist his robbing and murderous habits. The man seemed innocent enough, because he only compared himself with his comrades, not with the law of God. He, and such as he—and how many there are in similar case!—are like the snowdrift when it has levelled the churchyard mounds, and, glistening in the winter sun, lies so pure and fair and beautiful. And yet the dead are rotting and festering below. A very plausible profession, wearing the look of confidence and innocence, may conceal from human eyes the foulest corruption of the heart. In whatever way sin has prevailed over an individual—whether in avarice, injustice, ill-temper, pride, vanity, sensuality, untruthfulness, dishonesty, deceitfulness, guile, envy, malice, spite, vindictiveness, selfishness, worldliness, ambition, covetousness, party spirit, self-will—it generally reigns as powerful as the mighty stream, as withering as the icy frost. The soul is hardly aware of its bondage, it is so complete. "The Sanskrit word for 'serpent,'" says Max Müller, "was *Ahi*, the throttler. The root of the word means to press together, to choke, to throttle. This word was chosen with great truth as the proper name for sin. Evil, though presented under various aspects to the mind, having also many names, had none so expressive as that derived from the root, 'to throttle.' *Anhas*, sin, was throttling, consciousness of sin, the grasp of sin on the throat of his victim. The statue of Laocoon and his sons, with the serpents coiled round them from head to foot, realises what the ancients felt and saw when they called sin *Anhas*, the 'throttler.' And it does more than choke—it blinds." "It is amongst the most potent of the energies of sin," says Archer Butler, "that it leads astray by blinding, and blinds by leading astray; that the soul of man, like the strong champion of Israel, must 'have its eyes put out' when it is to be 'bound with fetters of brass,' and condemned to grind in the prison-house." "Often," it has been said, "the sense of guilt breaks upon the awakened spirit with all the strangeness of a discovery." So it was with St. Augustine of Hippo. So it was with Thomas Scott the commentator, the great saint of the end of the last century. When he left school he was bound as an apprentice to a surgeon. He behaved in such a manner that at the end of two months his master dismissed him, and he returned home in deep disgrace. "Yet," he said, "I must always regard that short season of my apprenticeship as one of the choicest mercies of my life. My master, though himself irreligious, first excited in my mind a serious conviction of sin committed against God. Remonstrating with me on my misconduct, he said I ought to recollect that it was not only displeasing to him but wicked in the sight of God. This remark proved the primary means of my conversion." You cannot tell when the voice will come or how; but depend upon it God will not leave you alone, and your salvation may depend on your discerning His warning or remonstrance and listening to it. There is a wholesome and significant legend in the Koran of the dwellers by the Dead Sea, to whom Moses was sent. They scoffed and sneered at him; they saw no message in what he said, and so he withdrew. But Nature and her rigorous veracities did not withdraw. When next we find the dwellers by the Dead Sea, says the legend, they had all become changed into apes. By not using their souls they lost them. The voice of conscience can be stifled. Light can be rejected. God's spirit ever striving can be resisted by the rebellious freewill of man. (*W. M. Sinclair*.) *The partiality and blindness of self-love*:—1. And we may observe that the readiest way to pass a true judgment upon any occasion is to be one's self disinterested and unconcerned, and to remove the cause to a third person. David here considered the case. The circumstances of his life were never such:

nor such, at any time, his disposition. Therefore, he is very free to consider narrowly, how much injustice and cruelty were in this single act of oppression; and viewing it in all its most unsightly colours, as freely could condemn it. The reason why we refer our causes to the arbitrement of a third person is not because he understands them better than ourselves (for that is not always so), nor that he loves justice better, but because he has no interest or inclination to corrupt and bias him, one way or other, but will judge according to reason. It is the same case with ourselves, when either love or hate, hope or fear or any other passion possesses us; we are too much prejudiced to judge exactly righteous judgment; every inclination or aversion drives us from that steadiness of mind which is requisite to the being impartial: Every little slight appearance is an argument when our goodwill is on its side, and the most solid weighty reasons are light as the dust of the balance, when urged against our interest or our humour. Every man and woman looks well enough in their own glass, but that is not the way to judge of beauty; we stand too near ourselves to see ourselves exactly. In a word, we love ourselves too well to censure hardly, and the voice of slander is the other extreme, so that the common judgment oftenest hits the truth in judging of our public actions. 2. That we may therefore know ourselves the better, and judge impartially of offences, we may observe the prudent way of parables, which the Spirit of God uses, throughout the Scriptures, to bring men to a sense of their condition by transferring the cause to another person, and showing men themselves in another's image. Our Saviour, who was exceeding tender, where he could find the least degree of modesty, uses this way of parables most frequently, instructing and reproving the Jews, in the person of a stranger. The end our Saviour drove at was not their shame, but their amendment, and therefore if they would but apprehend his meaning he would press no farther. "When the Lord of the Vineyard cometh" (Mat. xxi. 40) "what will he do to those husbandmen" who had beaten and stoned his servants and killed at last his son? "They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men," etc. Thus, by this parable, he brought them to acknowledge the justice of God in destroying the Jewish people for their great infidelity and cruelty shown to himself, the true Messiah. Had Nathan come to David and told him of a certain prince in the world who, having abundance of wives and concubines of his own, would not yet, in a fit of dissolution, satisfy those inclinations, where he might without offence or injury, but would needs send to one, who was his neighbour and a nobleman, to have his wife, who had but one, and whom he loved most tenderly, and accordingly debauched her, bereaving the man of all the joy and satisfaction of his life. Had Nathan addressed David with this story the king had found out his drift immediately, but the rude application would have given him such distaste that, though he might have been convinced of his guilt, yet probably he would not so freely have confessed himself guilty. The bluntness of reproof does not well suit with the modesty of human nature; and downright coming upon a man puts him upon his guard, into whose good liking you might have insinuated yourself and gained your point by artificial soft approaches. And people who design the benefit of those they would reprove will be careful to do it in the most acceptable manner; their chiefest aim is to secure their end, and their next point of wisdom is to use such methods as are easiest and most useful. And this especially should be observed in dealing with perverse tempers or with great superiors. And therefore great discretion is to temper zeal, to prevent its excesses; and zeal is to come in and hinder our discretion from degenerating into fear and cowardice, and being corrupted by our interest or self-love, for no example can be an adequate sufficient rule in all cases, to all people. 3. We may observe from hence the great partiality and blindness of self-love, that will not let us see how heinous our own offences are, nor suffer us to condemn them with the rigour they deserve, when we do see them. If the cruel oppression of this rich man in the parable deserved death, in the opinion of David, what would the violation of the marriage-bed deserve? And what the murder of the husband? When one would do justice one should remove the cause to a third person, and be wholly unconcerned; but when we would show mercy, then let us bring it home and put ourselves in the condition. And we may see how transcendently great the mercies of God are to men above what men can afford with reason to one another. Violent theft is worthy of death, so is adultery, and so is murder. They are offences that overthrow society and good order. Now all these sins are no less heinous in the sight of God than they are mischievous to men; and yet

God pardons them upon repentance. 'Tis a true plague, this wickedness! A man infects all he converses with, and gives them death, but dies himself also. David makes Joab guilty of Uriah's death, and many other officers and soldiers, but is himself, after all that, the man that kills Uriah. Men must not, therefore, think they avoid the guilt of many crimes by avoiding the being concerned immediately in committing them; there is a murdering men by other people's swords than our own, and a swearing people out of their estates by other men's perjuries, and a doing violence by other people's hands, of which we may ourselves be guilty, and for which we shall one day answer, as well as our instruments. A man may contract guilt, even by intentions, wishes, and desires, although they never take effect. If one man persuades another, his equal, to a piece of wickedness he will be guilty of that wickedness himself, though it be not plain how far, nor in what degree or measure; but if he command, or use authority with arguments, to his son, or servant, to commit the same wickedness, he will be, in such case, more guilty, proportionately to the power and influence a father or a master is presumed to have over a son or servant, which he uses to so bad purpose. If David the king, or Joab the general, command a common soldier to retire from Uriah in the heat of battle, and leave him to perish, they will be somewhat more guilty of Uriah's death than a common officer would be, though counselling the same thing, because the authority and influence of the former was so much greater, and more like to take effect, and the soldier is presumed to be more at liberty to refuse his compliance with such unjust and villainous commands, when they come from one who is nearer to him, and whose displeasure he dreads not so much, nor hopes so much from his favour. Let the people, therefore, that are busied in this bad work of setting others upon wicked actions consider this, that, however innocent they appear to the world, and unconcerned, however wary to avoid the censure of people and the punishment of the laws, by keeping out of sight, and at a distance, they are nevertheless guilty before God, according to the power and influence they have had over the instruments of wickedness that they employed, and that it will avail them little at the day of judgment to have kept their tongues from perjury and their hands from blood or other violence when their hearts have been deeply concerned in willing and desiring, and contriving and resolving, and their tongues employed in insinuating, persuading, threatening, or commanding wickedness, to other people.

4. Another use that we may make of Nathan's application may be, to use his words ourselves upon occasion, to be in earnest, and to let our consciences pronounce these words distinctly to us, "Thou art the man," when there is reason. A prophet will not always be at hand to tell us when we have offended, but every one's own heart will be to him a prophet, and speak it plainly to him, if he will but hear it. 'Twas a strange lethargy that David fell into, for the space of at least ten months, and one can hardly tell how a man so quick and tender as he was could possibly continue so long unmolested; the liberties of princes and great men in the East were always very great, and so continue to this day. David knew better than all the world besides that he was guilty of it. David knew his own intentions and his orders. We are therefore at liberty to think that David was not, for ten whole months, perfectly ignorant and unconcerned, and without all troublesome reflection on what had passed, but that he was, like people half asleep, alarmed with a sort of distant noise, but not enough to waken them throughout; he lay, as it were, in pleasing slumbers, and was afraid of rising to a full recollection of what he had done, and yet not able quite to shake it off. When I say, therefore, that a man should use these words of Nathan and be a prophet to himself, I mean that he should use no shifts or wicked arts to stifle his remembrance of his former life, but let his conscience do its part in reflecting on what is past, and in applying faithfully what is heard or read, proper to his condition, and I make no doubt but he would often hear it say with Nathan, "Thou art the man." And truly, unless a man will do his heart this right, as to let it speak freely, upon fit occasions, without endeavouring to choke or silence it, by vicious habits and a constant succession of business, or diversions, it will be hard for him ever to be again renewed to repentance. (II. *Felwood, D.D.*) *On the deceitfulness of sin*:—There are many circumstances in this narration which may and ought to remind us of truth in which we are too nearly interested. But the principal of them will be comprehended if we learn from it the following points of doctrine. I. THAT, WITHOUT CONTINUAL CARE, THE BEST OF MEN MAY BE LED INTO

THE WORST OF CRIMES. Every man hath within him the principles of every bad action that the worst man ever did. And though in some they are languid, and seem scarce alive, yet, if fostered by indulgence, they will soon grow to incredible strength: nay, if only left to themselves, will, in seasons favourable to them, shoot up, and overrun the heart, with such surprising quickness that all the good seed shall be choked on a sudden by tares, which we never imagined had been within us. And what increases the danger is that each of us hath some wrong inclination or other, it is well if not several, beyond the rest natural to us, and the growth of the soil. Then, besides all our inward weaknesses, the world about us is thick set round with snares, differently formed; some provoking us to immoderate passion, or envious malignity; some alluring us with forbidden pleasures or softening us into supineness and indolence. Not that with all this we have the least cause to be disheartened, but only on our guard. He that imagines himself to be safe never is so; but they, who keep in their minds a sense of their danger, and pray for, and trust in, help from God, will always be able to avoid or go through it. Temptation hath no power, the great tempter himself hath no power, but that of using persuasion. Forced we cannot be, so long as we are true to ourselves. David at first violated only the rules of decency, which he might easily have observed, and have turned away his eyes from an improper object. This, which doubtless he was willing to think a very pardonable gratification of nothing worse than curiosity, carried him on far beyond his first intention, to the heinous crime of adultery. There, undoubtedly, he designed to stop, and keep what had passed secret from all the world. But virtue hath ground to stand upon; vice hath not; and, if we give way at all, the tendency downward increases every moment. Sometimes the treacherous pleasantness of the path invites us to stray a little farther, though we are sensible it descends to the gates of hell. Sometimes the consciousness that we are guilty already tempts us to fancy it immaterial how much more we become so, without reflecting that by every sin which we add we diminish the hope of retreat, and augment the weight of our condemnation. Sometimes, again, as in the case before us, one act of wickedness requires another, or many more, to cover it. Lesser instances of undue parsimony grow insensibly into the meanest and most sordid avarice; lesser instances of greediness of gain into the most hard-hearted rapaciousness. And on the other hand, little negligences in their affairs, little affectations of living above their ability, little pieces of expensive vanity and extravagance, are the direct road to those confirmed habits of carelessness and prodigality by which people foolishly and wickedly ruin themselves and their families, and too commonly others besides their own. Always, therefore, beware of small sins. **II. THAT MEN ARE APT TO OVERLOOK THEIR OWN MISDEMEANOURS, AND YET TO BE EXTREMELY QUICK-SIGHTED AND SEVERE IN RELATION TO THOSE OF OTHERS.** The facts which David had committed were the most palpable, the most crying sins, that could be; nothing, one should think, to excuse them; nothing to disguise them; no name but their own to call them by: adultery, falsehood, murder. Even after the murder many months appear to have passed before Nathan was sent to him: still David had not recollected himself, but seemed to go on in perfect tranquillity. Nay, which is more astonishing than the rest, when the prophet had contrived a story on purpose to convict him of his guilt, representing the first part of it so exactly that nothing, which was not the same under different names, could be liker, it never once brought it, so far as appears, to his memory. Yet all this while he had not, in the least degree, lost the sense of what was right and wrong in general. We all know our duty, or easily may: we are all abundantly ready at seeing and censuring what others do amiss; and yet we all continue, more or less, to do amiss ourselves without regarding it. The main precepts of life, such as we are most apt to fail in, are partly obvious to reason, partly taught with sufficient clearness by revelation. Let all the sophistry in the world recommend, let all the powers upon earth enjoin, irreligion, cruelty, fraud, promiscuous lewdness: it will, notwithstanding, be altogether impossible, either to make the practice of them tolerable to society, or to change in all the inward abhorrence of them which mankind in general are led by nature to entertain. But still the majority even of heathens, and surely then of Christians, do or may, for the most part, as clearly discern what is blameable and commendable as what is crooked and straight. Let it be tried in the conduct of an acquaintance or contemporary; the principal danger will be of a sentence too rigorous. For if the

sin brought in question before us be one to which we have no inclination we shall be sure to censure it without the least mercy. And though it be one of which we have been guilty, provided our guilt be unknown or forgotten, we can usually declare against it as harshly as the most innocent person alive. Or how moderate soever the consciousness of our own past behaviour might otherwise dispose us to be: yet if once we come to be sufferers' ourselves by the same kind of sins, which we have formerly indulged, and perhaps often made others suffer by them, then we can be immoderately loud in our complaints of what formerly we fancied, or pretended, had little or no hurt in it. Nay, without any such provocation, few things are commoner than to hear people condemn their own faults in those around them. Now these instances prove, we are convinced, that all sorts of sins are wrong: only we err in the application of our conviction. No one's failings escape us but our own: and of them the most glaring escape us. Self-love persuades us to think favourably of our conduct in general. Then, in some things, the bounds between lawful and unlawful are hard to be exactly determined. Now, unfair minds lay hold on these difficulties with inexpressible eagerness: and choosing, not, as they should, the safer side, but that to which the bias within attracts them, proceed, under the cover of such doubts, to the most undoubted wickedness: as if, because it is not easy to say precisely, at what moment of the evening light ends and darkness begins, therefore midnight could not be distinguished from noonday. Thus, because it cannot be ascertained just how much every one ought to give in charity, too many will give nothing, or next to nothing. Because it cannot be exactly decided how much time is the most that we may allowably spend in recreation and amusement: therefore multitudes will consume almost the whole of their days in trifling instead of applying to the proper business of life, in order to give their account with joy to him who shall judge the quick and the dead. These and the like things they will, some of them, defend and palliate with wonderful acuteness; designed partly to excuse them to others, but chiefly to deceive and pacify themselves. Not that they ever attain either of these ends. For their neighbours, after all, just as plainly perceive their faults, as they perceive those of their neighbours. And it is but a half deceit that they put upon their own souls. Yet this dream of security is but a very disturbed one: nothing like the clear and joyful perception that he hath, whose conscience is thoroughly awake, and assures him of his own innocence, or true repentance, and interest in the pardon which his Redeemer hath purchased. But in however strong delusion God may permit them to remain at present, how can they be sure but ere long remorse may seize them, an adversary expose them. Therefore, one of the happiest things imaginable is being made sensible of our sins in time: and the first step to that is reflecting how liable we are both to commit them and to overlook them. III. THAT, AS SOON AS WE ARE, BY ANY MEANS, MADE SENSIBLE OF OUR OFFENCES WE OUGHT TO ACKNOWLEDGE THEM WITH DUE PENITENCE. Indeed, let the person that makes you known to yourselves be ever so little authorised to do it, still you are indispensably concerned to take notice of it. If he profess himself a friend, he hath given you the truest and boldest proof of his friendship that can be. If he be a mere acquaintance or a stranger, but appear to admonish you with good intention, you ought to esteem him for it as long as you live. And were you to believe him ever so much your enemy, never let that provoke you to become your own; think only if he speaks truth, and submit to it; amend, and disappoint him. Strive not to make yourself easy in what you feel is wrong, but quit it. Strive not to colour over and palliate matters, for this is deceiving no one but your own souls. IV. THAT IF WE REPENT AS WE OUGHT THE GREATEST SINS WILL BE FORGIVEN US. This, indeed, our own reason cannot promise with any certainty at all. God we know is good. Man is frail. And hence we have cause to hope that his goodness will extend to the pardon of our frailties. But, then, in proportion as we go beyond frailties, to gross, deliberate, habitual transgressions, this hope diminishes continually, till at length it becomes exceedingly doubtful. And now, as we are strangely apt to apply everything wrong, too many, instead of the extreme of despondency, run into that of profane boldness: and are very near looking upon sin as nothing to be dreaded, and remission of sin as nothing to be thankful for. At least the certainty of it they conceive, they could easily have discovered of themselves, and therefore have little obligation to Christ, the publisher of a truth so obvious. Indeed, after all that hath been done to assure us it shall be exer-

cised, there are some, of minds more tenderly sensible than ordinary, who, after committing great offences, or perhaps only such as to them appear very great, experience the utmost reluctance, either to be reconciled to themselves, or persuaded that God will be reconciled to them. How ill soever you may think of yourselves; though God requires you not in the least to think worse than the truth, and would have you judge calmly of your spiritual state, not under the disability of a fright; but whatever opinion you may form of your own defects, forbear to entertain an injurious one of him. When he hath sent His blessed Son to make atonement for you, when He hath told you in His holy Word, when He tells you by His ministers every day, that this atonement reaches to the very worst of cases, do not except your own in contradiction to Him, do not indulge doubts and scruples about what He hath plainly promised, in order to be miserable against His will, but, together with the sorrow of having offended, allow yourselves to feel the joy of being restored to favour. **V. THAT WICKEDNESS, EVEN AFTER IT IS FORSAKEN, AND AFTER IT IS FORGIVEN, PRODUCES NEVERTHELESS VERY OFTEN CONSEQUENCES SO LAMENTABLE THAT FOR THIS CAUSE, AMONGST OTHERS, INNOCENCE IS GREATLY PREFERABLE TO THE SINCEREST AND COMPLETEST REPENTANCE THAT EVER WAS.** Sometimes no immediate connection between the transgression and the suffering is visible, that it may seem to be the hand of God rather than a natural effect; though, indeed, would men consider, every effect proceeds from His hand, but commonly they are closely linked, to deter men from committing iniquity, by showing them beforehand what fruits they must expect it to produce. (*T. Secker.*) *The self-deceitfulness of sin*:—Butler points out that, portentous as David's internal hypocrisy and self-deceit was, it was all the time local and limited in David. That is to say, his self-deceit did not as yet spread over and corrupt his whole life and character. There was real honesty in David all this self-deceiving time. David gave scope, in Butler's words, to his affections of compassion and goodwill, as well as to his passions of another kind. And, while this is some comfort to us to hear, there is a great danger for us in this direction also. The whited sepulchres fasted twice in the week, and they gave tithes of all that they possessed. They made broad their phylacteries, and made long prayers, and were always to be seen in the synagogues, with their mint and anise and cumin. They made clean, no men made so clean, the outside of the cup and platter. Many of them had begun, like David, with only one thing wrong in their life; but it was a thing which they hushed up in their own consciences, till by that time the self-deceit was spreading and was well-nigh covering with death and damnation their whole life and character. David was rescued from that appalling end; but he was fast on the way to that end when the Lord arrested him. David all the time was administering justice and judgment as boldly, and with as much anger at evil-doers, as if there had never been a man of the name of Uriah on the face of the earth. And just because he was making men who had no pity restore the lamb fourfold; just because of that he was more and more confirmed in his own self-deceit. We would need Nathan and his parable at this point. Only your self-deceit would make you miss his point, till he drove it home into your bleeding heart. You are the men. (*Alex. Whyte, D.D.*)

Ver. 7. And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man.—*His natural face in a glass*:—Mr. Moody somewhere tells the story of a little child who had fallen into the gutter, but would not submit quietly to be washed, till his mother, finding persuasion useless, caught up the rebellious boy in her arms and turned him before a looking-glass. So here the righteous prophet brings the guilty king before the mirror of a lustrous parable; in a moment the blackness of the royal transgressor's misdeeds was seen, and he cried out, with full conviction of his sin—"Unclean! unclean! wash me, O God, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression!" Nathan by his parable brings David the offender unawares before David the judge. The solemn subject suggested by these words is the blinding of self. Here was a man who was deeply incensed at an abstract story of injustice, with which he personally, as he thought, had no concern, but apparently insensible to the gravity of the crimes, far more abominable, which he himself had perpetrated. How is it that we have such open ears and quick eyes and sharp tongues for the misdeeds of others, while we are so blind and gentle to our own? Why are we such severe judges on our very own crimes seen on

others? Let us try to answer these questions on the lines of the Old Testament episode. I. IT CANNOT BE SAID THAT CONSCIENCE IS DEAD. For no sooner does David hear a story of oppression than his conscience rises majestically in condemnation of the rich man's execrable tyranny. The conscience was quick and powerful; otherwise it could not have asserted itself so immediately and majestically. Conscience cannot die. There are certain moral truths which shine by their own light and need not that any should bear witness to them. These moral axioms require no proof: they abide for ever in the constitution of man. Just as mathematical axioms, such as "Things which are equal to the same are equal to one another," are accepted by all men as fundamental and final: so there are moral axioms, such as "Honesty is right," or "Truth is right," which require no laboured demonstration, but by their own intrinsic excellence command acceptance at once and by all. These moral intuitions cannot perish. They are a part of man's being. A man may mistake the application or resist the force of these moral certainties, but he never can deny their reality. In this fact lies the hope of the world's salvation. There is in every soul a sense of right and wrong. Prove to any one that he is a sinner, reach the conscience, and redemption is already begun. From this fact, those engaged in Christian work may gather great confidence. Every witness for Christ has a friend in the court of man's nature. A man may be so engrossed with the pursuit of what is merely pleasant or profitable that he may not hear at all, or hear but in a dim and confused way, the warnings and entreaties of the inner monitor, just as a member of the family circle, busy at some book or task, may be so preoccupied with his own thoughts and employment, that he hears and yet does not hear the conversation of those around him, and answers the questions even that may be addressed directly to him in that provokingly dreamy and abstracted manner, characteristic of absent-mindedness. So we hear, even though we may only vaguely heed, the voice of conscience. A man may even encase his conscience in a mailed coat of deliberate and hardened villany, but conscience is still there, a living, breathing immortal entity. At any moment a word, a glance of the eye, a pressure of the hand, may be an arrow to penetrate some joint of the harness. There are many ways of reaching the conscience, as there are many ways of touching the heart. It may be only a brief story, like Nathan's parable, or a single verse, or a child's sermon; but any one is sword enough to pierce the quick sense of right and wrong. Take comfort, then, my fellow-labourer, from this thought that in every man conscience lives, moves, and has its being; and that however closely confined it may be in the dungeon of ignorance or depravity, a word of God can shake the prison as with an earthquake, and wring from the sturdiest keeper's soul the cry, "What must I do to be saved?" II. BUT LET US GO A LITTLE DEEPER AND ASK, HOW IS IT THAT THOUGH DAVID'S CONSCIENCE WAS IN ITSELF LIVING AND VIGOROUS, IT WAS ACTUALLY SO LONG IN MOVING AGAINST HIMSELF? In endeavouring to answer this question, we must remember that conscience is not an independent faculty. Its judgments are founded on the representations of the mind. The intellect furnishes the premises on which the moral faculty rests its conclusions. If the premises are wrong, the inferences must be erroneous, even though they are in themselves correctly drawn. To be a little more specific, conscience never undertakes to tell me what is honest in a particular case; my own intellect tells me that: but conscience, as soon as the intellect decides what is honest, authoritatively declares that the honest course is right and ought to be pursued. Conscience never says any more than this, that "honesty, or purity, or veracity is right;" it is for the intellect to state what is honest, or pure, or truthful. Consequently, if the information furnished to the conscience by the intellect is defective, or exaggerated, or distorted, or wholly mistaken, the judgment of conscience will be proportionately in error. The moral axioms are in themselves infallibly correct, but they may be wrongly applied, just as the axioms of mathematics, while infallibly correct in themselves, may be wrongly applied. I turn my intellect to consider certain actions, and I carry, suppose, the assurance to my conscience that these are honest and those dishonest. Immediately conscience, acting on the information of the intellect, asserts that the former are right and the latter wrong. But if the intellect is mistaken, conscience must be correspondingly mistaken. Conscience is like an eye, which is round and good in itself, but which is compelled to look on men and things through the window of the understanding. If the intervening glass is not pure and spotless, if it is coloured or discoloured, the external world will, to my eye, be tinged or blurred

accordingly; or if this pane is marred by a knot, that one by a bubble, that other by an abnormal curve, all by some defect, then my view will be distorted, nature will be twisted out of shape, in accord with the character of the medium. Yet the fault is not in my organ of vision or in the outside world, but in the interposing panes of glass. Herein lies the possibility of two consciences, equally good and true in themselves, giving totally opposite, or widely diverse, decisions on the very same data. An easy conscience, therefore, is not always a safe guide. A man may fight even against God with a perfectly clear conscience: a man may go to hell with a perfectly clear conscience. There is a story told by John Foster in one of his essays of a wicked and traitorous naval captain, who, unable to coax or coerce his sailors into a vile surrender to the foe, concealed a large loadstone at a little distance from the needle. The sailors, unaware of the cruel trick played upon them, steered their vessel faithfully by the compass, but to their degradation and destruction, for their misplaced confidence carried them directly into a hostile port and the enemy's pitiless hands. Yet all the while these misguided mariners thought that all was well because they were steering by the compass. And, indeed, the needle was right in itself, tremblingly sensitive, ready to point in the proper direction if it had not been tampered with, if it had not been turned aside from its true bearing by an influence that the hapless crew wot not of. Just so many a one is going to ruin, shaping his course, as he thinks, by conscience; but it is a conscience directed, or rather misdirected, by a darkened mind, an evil heart, a sinful will. Thus, many a man, who has not yet had his heart changed, manages to say to himself, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. Certainly all should believe in Christ; but does not he believe in Christ? So he keeps interpreting or misinterpreting matters to his conscience; so conscience is soothed; so the sinner, often a respectable, well-clad, high-toned, pure-minded sinner, is lost. It is thus possible for us to keep saying, "Peace, peace," until by mere reiteration we come to believe our assertion. It is proverbial that a man may tell a lie so often that he comes at last to believe his own falsehood; and a soul may be at ease in Zion, the conscience reposing on a specious and comfortable falsehood or half truth, which frequent repetition clothes with an air of authority. What reason, then, in view of the awful possibility of being self-deceived, we have for scrutinising and re-scrutinising our outward conduct, and as for the inner man humbly and earnestly we should cry to God each for himself: "O Lord, teach me Thy way. Lead in a plain path, for I know nothing as I ought to know. Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." III. BUT STILL THE QUESTION RECURS, HOW IS IT POSSIBLE FOR A MAN LIKE DAVID TO BE GUILTY, LIKE DAVID, OF MOST ABOMINABLE CRIMES, AND YET SOOTHE HIS CONSCIENCE INTO QUIETNESS? We can understand a man misinterpreting actions that are not palpably and notoriously evil, where there may be room for mistake and misapprehension, and so furnishing his conscience with misleading information. But how is it possible for one, like David, to perpetrate the enormities of which he was guilty and yet remain easy in his mind? How could he by any chance so misreport the facts of such a glaring case to the impartial tribunal within? Here we enter on one of the most solemn subjects that could be considered, the blinding influence of the love of self. Love is notoriously blind: and self-love—the most subtle, ineradicable of all loves—is the blindest of all, so that even if our hands, like David's, be steeped in blood, we have still some excuse to offer for ourselves. It is this love of self that makes us very conscious of the changes that take place in our neighbour's appearance, but slow to note our own. We see the pallor of disease, the wrinkles of care, or the whitening of old age, far more readily in others than in ourselves. Loathsome diseases are far more bearable in ourselves than in others. What would be tedious and offensive in others is perfectly tolerable in ourselves. So in spiritual things, we can behold the motelike splinter in our neighbour's eye, but the weaver's beam in our own we may not discern. I knew two men, occupying good social positions, who were unhappily addicted to drink. They lived in the same town, and their families were very intimate. Each of them was blessed with an excellent wife. Again and again have I heard each of these men in turn, when he happened to be sober and his neighbour was indulging in a bout of drinking, railing at the drunken husband over the way, and pitying the splendid woman who had the misfortune to be tied to such a sot! all this in tones of unquestioned sincerity. What is the explanation of this? In judging ourselves we

have the love of self on our side as a special pleader. David may have said to himself: "I was very idle, and Bathsheba was very beautiful. I was specially tempted." Or he may have flattered himself with the thought: "After all, I did not kill Uriah. I did indeed order him to be put in a place of danger, but some one had to stand in the forefront of the battle, and why not he as well as another? Moreover, is not Uriah a Hittite? Is he not one of a race that we are authorised to exterminate?" Or he may have soothed his conscience with the notion that if he had done wrong to Uriah it was for no merely selfish purpose, but in order as far as possible to recompense Bathsheba for the injury inflicted on her. Possibly by some such arguments, at all events by some subtle reasonings and excuses, dictated by the love of self and the pride of life, he succeeded in veiling the filthiness of his conduct from the clear eye of the moral faculty. What a commentary is all this on the blindness of man to his personal guilt! Here was one, who had been wont to live in close and happy fellowship with God, and yet yielded to and lived in flagrant sin for a long time, without apparently being conscious of its vileness. Ah, beloved, do we not stand sorely in need of some one who will tell us the truth about ourselves? Is Christ our enemy because He tells us the truth? There is in reality in every one of us the seeds of thoroughgoing depravity. If we say that we have not the principle of sin we simply deceive ourselves. The principle of sin may take divers forms, varying according to men's training, opportunities, hereditary tendencies, peculiar temptations, associates, and such like; but, whatever form it takes, the principle is there. What varied manifestations there are of matter in nature. There it is in the clouds, in the rushing wind, in the gas lighter than air, in the flowing river and the restless ocean, in the green field and the snow-capped mountain, in the pebble from the brook and the rock dug from the quarry. Analyse these multitudinous forms, and you will find all alike in essence; there is one elementary substance throughout all this manifoldness. (*G. Hanson, M.A.*) *Sin's self-discovery*:—In this lurid sentence the prophet of God condemned the guilty king out of his own mouth. It was no mild utterance, this, but one charged with moral passion and righteous anger. The circumstances called for the word, too. The wretched man upon the throne now saw, and for the first time, what his sin really was. It was guilt calculated upon and persisted in, guilt covered up even in David's own mind by sophistry and self-excuse. Now comes the moment of revelation, when the true state of things is declared to David's consciousness just as it had long ago been declared unconsciously, though he never dared to face the truth. Imagine the scene that is hinted at in this chapter rather than described. David sits upon the throne in the day of his splendour, surrounded by his mighty men, and the plain-garbed figure of the prophet of God appears on the scene. He is made welcome—why should it not be so? This victorious king is the chosen of the Lord. What message can Nathan have to bring but a message of good? The court is hushed to listen. The wisdom and righteousness of David respond eagerly to the demand of the prophet. Thus and such the rich man has done. Thus and such vengeance is called for, retribution to be awarded. What saith the king? "And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man." The court is silent, waiting for the prophet to speak. One sentence it is which issues from his lips, how terrible only David knew, though the awe-stricken listeners must have felt, too, something of the impact of the tremendous utterance, "Thou art the man." Self-deception is never very difficult. Men are curiously averse to calling things by the right name. There is no kind of hypocrisy so subtle and so dangerous as the hypocrisy which is hypocrite to itself and will not acknowledge its own presence. We can cheat ourselves as David did, that because the world knows nothing and because there is a euphemistic word to describe a foul thing, that therefore God is deceived too. He is not, and heaven is not. The world of truth interpenetrates this, the world of glory is not a handbreadth off. You cannot hide from the eternal right. As Arthur Hugh Clough hath it in one of his most familiar lines, "Listen before I die, one word. In old times you called me pleasure; my name is guilt." What a dark name, what a foul name, what an unpronounceable shuddering word you would have to apply if you were honest, some of you, to the things you have done! God, you see, applies the right word—"Thou art the man." In God's economy, in God's moral world, the meaning of punishment is that the soul is compelled to see itself as it is, and to acknowledge the eternal justice. Come it soon or come it late, God's verdict upon sin is written

large in the experience of the sinner. I was reading recently in one of Maurice Maeterlinck's books, I think the last, a paragraph something to this effect. I do not quote, I only paraphrase—If a man hath done a guilty deed, if a man hath been betrayed by himself, dragged down by evil propensity, and hath the courage and the faith to rise again, the day comes, the moment is his when he can say, It was not I that did it. Of course you see the paradox of the mystic. Yes, but it was a truth stated in paradox. A man may so rise above the habitual level of his own character that deeds are forgotten. It is not so much the deeds that matter, it is the climate of the soul, it is the moral atmosphere in which you live that is telling out the truth. A man's real fall often antedates by long the fall that the world can see and judge him by. But, look you, if a man has risen so far by virtue of his penitence that he reaches the heart of God; so exalting himself by true humility that he is no longer capable of that old sin, it is, as it were, blotted out of the book of remembrance. To such a man I would be entitled to say in the name of the Lord of Hosts, "Thou art *not* the man," the man that was, but another, redeemed, purified, made holy by the Spirit of God. There are some people who are morbid in their retrospection and their view of their own moral delinquencies. Remorse is not repentance. Morbidity is by no means humility. There is another way and a higher. It is impossible for you to contend with God. Once you have realised that there is no longer need for you to remain in the prison-house. If any man is hopeless concerning the past I call him to a deeper as well as a higher life. An old mediæval mystic once wrote, "In every man there is a godly will which never consented to sin nor ever shall." You know what that signifies. It tells you that the deepest self in every man is Christ. What? Yes, I mean it. Until conscience is dead Christ is not gone from the soul of any man but that Christ you may be crucifying. (*R. J. Campbell.*) *Conviction, confession, and forgiveness*:—The king was confounded! So sharp, so sudden, so altogether unexpected was the charge, he could not resist it. Like a well-appointed shaft flying from a practised archer it transfixes his heart. I. **THE FORCE OF A DIRECT APPEAL TO THE CONSCIENCE.** General allusions to human guilt, coupled though they may be with fervent exhortations to repentance, fail to produce conviction and compliance. Ordinary arguments, though derived from the Word of God, and based on the love of God, are ineffectual to melt and subdue. All the ordinary strivings of the Spirit are resisted and repelled. II. **MAN'S WEAKNESS WITH CONCEALED SIN IN HIS HEART.** Of all the men of his age, up to this time, David was certainly, intellectually and spiritually considered, the strongest. Righteousness is man's strength, and the fear of God his courage. What wild and foolish fears afflict the guilty one, who has covered his sin, who has hidden, as he thinks, from all mortal gaze every trace of the deed he has wrought, the exposure of which is his shame, but in whose heart, nevertheless, the horrid fact lies festering and pulsating! The weakest point in a wicked man's heart, after all, is his own conscience—that principle within that sits in judgment on all his doings, and pronounces which are right and which are wrong. And in a great wrong conscience will cry out with a loud voice. III. **OF THE LOVE OF GOD IN THE EXPOSURE OF GUILT OPENING UP TO THE GUILTY THE POSSIBILITY OF FORGIVENESS.** Now, what will God do with him? Will He inflict an instantaneous vengeance, and execute him as a criminal? He deserves it; it is the legal award of his crime. No, not the God of Love; not if it can be avoided; not if God can make a way to avoid it. He makes such a way. "The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great mercy. He will not always chide, nor will He keep His anger for ever." So sang the psalmist hereafter, and well could he verify his song. "The Lord hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die," are the first words of mercy to revive hope in David's stricken heart. Not in wrath, but in love, sent the Lord His prophet unto David. The text is a sharp arrow, but it is tipped with honey, not with poison. It is a healing, not a killing dart. Its message is painful, but it is a message of mercy. Was it not Divine love that thus hung as a dense cloud charged with electric fire, threatening to smite him? Let us learn, then, that the judgments of God as well as His mercies embody and exhibit His love. Let us learn in it God's disciplinary and chastising dealings with ourselves. And in Christ we have the fullest revelation of His love. Beginning with the forgiveness of sins to the perfecting of our manhood in Christ—let us remember there is forgiveness with Him. (*W. J. Bull, B.A.*) *Nathan's message*:—David's conscience seems to have been deranged, to have forgotten its function; and it is with our

moral as with our physical being—when any of our natural organs are diseased and suffered to continue in that state, the character of the organic action becomes gradually changed, and a complete departure from healthy action succeeds, and perhaps the reparation of the organ becomes impossible after a time. David is excessive in pronouncing sentence upon the imaginary transgressor. Now, here is an indirect testimony of conscience to the law, that it was good; but here is a solemn lesson. It is one thing to agree with the general correctness of a principle, and it is quite another thing to apply practically that principle to our own life and conversation. Every one is ready to admit that it is a practical duty to relieve distress; and yet, if you compare the numbers of those who act upon the conviction with the multitudes of those who are ready to admit the principle, it is to be feared that a lamentable failing will often be discovered. Or take some of our every-day principles. We are ready enough to admit the uncertainty of life, and the goodness of God, and there are certain principles of practice that follow as directly from the admission as night succeeds to day; and yet bring men to the touchstone of practice, and they will be found as practical deniers of their own principles. No; you find men eager in the pursuit of shadows still. We are ready to admit the goodness and long-suffering of God, that we are dependent for everything upon Him, and yet where is the man that can examine his own conscience without being compelled to admit that his affections have been given to things with which it would be blasphemous to speak of God as having divided allegiance? Therefore, we have, in dealing with ourselves, a mighty enemy to guard against—our tendency to deceive ourselves. The wisest statesman of antiquity has said, "It is the easiest thing possible to deceive oneself." The wish is too often parent of the thought. If, by succeeding to deceive ourselves as to our actual state, we were able to cancel the reality of that state and to remove the fearful consequences that unrepented sin entails upon us, then indeed the preacher's task were one of wanton cruelty, to disturb the calm repose of the life that now is, if, by suffering it to continue, it could possibly issue in the repose of the life that is to come. But what would be thought of one who would see a fellow-creature moving blindfolded to the brink of a precipice, one step after the arrival at which precipitated his doom? Perceive how the prophet advances. "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul." The prophet here enumerates the mercies of God which had been vouchsafed to David from his earliest history. It is well, when the Christian habitually enumerates God's mercies, and when the recollection serves to keep alive the flame of gratitude that ought to burn there. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." But it is a very different state when the conscience is dead, when the memory of past mercies is lost, when it produces no response in the seared heart—when the man of God is constrained, as Nathan is here, to enter into a recapitulation of the mercies of God, and the forgetfulness of him who was sustained by them, and who had so long forgotten them. "Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword." It would, humanly speaking, have been impossible to have brought the murder home to David; but "God seeth not as man seeth; man judgeth by the outward appearance, but God regardeth the heart." Just as David is here arraigned by God for the murder which he had not with his own hand perpetrated, so are multitudes found guilty before God, of that which man can never substantiate or bring home to them. This is the penetrating character of God's Word; it is thus that we are to read it—as entering into our inmost thoughts and conceptions—as high and holy in its requirements. It is in the life and language of Jesus Christ that we see this law reflected. Here the prophet dealt faithfully with the royal transgressor; and there seems to have come a flood of light upon David's slumbering mind. He seems as one awakened from a dream of sin. And now we hear the psalmist humbling himself. "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord." These are blessed words; they are the response that God requires to His expostulation—"Only acknowledge thine iniquity." And simultaneous with the confession is the offer of mercy. "The Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." Here we have the law and the Gospel forcibly contrasted. We have the unbending rigour of the law speaking in this wise. The law says, "Thou shalt surely die," and there is no help or escape; but the Gospel says, "Thou shalt not die." How otherwise than in Christ can these

statements be reconciled? How can we vindicate the stern requirements of God's holy law, and yet offer to the transgressor of that law unqualified pardon and free acceptance, except in the name of Jesus Christ? This is exactly the Gospel; and would it not be strange, were the Bible of any other source than that whence it came? We have no eye to appreciate the beauty of God, until it is reflected in the face of Jesus Christ; we cannot understand "the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely," until the Spirit, whose office is to glorify Jesus, takes of the things of Christ and shows them to our wondering souls. Then there is amazement, then there is gratitude, then there is love, and the heart going forth earnestly to God, in conscious acknowledgement of all that God hath done for us. Observe, then, what a fund of comfort is opened here to the distressed mourner. He looks to his Bible, and there he finds encouragement to believe that no degree of guilt, however black, can militate against his free acceptance, if he cast himself only on the free mercy of God in Christ. Then the sinner asks, "How is it consistent with the justice of God? How is it consistent with the maintenance in their perfection of the other attributes of God, to extend pardon to the sinner upon his confessing his sin?" Then the Gospel interposes; then all that Jesus undertook, all that Jesus accomplished, and the value of Jesus' work comes in upon his mind, convinces him that God can be just, even when He is the justifier, and that if he confesses and forsakes his sin, God is not only merciful, but even righteous and just in forgiving his sin, and in cleansing him from all unrighteousness. The very attributes that were before arrayed against the sinner, and clamoured, trumpet-tongued, for his destruction, are now arrayed on the other side, and speak as powerfully for his acceptance and sanctification. There is another feature connected with this. David was a man after God's own heart, and David's sin was calculated from its very nature to throw a greater discredit upon the profession of religion than the sins of those who were not so remarkable for having previously walked with God. (*T. Nolan, M.A.*) *No man impeccable* :

—I. THAT NO MAN IS PLACED BEYOND THE DANGER OF PERPETRATING THE MOST ATROCIOUS CRIMES—crimes which are equally offensive to God, injurious to society, and destructive to the criminal. This observation is strikingly confirmed in the instance of David, the king of Israel. There was no advantage on the side of virtue and religion which he did not possess. What ought to operate as a preventive of wickedness, which did not distinguish this man at the very moment when he consented to become the most guilty of his species? 1. Shall rank, wealth, and glory be pleaded as a security against the perpetration of evil? David possessed them all. How extensive was his range of lawful gratification! In the figurative language of the prophet, "he had exceeding many flocks and herds." The occupiers of thrones have too frequently been as notorious for their vices as conspicuous for their stations. Blessings tainted by depravity are curses in disguise. 2. Genius of the highest order, learning of the most useful kind, taste exquisitely refined, and capable of the purest satisfactions—will not these preserve the character, at least, from the foulest blots of iniquity? No; dead and living illustrations prove the contrary. 3. May we not confidently hope that the sobriety of mature age, no longer subject to the fervours of youthful passion, will present an effectual barrier against the inroads of crime? The time had long passed away when it was said of David that "he was a youth, and ruddy." 4. But surely long habits of the strictest virtue, founded on principles of genuine and long cultivated piety, will place an individual on a pinnacle too high for temptation to reach. This good man, even when grown old in religion, was guilty of deeds which many habitual sinners, though prompted by youthful passion, and unrestrained by the fear of God, would still have abhorred. But, indeed, when once we allow ourselves to go wrong we can neither know nor guess the consequences. That sin, indeed, with which David began is peculiarly ensnaring and pernicious. The lower degrees of immodesty lead on imperceptibly to the most unlawful familiarities. These entangle in a variety of difficulties that ensure at last the commission of the vilest and cruellest acts imaginable. And to specify no more particulars, mere indolent omissions of religious duties, public or private, leave our sentiments of piety to languish till we become utterly unmindful of our eternal interest, and perhaps at last profane scoffers. II. THAT MANY OF US, WHO LEAST SUSPECT OURSELVES, ARE CHARGEABLE WITH SIMILAR OFFENCES OR TENDENCIES TO THOSE OFFENCES WHICH WE MOST SEVERELY CONDEMN IN OTHERS. We lift up our voice, and justly, against the perjured, the ungenerous, the insulting adul-

terer; the wretch, who robs his neighbour, perhaps his friend, by one fatal act, of his dearest treasure, and his peace of mind; but have we pondered well the saying of him who declares, "Whoso looketh upon a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery already in his own heart?" The will, before God, is the deed. Do we regard with exemplary strictness the law of equity? If we do not grossly defraud, do we not go beyond our brother, and take advantage of his ignorance or weakness? In order to shorten human life, it is not necessary to employ the pistol and the dagger. Servants may be easily brought to an untimely grave by stinting them with respect to their necessary food, clothes, lodging, or fuel; or by a repetition of tasks unnecessarily burdensome. The pleadings in this case might be greatly extended, and the mask torn off from many whose criminality is perhaps still hidden from themselves. (*J. Styles.*) *Tenderness of conscience*.—We should have naturally thought that every word of Nathan's parable would have stabbed David to the heart, would have cut him to the quick, covered him with the deepest shame, and melted him into a repentant state. And yet David's conscience smote him not as the touching tale was told; he saw nothing, he felt nothing, bearing on himself or his own case. He had no thought that the arrow was meant for him, or that he was designed to read out, by the light of the parable, his own great guilt to his own blackened heart. Nathan had with his own hands to tear off the veil, beneath which it was thought David would have caught the dark features of his own transgression; and it was not till he plainly said, "Thou art the man," that the sinner felt his sin, and was convinced that the messenger of God was sent to condemn him for his own evil ways. Now, doubtless, as we have read this passage of God's Word, we have often wondered at David's blindness, his want of perception, his strange dulness and slowness of mind, which prevented him catching at once the meaning of what was said; but the truth is, what seems strange in another, is all the while common among ourselves; the same thing continually goes on. Blind and unobserving as regards our faults, too ready to dismiss any shameful doings from our minds, we are slow to apply warnings or reproaches to ourselves. We see easily, and with quick eyes, how such a sentence strikes our neighbour, how our neighbour's faults are hit, our neighbour's sins condemned. Messages sent from God often come to us without effect, do not even graze the conscience, pass by unnoticed and unapplied; and it needs often home-thrusts of the sharpest, plainest kind, to convince us that we are spoken to by God at all. How much there is of warning, of reproof, of condemnation, mercifully uttered in our ears, mercifully addressed to us especially. These warnings are often very strong, very decided, very plain; and yet we do not fit the cap to the head; they seem to us to be meant for others, to be meant for the world at large, or at any rate not to be particularly meant for us. Thus the proud hear the proud condemned by prophets whom God has sent, condemned by apostles whose mouths breathe forth words of the Holy Ghost, condemned by Christ Himself, condemned fearlessly in such awful terms as this, "that God resisteth the proud;" and yet they get used to all these sayings about pride; they do not stop and weigh them, and take them home to their own hearts, and see themselves condemned. So the covetous hear of covetousness condemned at every turn, stamped as idolatry, blackened with terrible denunciations, and yet the covetous go on saving money, grudging to give it, making excuses for not giving it, slaving and toiling for it, without any strong self-condemnation, without any quick perception that they are in a perilous state. So the lovers of pleasure get used to the threatenings hurled against those that love pleasure more than God, without stopping to hear their own individual reproof. We do not see how the Spirit of God, how the Lord Jesus in His love pleads with us individually, sets before us our own falls, our own pride, our own covetousness, or our own lusts, our own worldliness, our own swearing and drinking. Yet God deals with us one by one. He speaks to each; to each He sends His messengers and message. If, then, we are dull of heart, slow to hear what is for our own ears, we are, in neglecting and failing to apply reproofs and condemnations, neglecting mercies, loving-kindnesses, forgiveness, the longings of the Father for our salvation, the pardon purchased by His Son. Often is there a voice which says, "Thou art the man," and even then we hear it not. One comes in choken with the cares of the world, and a passage of God's Word describes his state, shows his sin, reveals his peril, and yet he goes forth unmoved, untouched, caring still about worldly things; another comes in fond of money, and the love of money is denounced in many fearful texts, and yet he seems not to

hear the inspired writer say to him, "Thou art the man." Another comes in to offer lip-service, to lounge away an hour drowsily in his seat, and Scripture straightway speaks stern words concerning those who draw near with their lips while their heart is far away, or who behave irreverently in God's House; yet he too fails to think that he is the one pointed at in the text. Another comes in given to drink, or given to oaths, and he hears the Scripture awfully pronounce the guilt of those who do such things without fear or dread, or awe. The least that we can do is to pray for a more tender, quick-eared conscience, that the heaviness and drowsiness of the heart may give way to a readier, more open mind, a mind more keenly intent to hear what the Lord doth say, whether through things done in the world, or through His written Word, or through the example of others, or through the counsels of His ministers, or through the movements of grace within our hearts, those inward calls, those inward warnings that rise up within us, when no speech nor language is to be heard. (*J. Armstrong, D.D.*) *The awakening to the sophistry of sin*:—David is no longer the ingenuous youth on whose cheek glows the blush of modesty; he is the hardened voluptuary, blind to his own failings, careless of the welfare of his subjects, engrossed by selfishness. The prophet of God was come unto him no longer to bless, but to rebuke. While the accents of justice thus rushed to his lip, did no hidden pang tell him of his own unworthiness? He Himself hath guided the sword that laid Uriah in the dust. This was the enormous transgression which even now hung, unconfessed and unrepented, upon the soul of David. He sinks not beneath its weight. He seems scarcely to feel the pressure. His countenance glows not with the blush of shame, but with the indignation of virtue. On his lips is the language of proud and conscious worth. The sacred Scriptures have not informed us by what artifices David had concealed this wickedness from himself, or so palliated it as to prevent in such a remarkable degree the power of conscience from exerting its authority. The experience of ordinary life may, in part, unfold the mystery. When we find men unconscious of their own defects, detecting these very faults in another, and censuring them with unsparing severity; when we find the vainest eager to deride the foibles of vanity; when we hear the ambitious declaim against the folly of ambition; when we hear the miser loud to censure an avarice less conspicuous than his own, it is obvious that these men have either hid from themselves the knowledge of their own transgressions, or have, by some sophistry, explained their sinfulness away. The king of Israel's ignorance of his own crime may then, in one view, have been wilful. When a subject is disagreeable, we naturally avoid it. The spendthrift feels at times the presage of approaching ruin; but he flies from the thought while he may, and opens not his eyes till ruin is inevitable. Self-disapprobation being painful, the same infirmity makes us wish to escape it—makes us to indulge the dangerous palliative of hiding our sin even from ourselves. What avails it that the means of information are in our power, if we obstinately refuse to employ them? Bright and varied, to the attentive gaze, are the charms of external nature; but he who shuts his eyes against the light, cannot distinguish even deformity and loveliness. Strong are the attractions of music to them who court their power, but to him who stops his ear against their melody, the voice of the charmer can never reach. David may at times have had transient glances of his crime, but if he expelled them by the cares of empire, or drowned them amidst the riot of gaiety, their impression would become ever fainter and fainter. Had not the voice of rebuke or the stroke of adversity reached him, he might have lost all knowledge of his own character for ever. But the king of Israel's ignorance of his own crime may also have been in a great measure involuntary. The prejudices which various situations inspire, and the sophistry with which passion argues, have incredible power in perverting our views of good and evil. Even the most candid cannot view in precisely the same light, the same action, committed by himself and by another man. A thousand little selfish considerations bind him. The very emotion which roused him against the oppressor whose history Nathan had told, if permitted to operate fairly, would have guarded himself from committing an act of cruelty yet more atrocious. But when self-interest mingled its enchantment we see how totally his perceptions were changed. The situation which he filled in life was one of those which are the most peculiarly trying, unfavourable to disinterested and impartial views of conduct. Exalted so far above his brethren, he seems at times to consider them as made only for his pleasure, and to estimate actions only by their tendency to promote it. If he applied his standard only to

the case of Uriah, he would find in it little to regret. In the particular case of David, too, the pleadings of passion would exert all their artifice to blind the conscience and judgment. For the first guilty act he would plead, as every succeeding voluptuary has pleaded, the natural force of passion, unmindful that the passions were given to be the handmaids, not the tyrants of reason and conscience. For every succeeding step in his guilty progress he had something like the plea of necessity to urge. But now, by the sophistry of passion, the circumstances of the case were entirely changed. What would otherwise have been seen to be the foulest murder was now an act of self-defence; what would otherwise have been seen to be the meanest treachery was now interpreted as considerate and merciful tenderness—softening the blow which it was forced to inflict; and, since the victim must fall, kindly allowing him to die a soldier's death. What would otherwise have been seen to be base ingratitude was now interpreted as an unavoidable though painful effort to screen the fame and the life of a helpless confiding woman. Uriah must fall, or Bathsheba must die. The choice is too clear for hesitation, and David almost imagines he does a wise and a generous deed when, to screen the guilty, he devotes the unsuspecting to sure and speedy destruction. By whichever of these delusions David had permitted himself to be blinded, its power seems to have been strongly fixed in his mind. His danger was dreadful. If God had not interposed in mercy, what was to rouse him from his fatal dream? Would not the sleep of death have found him unconverted, and horror inexpressible attended his awakening? Nathan with skillful and happy art raised first the better feelings of David into action, and then tore the veil of self-delusion at once asunder; taxing him loudly with his guilt, upbraiding him with those mercies of heaven which he abused, and denouncing against him the judgments of the Lord. Let me recommend to your most attentive performance the duty of self-examination, not merely when you are called to join in the solemn festivals of religion, but at regular and frequent periods. Examine, with keen and prejudiced suspicion, every excuse that is offered for acknowledged defects. Think nothing trivial that misleads from duty. Who can tell where the labyrinth of sin shall end? (*A. Brunton, D.D.*) *A bold preacher*:—Pulpit power comes of holy boldness. In 1670, Bourdaloue, "the founder of genuine pulpit eloquence in France," preached before his sovereign. Having described a sinner of the first magnitude, he turned to Louis XIV. and in a voice of thunder cried, "Thou art the man!" The effect on all was electrical. After the sermon the preacher went and fell at the feet of the king, saying: "Sire, behold one of the most devoted of your servants. Punish him not because that in the pulpit he owns no other master than the King of kings." *Preaching to the heart*:—A great admirer of Bramwell once invited a scholarly German friend to accompany him to hear the fervent Methodist. At the close of the service, anxious to know the impression produced, he said: "Well, Mr. Troubner, how do you like him? Do you think he wanders too much from the subject?" "Ah! yes," said the German, wiping his moistened eyes, "he do wander most delightfully from the subject to the heart." Exposition needs personal application, the mind enlightened must advance to the heart moved. (*H. O. Mackey.*) *The fearless preacher* was a type. He has had many a successor. John Knox at the Court of Queen Mary, Bossuet preaching before the "Grand Monarque" of France, Savonarola thundering from his Florentine pulpit at the vices of "Lorenzo the Magnificent" and the nobles, Martin Luther defying, in the name of righteousness, the conclave of princes and cardinals at Worms, Hugh Latimer preaching at Westminster in the days of fearful peril to the faithful, Peter exclaiming, "We must fear God rather than man!" (*Christian Commonwealth.*) *Faithfulness to God and the king*:—Bishop Latimer, having one day preached before King Henry VIII. a sermon which displeased his Majesty, he was ordered to preach again on the next Sabbath, and to make an apology for the offence he had given. After reading his text, the bishop then began his sermon: "Hugh Latimer, dost thou know before whom thou art this day to speak? To the high and mighty monarch, the king's most excellent majesty, who can take away thy life if thou offendest; therefore, take heed that thou speakest not a word that may displease; but then consider, well, Hugh, dost thou not know from whence thou comest; upon whose message thou art sent? Even by the great and mighty God, who is all-present, and who beholdeth all thy ways, and who is able to cast thy soul into hell! Therefore, take care that thou deliverest thy message faithfully." He then proceeded with the same sermon he had preached the pre-

ceding Sunday, but with considerably more energy. The sermon ended, the court were full of expectation to know what would be the fate of this honest and plain-dealing bishop. After dinner, the king called for Latimer, and, with a stern countenance, asked him how he dared to be so bold as to preach in such a manner. He, falling on his knees, replied that his duty to his God and his prince had enforced him thereto, and that he had merely discharged his duty and his conscience in what he had spoken. Upon which the king, rising from his seat, and taking the good man by the hand, embraced him, saying, "Blessed be God I have so honest a servant." *Pointed sermons*:—Many sermons, ingenious of their kind, may be compared to a letter put into the post-office without a direction. It is addressed to nobody, it is owned by nobody, and if a hundred people were to read it, not one of them would think himself concerned in the contents. Such a sermon, whatever excellencies it may have, lacks the chief requisite of a sermon. It is like a sword which has a polished blade, a jewelled hilt, and a gorgeous scabbard, but yet will not cut, and, therefore, as to all real use, is no sword. The truth, properly presented, has an edge; it pierces to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit; it is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (*J. Newton.*) *Convincing preaching*:—A parishioner of Whately said to the Archbishop that he did not believe that the occupant of the pulpit had a right to make those in the pew uncomfortable. Whately agreed, but added, "Whether the sermon is to be altered or the man's life depends on whether the doctrine is right or wrong." Said Robert Morris to Dr. Rush, "I like that preaching best which drives a man into the corner of his pew and makes him think the devil is after him." (*E. P. Thwing.*)

Ver. 9. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord.—*The sinner's treatment of God's law*:—Some men treat the law and testimony of the Lord as if it were like plaster of Paris, to be poured over their features to take the cast of their own boasted loveliness. Religion is to them a matter of opinion and not of fact; they talk about their "views," and their ideas, as if Christians were no longer believers but inventors, and no more disciples but masters. This cometh of evil, and leadeth on to worse consequences. Our sentiments are like a tree, which must be trained to the wall of Scripture; but too many go about to bow the wall to their tree, and cut and trim texts to shape them to their mind. Let us never be guilty of this. Reverence for the perfect word should prevent our altering even a syllable of it. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul;" let it convert us, but never let us try to pervert it. Our ideas must take the mould of Scripture—this is wisdom: to endeavour to mould Scripture to our ideas would be presumption. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 13. And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord.—*The repentance of David*:—If we wish to draw any lessons from the repentance of any one, it is a great assistance to us to know something of the character of the man, something of the sin from which he repented, something of the mode by which he was roused to repentance, something of the nature of the repentance itself. All these we have given to us in the case of David. I. **HIS GENERAL CHARACTER.** It is a character difficult, perhaps, to understand, but its very difficulty makes it instructive. It is full of variety, full of impulse, full of genius; it is like the characters of our own later times—complicated, intricate, vast; it covers a great range of characters amongst ourselves; it is not like one class or character only, but like many; it is like you, it is like me; it is like this man and that man. He is the shepherd, and the student, and the poet, and the soldier, and the King. He is the adventurous wanderer, strong and muscular, "his feet like steel." He is the silent observer of the heavens by night, "the moon and the stars which God has ordained." He is the devoted friend, the first example of youthful friendship, loving Jonathan "with a love passing the love of women." He is the generous enemy, sparing his rival. He is the father mourning with passionate grief the loss of his favourite child: "O my son Absalom." Again and again we feel that he is one of us—that his feelings, his pleasures, his sympathies, are such as we outwardly love and admire, even if we

do not enter into them. But yet more than this, it is exactly that mixture of good and evil which is in ourselves; not all good nor all evil, but a mixture of both—of a higher good, and of a deeper evil, yet still both together. But it is the other side of his character that we are now called to consider; and yet it is only by considering both sides together that we can draw its true lesson from either. It was to this tender, and brave, and loving character that the Prophet Nathan came, with the story of the hard-hearted, mean-spirited man. Every just and generous feeling in David's heart was roused by the story: its simple pathos, now worn through and through by much repetition, was then felt in all the freshness of its first utterance: his anger was kindled against the man. No lengthened comment can add anything to the startling effect of the disclosure of this sudden descent from all that was high and good to all that was base and miserable.

II. DAVID'S REPENTANCE AND OUR OWN. 1. Let us observe how the Scripture narrative deals with the case. It does not exaggerate—it does not extenuate. David's goodness is not denied because of his sin, nor his sin because of his goodness. The fact that he was the man after God's own heart is not thrust out of sight because he was the man of Nathan's parable. The fact of his sin is not denied, lest it should give occasion to the enemies of God to blaspheme. This is the first lesson that we learn. 2. The sin of David, and his unconsciousness of his own sin, and so also his repentance through the disclosure to him of his own sin, are exactly what are most likely to take place in characters like his, like ours, made up of mixed forms of good and of evil. The hardened, depraved, worldly man is not ignorant of his sin—he knows it, he defends it, he is accustomed to it. But the good man, or the man who is half good and half bad—he overlooks his sin. His good deeds conceal his bad deeds, often even from others, more often still from himself. Even out of those very gifts which are most noble, most excellent in themselves, may come our chief temptations. 3. Let us observe both the exact point of Nathan's warning, and the exact point of David's repentance. It is most instructive to observe that Nathan in his parable calls attention, not to the sensuality and cruelty of David's crime, but simply to its intense and brutal selfishness. It is remarkable that even deeper than David's sense, when once aroused, of his injustice to man, was his sense of his guilt and shame before God:—"Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight." Dark as is the shade of the dark sin done to man, a yet darker shade falls over it when viewed in the unchanging light of the All-Pure and the All-Merciful. This is perhaps especially the case with these grosser sins. David is driven by the very fervour of his penitence to speak of this one sin as he would have spoken of all sins. Every one of us is in danger of falling into sins of which we have no expectation beforehand, of which, like David, we are ignorant even after we have committed them. Whatever be our special failing—self-indulgence, vanity, untruth, uncharitableness—and however it be made known to us—by friends, by preachers, by reflection, by sorrow, by the death of our first-born, by the ruin of our house—let David's feeling respecting it be ours. 4. This leads us to see what is the door which God opens, in such cases as David's, for repentance and restoration. There is the general lesson, taught by this, as by a thousand other passages both of the Old and the New Testaments—that, as far as human eye can judge, no case is too late or too bad to return, if only the heart can be truly roused to a sense of its own guilt and of God's holiness. "Thou desirest no sacrifice;"—consider the immense force of the words; how wise, how consoling, how vast in their reach of meaning—"Thou desirest no sacrifice, else would I give it Thee; Thou delightest not in burnt-offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." So spoke David in the fulness of his penitence. So taught the Son of David in the fulness of His grace and truth. Two final lessons we may learn from David's repentance. For others, it teaches us to regard with tenderness the faults, the sins, the crimes of those who, gifted with great and noble qualities, are, by that strange union of strength and weakness which we so often see, betrayed into acts which more ordinary, commonplace characters avoid or escape. And for ourselves, let us remember the still more important lesson that such a foundation of good as that which there was in David's character is never thrown away. If it is not able to resist the trial altogether, it will at least be best able to recover from it. (*A. P. Stanley, M.A.*) *On repentance*:—I. AS THE SIN HAD BEEN PUBLIC, SO WAS HIS REPENTANCE. His penitent confession is recorded to the

end of time, to be read by every child of God, and be made the vehicle of hearty confession by every penitent sinner until the day of judgment. II. HE PUTS UTTERLY OUT OF THE ACCOUNT ALL HIS FORMER FAITHFUL SERVICE; there is not so much as a hint of it; and if a person did not know how David had hitherto walked before the Lord, and been his faithful minister on many trying occasions in the Church of God, he could not have guessed it from any expression here. The truly contrite heart gives glory to God for all the good, and takes shame to itself for all the evil. Here is one of the difficult things in true repentance; how unwilling is the heart to lose sight of any thing which it can set against its sin! Even when it sees the vanity and sinfulness of doing this, it still clings to a lurking comfort in the thought of some merit; it is unwilling to forego every support of self-righteousness, to place itself at the bar of God's judgment, and to be found speechless without one word of defence; yet so David did. III. HIS REPENTANCE FOLLOWED UP BY ACTIONS. See the utter resignation with which he submits to the first instalment of his punishment in the death of the child; see, again, how humbly he bears the curse of Shimei, when he cries out, "Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial;" thus cruelly reminding him of the very sins which we have been considering. How utterly dead was the spirit of self-justification in the heart of the man who could speak and act thus! IV. REPENTANCE IN ITS TRUE NATURE IS NOT THE WORK OF A CERTAIN NUMBER OF DAYS OR YEARS: IT LASTS THROUGH LIFE. As David says, "My sin is ever before me," and as David showed by his humbleness of heart to the end of his life. V. THE SIGHT OF HIS FORGIVENESS. God, who seeth the heart of man, saw the real worth of those words, "I have sinned against the Lord." He saw in them the deeds which followed them; He knew that they were not showy blossoms, that would soon drop off, without any setting of fruit, like flowers in an unsuitable climate; He saw in them the earnest of much and good fruit, as in a tree that is in its proper soil and genuine climate. The beginning and the end are at once in the sight of God, and He knew that the words came from a heart which would make them good by the help of His grace; and therefore He accepted David's repentance, and commissioned the prophet Nathan to say unto him, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." (*B. W. Evans, B.D.*) *David's fall and recovery*:—1. The history of this pious and sincere servant of God is like a broken hull deeply imbedded in the sand, and the ragged masts emerging from the waves to tell others of the danger and to warn them to steer away from the shoal on which this gallant ship was wrecked. David's sad story has a voice to every open ear, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." 2. But this history illustrates David's character, while it brings out in parallel the character of God. Did God who has so fully recorded the particulars of his servant's crimes—did He wink at the crime? Did God dread the exposure of David, and care to hide the crime, because the criminal was one of His own family, and household? Let him who is disposed to sneer at David's fall, and to think that God may be partial, study well and carefully the record of David's punishment. But is that all that David's sin and David's fall should teach us and has taught us of judgment? 3. Does it tell us nothing of mercy? Does it bring out nothing further, both of God's character, and the character of His true, though fallen child? "I have sinned against the Lord." That one thought spreads its sorrowful influence over his whole soul. "My base ingratitude against God, my foul dishonour done to God, the deep offence against his holiness, the sad requital of His unmerited goodness"—that one thought like a dark veil shuts out all others. 4. And does not David's feeling as a child bring out and illustrate the feeling of God as a father? "If he commit iniquity, I will punish his offences with the rod and his sin with scourges; nevertheless I will not take away my loving kindness from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail." When the child who has sinned comes back with a broken spirit, and melting heart, to his wronged and injured, but still loving father, will that father refuse the pardon which is now all in all to his repenting child? Will he turn away coldly from the returning prodigal, and not forgive the offence so deeply felt, so fully acknowledged, and so evidently repeated? And so the broken-hearted David has scarcely sobbed out, "I have sinned against the Lord," when he who knew how true and deep that sorrow was that wrung his heart, replied by his prophet, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." (*W. W. Champneys, M.A.*) *Conviction of sin and recovery*:—The history of the past is the parable of the

present. The shadows of the dead are the representatives of the living. Scripture history is a perpetual illustration of passing life. The sins of different ages may not be exactly the same, and yet the illustration may be very complete. **I. MEN OFTEN CORRECTLY UNDERSTAND A MESSAGE FROM THE LORD WITHOUT OBSERVING ITS PERSONAL APPLICATION TO THEMSELVES.** David listens with interest and indignation to the words of the prophet. You do wonder, as you observe the appropriateness of the words, that he does not himself see the meaning of the parable. You feel in reading it as if it did not require any exposition. You understand Nathan as soon as you hear his tale. But David heard no interpreter, and in pronouncing judgment upon the unknown offender unconsciously condemned himself, the real culprit. Yet this is so like human nature that I feel the truthfulness of the account. Just like him many of you feel under a message from the Lord. You do not think of yourselves. How many times have some of you uttered your own condemnation, while you supposed you had been pronouncing righteous judgment upon others! To you he has opened his mouth in a parable, and uttered a dark saying; but only because you have not had the true interpretation. Yet often the interpreter was there, if you had consulted him. **II. THE BEGINNING OF RECOVERY FROM SINS TO PRODUCE IN THE HEART OF THE SINNER DEEP CONVICTIONS OF HIS OWN SINFULNESS.** To send a messenger to David, though he brought from the Lord the most severe rebuke of the sin, was yet an auspicious omen and sign of mercy for the sinner. Notwithstanding the grievousness and aggravation of the sin, God had not utterly cast off His servant. In wrath He remembered mercy. Mercy he did obtain; but it is for you to observe the sorrowful way he had to travel in order to find mercy of the Lord. The words of Nathan were never forgotten. Let no man think he may sin with impunity. Let no backslider comfort himself with the thought that he will be restored in due time. Restored he may be; but he will retrace every step with many tears. He will be brought back with many stripes, and made to feel, in the sadness of his soul, the evil of his sin, that never, as long as he lives, he may think lightly of it any more. **III. FOR HEINOUS SINS A PROVISION OF MERCY IS MADE, BUT SO MADE AS WILL SECURE LONG AND HUMBLING RECOLLECTIONS OF THE AGGRAVATED GUILT.** David was pardoned—freely pardoned—though his sin was very great upon him. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." (*R. Halley, D.D.*) **The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.—God and the sinner:—I. THE LORD CONVINCING THE SINNER.** We observe that the impression which pierced most deeply was this—he had sinned against his God. **II. GOD PARDONING SIN.** This appears particularly deserving of notice, as God's dealing with David may well be regarded as in the case of Paul, a pattern to those who should after believe upon him to life everlasting. It is plain that pardon was here bestowed as an act of God's free and royal grace; it was extended according to his will, at his own time, and in his appointed way. The way in which the Lord here forgave his guilty servant may appear to mere human reason as by no means the wisest; but to such a thought we may well reply, "the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." A deeper view would convince us that no other way could have so well displayed the attributes of Jehovah, or so secured the heartfelt humiliation and subsequent holiness of David. Again, this mode of forgiveness must have melted the soul of David into that union of self-loathing and gratitude, which constitutes genuine repentance, and gives hope and peace, without which there can be no willing obedience, while the memory of the past would ever keep alive self-distrust and watchfulness. **III. THE LORD CHASTENS THE RESTORED PENITENT.** Nathan had previously declared that the sword should not depart from his house, but that in domestic trouble his own sin should return upon him; and now he pronounced that, to mark the injury his fall had done to the cause of God, the child of his sinful affection should die. We are not to think from this that any guilt still remained charged upon him before the Lord—no, for his sin was put away—but for his own good and for our admonition, he underwent this painful discipline. Applications:

1. I think this subject speaks a word to the careless or hardened sinner. Are you trying to hope as far as you think about it, that God will pass over your sins? Beware, they must be absolutely pardoned here, or absolutely punished hereafter.
2. There is much also here for the Christian to ponder on—he will reflect with joy and great consolation upon this gracious proof of the infinite mercy of the Lord—to many a soul it has furnished a successful reply to the infected doubts

of the tempter; but it unfolds an awful picture of the heart of man. While we learn here that the gifts and calling of God are without repentance, let us ever remember that our own strength is but weakness, and to trust in our own hearts foolishness; for that God alone is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. (*H. Townsend.*)

The effect of pardon.—1. We have two cases of sinners who have been entirely pardoned, and whose actions after the announcement of that pardon have been left on the record of Scripture—David and Mary Magdalene. Certain distinct features appear in their cases after forgiveness, which are separate from the features of their penitence; an intensity of love proportioned to the amount of remitted debt, a life of continual carefulness, and a pathway in which they trod more or less softly to the end of their days. And all this proceeding partly from the deepest gratitude, and partly from the encouragement afforded by knowing they were forgiven. We are all familiar with the glorious effects of the pronouncing of pardons in the case of earthly criminals and earthly punishments. These may as faint shadows symbolise to us the effect on our spiritual life of the pronounced pardon of sin. 2. Under the Jewish dispensation we frequently find that a certain bodily trial was annexed as a penalty to an act of rebellion against God; and when that act of rebellion was repented of the act was cancelled. (1.) Thus Zacharias offended against God by the expression of unbelief in the promise of the angel; the penalty of speechlessness was immediately annexed to his crime. (2.) The children of Israel rebelled against God by their constant desire to return to Egypt, their unwillingness to yield to the law of Sinai, which imposed a new curb on their stubborn dispositions, and a reluctance to go up and conquer the holy land, where the sons of Anak dwelt. The constant wandering in the wilderness was their punishment. (3.) It would be highly dangerous to us to attempt to apply this rule rigidly to our own case. We are seldom certain of the connection between the cause and effect in the case of our own troubles, and even, where we might be able, we should find it hard to say in what cases the removal of infirmity is equivalent to the statement of pardon. But to a certain degree we may apply this rule. 3. But there are other conditions which we may take, as in some degree equivalent to a pronounced pardon. When a sin has bound us in its chains, and we lamenting over its dominion use every effort to subdue it and at last succeed, and form the contrary habit, we may naturally hope that that sin is forgiven. When we remain tied and bound by the chain of our sins in spite of every effort to overcome them, we may take for granted that He, Whose grace is all-sufficient, refuses on account of some lurking impenitence to grant the pardon. There is some goodly Babylonish garment hidden in the heart, and till that is given up the dark citadel will not yield. The moment the surrender is entire, God's hand will free the captive, and the stronger man will enter the strong man's house, take his spoils and the armour wherein he trusted. There are times when strong inward persuasions, feelings of inward joy, the witness of the Spirit may be indications of God's forgiveness. When these feelings are permanent, real, and healthy, we may fairly argue that they can proceed from no other source than the blessed Spirit of God. 4. We must consider the result of pardon on the penitent. (1.) An intense, earnest, cheerful desire to follow God for the future would be the first impulse of the pardoned sinner. When the man of Gadara was released from Legion, his first impulse was to sit for ever at Jesu's feet. When Mary's pardon had proceeded from the lips of Him Who never fails, wherever He was, there was she; at the cross, over against the sepulchre, and in the garden on Easter morning. When the blind man of Jericho received his sight from our Blessed Lord, his first impulse was to forsake every worldly consideration and follow Christ. The first impulse of the prodigal, under the hope of possible forgiveness from an offended father, was to work for the remainder of his life cheerfully as a hired servant. When David had been assured of the forgiveness of God for his sin, his first impulse was to take, with the utmost patience, his punishment, and to rise up cheerfully to go about his religious and his secular duties. (2.) Another result of the consciousness of forgiveness is the definiteness of a new beginning of a heavenly life. When a dreary past lies behind us, to which there is no definite end, a long waste of hazy night, an unascertained morning with no clear sunbeams to mark the border-land, we lack spirit and energy in our religious course. When the brilliance of that morning light wholly eclipses the night past, we travel on like new beginners, briskly, and clearly and energetically. (3.) A

third result which arises from the pardoned state is the power to cast off the chains of a now past captivity. The mere consciousness of a sin clinging to us, because unpardoned, gives a continual sense of inconsistency, a constant dread lest the labour we are spending should be in vain. (4.) The pardoned condition enables us to realise with a full and vivid power the objects both of faith and hope. These considerations with respect to the pardoned state should lead us to all the lawful investigation which we may follow of what are the trustworthy tokens of that condition; and while we should never rest satisfied for one moment with remaining on the border-land between doubtful and ascertained duty, we should surely also strive to ascertain as closely as we can the real nature and power of absolution committed to the Church. (*E. Monro.*) *David forgiven; a source of comfort to sinners*.—I. **HEAVY AFFLICTIONS ARE NO SIGNS OF AN UNPARDONED CONDITION.** There are times, perhaps, when we find it difficult to believe this truth. A light and short affliction seldom much depresses us, for we can easily reconcile it with a Father's faithfulness; but when succeeds blow to blow, when our troubles are peculiar, and long-continued, and harrowing, our hearts begin to fail us. We are tempted to think that a gracious God never can love the creatures whom He so sorely wounds. We could not so afflict our children; we are ready to conclude, therefore, that were we the children of a Heavenly Father, He would not so afflict us: our once peaceful assurance of His pardoning mercy gives way, and is succeeded by perplexity and doubt. Turn to the experience of David. It tells us as plainly as the most comfortless affliction can tell us that a want of spiritual consolation under calamities is no evidence of an unpardoned state. It is true the Gospel teaches us to expect special consolations in special sufferings. It is true also that the hour of affliction has oftentimes proved the happiest, though at the time the afflicted Christian has thought himself utterly forsaken. The feelings of mankind under afflictions have been as various as their afflictions themselves. An accusing conscience is not the scourge of an angry God: it is not the mark of His wrath. But an accusing conscience is a mark of nothing but this, that we are sinners, and that sin is a more evil and bitter thing than we once thought it. II. **A PAINFUL SENSE OF INWARD CORRUPTION IS NOT INCONSISTENT WITH PARDONING MERCY.** If there is any one lust which, day by day and year after year, leads us captive; any ungodly practice in which we habitually indulge; if the sin which is our fear is at the same time our delight, ever committed with greediness, though sometimes repented of with anguish, the written testimony of God declares that we have no more reason to regard ourselves forgiven than a dying man has to think himself in health. But if sin is opposed, as well as felt; if through the Spirit the base passions of our nature are habitually overcome; if sin causes grief and abhorrence in our souls as well as terror; then, my brethren, we may be assured that God, who is ever waiting to be gracious, will accept of our imperfect services, He will hear our prayers and bless us for Christ's sake. **LESSONS:** 1. It points out to us the persons to whom the ministers of the Gospel are to speak peace. 2. The text holds out to the sinner the greatest encouragement not to despair, if he is truly sorry for his sins, and intends by God's help to walk in newness of life. (*A. J. Wolff, D.D.*)

Ver. 14. By this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.—*Sins of Scripture saints*.—I. IT IS NOT OUR DUTY TO ATTEMPT TO PALLIATE THE CRIMES OF SCRIPTURE SAINTS. Some have laboured in their defence, as if our religion depended on their vindication, and, under their pleadings, that which is recorded as the grossest crime, has been made to appear as a very venial transgression. But against such ingenuity common sense will revolt, and though carried away for a while, as the judgment may be, by an eloquent plea for a criminal at the bar, the verdict will still be one of condemnation. And this is precisely the course which the Scriptures pursue. And this is the course which the Christian ought to pursue in speaking of these characters. II. **ALLOWING, THEN, ALL THE GUILT OF THESE SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS, DOES IT FURNISH ANY ARGUMENT AGAINST RELIGION?** It has often been used for this end, but without reason. Will it be said that a religion which holds up such transgressors as the saints of the Lord, cannot be from a holy God? But that religion does not commend their sins, if it did, we might well reject it. Their sins are held up to our abhorrence, and as proceeding from the want of more of the power of godliness. The record of their faults, so far from weighing against the truth of Scrip-

ture, is, indeed, one strong evidence in its support. III. HAD ALL BEEN REPRESENTED AS FAULTLESS, WOULD THE BIBLE HAVE BEEN ANY MORE CREDIBLE? Then the question would have been asked, Why is it that no such perfect characters are formed under the power of the Gospel in the present day? Men would have looked around upon its professors, and seen that they were but imperfect, and they would have said either that religion had lost its power or that it never had any. IV. WILL IT BE OBJECTED THAT RELIGION HAS BUT LITTLE POWER, IF IT LEAVES MEN TO FALL INTO SUCH SINS, AND THAT UNASSISTED REASON CAN PRODUCE AS PURE A MORALITY AS THE BIBLE? We are willing that the latter should be judged by its fruits, and if it does not yield more perfect fruits than philosophy or reason ever produced, then let it be rejected. But in judging of its effects we must take them as a whole, and not look at solitary instances of failure. David was one of the greatest kings of Scripture; let his whole reign be compared with that of Alexander, the greatest king of ancient profane history, and if it do not stand higher in a moral point of view, then we might acknowledge that David's religion was powerless. Every one acquainted with the private and public characters of these two monarchs, placed amid the temptations of power, must acknowledge that while there was one defiling blot on the character of David, that of Alexander was one whole blot, set off only by shining sins, and that while the subjects of the former were happy, those of the latter were but the slaves of ambition and the instruments of terror. V. WHEN THE SCRIPTURES DESCRIBE THE FAILINGS OF GOOD MEN, WE SEE ALL THE SECRET GUILT OF THEIR SINS BROUGHT TO LIGHT. VI. THE SEVERITY OF GOD'S JUSTICE TOWARDS THESE, HIS GUILTY SERVANTS. In the ordinary course of things, their crimes would have been in a great measure concealed. But God would not suffer these offenders so to escape. What would have been forgotten, he has engraved on an enduring monument to their shame. Does not this look like the confidence of truth? VII. IF, THEN, ANY TAKE OCCASION FROM THE EVIL DEEDS OF THOSE MENTIONED IN SCRIPTURE TO BLASPHEME IT PROVES THAT THEY ARE ENEMIES OF THE LORD. A humble-minded person will see much in these records of sin to convince him of the truth of Scripture, and for his own edification. VII. THEY HAVE ENCOURAGED MANY A BELIEVER, OVERTAKEN IN A FAULT, TO SEEK FORGIVENESS. No doubt many have drawn encouragement from hence to sin, and because such crimes as those of David and Peter have been forgiven, some have been led to presume that they too should find forgiveness, however they might live. From the same plant poison and honey are extracted. But many a time also has the Christian been led by the deceitfulness of sin into some gross transgression, yet after long indulgence he awakens from his dream of pleasure, and finds the stings of conscience can still reach him. IX. THESE RECORDED FAILINGS OF GOOD MEN HAVE ALSO MADE BELIEVERS OF SUCCEEDING AGES MORE CIRCUMSPECT. Many a one disposed to say, "I never will deny thee, Lord," has had presumptuous confidence checked by the recollection, how vain the boast was in the mouth of an apostle. Probably every Christian can declare that he never reads these melancholy accounts without being made more humble, and distrustful of self; and thus they have their use. In a great naval contest of England, we are told that one ship ran aground so as to be entirely cut off reach of the enemy, but contributed very much to the victory, by serving as a beacon to the other ships bearing down into action. It was not a way of contributing to victory which any brave captain would choose, but it would be a matter of rejoicing even in this way to serve one's country. And so, though we would not choose that holy men of old should have fallen into sins, we rejoice that the great Captain of our salvation is making use of their failures to swell the triumphs of his people, and to bring glory to his own great name. X. THAT SALVATION CANNOT BE OF WORKS, BUT ONLY OF GOD'S FREE GRACE. (W. H. Lewis, D.D.) *The sin of giving occasion to blasphemy*:—You will observe that this signal misfortune is denounced against David because he had "given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." Here is at once an answer to all the cavils of unbelievers, and a satisfaction for all the scruples of weaker brethren. So far from any justification of the conduct of David in this particular, we find it expressly condemned; the sacred writer is perfectly aware of the tendency of this passage of David's history; and yet he is not directed by the Holy Spirit to suppress it. (2.) It is only to the enemies of the Lord that they afford occasion to blaspheme. They, indeed, never will want occasion; and we are not to be denied the salutary examples which the Scriptures

hold forth to us, because there are those who wrest them to their own destruction. But it is chiefly in the failings of the good, that the enemies of the Lord find cause of triumph. (2) The occasion of blasphemy given by David to the enemies of the Lord has been amply improved. (3.) Giving occasion of blasphemy to the enemies of the Lord is, therefore, a sin of vast magnitude, even separately considered. All conduct of ours, which tends in the slightest degree to strengthen that system of false reasoning by which sinners confirm themselves in their sins, and undermine the faith and practice of others, is sin of the deepest dye. (4.) I am only aware of one objection which has been raised against the authority of Scripture from this portion of the life of David. It has been represented as inconsistent with the justice of God, to punish David by inflicting death on an innocent being. But scarcely a moment's consideration is necessary to shew the fallacy of this objection, for it never could be made by any person recollecting that there is a future world. Death, in the course of that nature to which the child was subject, must necessarily have arrived; and at no time could it have arrived with so little risk and such cheering prospects, as in that age, whose happy and highly favoured possessors compose, with those who most resemble them, the kingdom of heaven. And this circumstance may teach us to admire the wonderful economy of goodness which characterizes all the acts of divine Providence. (*H. Thompson, M.A.*) *The faults of others no excuse for evading the claims of Christ*:—How can you make the excuse that because there are some hypocrites you will refuse Christ Himself? I heard a friend tell a good story in reference to that matter. An Irishman had found a sovereign which was short in weight, so that he could only get eighteen shillings for it. The next time he saw a sovereign lying on the ground he would not pick it up, for, he said, he had lost two shillings by the other. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Hindering the Gospel*.—If the sun be eclipsed one day, it attracts more spectators than if it shone a whole year. So if you commit one sin, it will cause you many sorrows and the world many triumphs. Dr. Whitaker, on reading the fifth of Matthew, broke out saying, "Either this is not the Gospel or we are not of the Gospel." The cruelty of the Spaniards to the Indians made them refuse Christian baptism. "For," said they, "He must be a wicked God who has such wicked servants." (*W. Secker.*) *Evildoers discredit others also*:—A non-venomous snake one day met a venomous. "I wonder," said the non-venomous, "why men loathe and avoid me?" "Simply because they don't know which is which," answered the other; "very few can tell us one from the other; my poison fang, therefore, protects you also." "Yes," said the first, "and brings me into dreadful discredit too; your evil deeds are credited to our whole family, and keep us in disgrace."—(*Weekly Pulpit.*) *Judging all by unworthy examples*:—It was an amusing distortion of a good hymn, but there was not a little sound philosophy in it, when the old negro preacher sang, "Judge not the Lord by feeble saints." And yet this is precisely what the great majority of unconverted men are doing all the time. They will not go to the Bible and give heed to what God Himself says. They have no ear for His voice of mercy that offers them salvation for the taking. They do not pay any attention to the solemn warnings that the Scriptures utter. They judge the Lord by "feeble saints." They attempt to feed their starving souls on the imperfections of Christians—poor food enough they find it! Because God's people are not all that they ought to be, therefore these cavillers will keep aloof from the religion which they profess. Because God's believing followers are not perfect—they do not claim to be—therefore, say these unbelievers, there is no power in religion. Christians cannot claim exemption from criticism. They do not expect it. They know that the eyes of the world are upon them. But they say to the unbeliever, "If you would know the truth, go to the Word; go to Him Who is the truth; judge not the Lord by feeble saints." *How to judge the merits of religion*:—A man said to me in a railway train, "What is religion? Judging from the character of many professors of religion, I do not admire religion." I said: "Now, suppose we went to an artist in the city of Rome, and while in his gallery asked him, 'What is the art of painting?' would he take us out to a low alley, and show us the mere daub of a pretender at painting? or would he take us into the corridors, and show us the Rubens and the Raphaels and the Michael Angelos? When we asked him 'What is the art of painting?' he would point to the works of these great masters, and

say, 'This is painting!' Now, you propose to find the mere caricatures of religion, to seek that which is the mere pretension of a holy life, and you call that religion. I point you to the magnificent men and women whom this Gospel has blessed and lifted and crowned. Look at the masterpieces of Divine grace if you want to know what religion is." (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Christianity a holy religion*:—Dr. Mason Good, when arguing with a young infidel scoffer, well put the old error of making the faults of professors the fault of their profession. "Did you ever know an uproar made because an infidel had gone astray from the paths of morality?" The young man admitted that he had not. "Then you allow Christianity to be a holy religion by expecting its professors to be holy; and thus, by your very scoffing, you pay it the very highest compliment in your power." (*Weekly Pulpit.*)

Vers. 14—25. **The child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.**—*Great troubles following great transgressions*:—David became a backslider. Men sometimes speak, not of David's great sins, but of his great sin, as if he were guilty of only one flagrant transgression. Such language is lenient at the expense of truth. A great sin seldom stands altogether alone. It is most frequently found in the midst of kindred company, like a high Alpine peak—a region of desolation and death, surrounded by other desolate peaks only a little lower than itself. In David's case it was not one monster transgression, but several which lifted themselves in colossal defiance of God's law. The offender against man and God might plead, that at first he was swept into transgression by a sudden gust of passion; but he could not urge any such extenuation of his sins when he tempted Uriah to drunkenness; when he sent the patriotic soldier back to the camp with a letter containing a plan whereby his fidelity and courage might be taken advantage of to accomplish his destruction; and when he used his kingly power in commanding Joab to help him in this murderous policy. There are few things in history more appalling than the awful completeness of David's transgressions. Having brought himself into difficulties by his crime, he grappled with the difficulties with a masterful energy and a terrible recklessness, as if he would shrink from nothing and spare nobody, in his endeavour to hide his own shame. The ravages made by sin in his nature, in a short season, were incredibly great. How utterly unlike himself David was, when he tried to cover his delight at Uriah's death with canting words about the chances of war and the duty of resignation! What a pitiable pretence it was to send a message to Joab, exhorting him not to be too much distressed and discouraged by the calamity which had befallen the army. Can this be David? Is this what sin does with a man when he suffers it to have place and power in his heart? The sight of such havoc wrought in one who was a king amongst the great and good, might well dim the brightness and disturb the joy of heaven itself. Our present object is not to set forth either the repentance or the forgiveness of David, but to show that, though he was penitent and pardoned, he sustained great loss and damage by reason of his sins. Punishment for his sin preceded his penitence and forgiveness. For a whole year David remained in that strangest greatest guilt of all—an unconsciousness of guilt. His spiritual sensibilities were so deadened he did not imagine there was any reference to him in the story Nathan told. With great beams in both his own eyes, he was yet determined to put another man to death for having a mote in one of his. While David was forgetting his transgressions God was setting them in the light of His countenance—the light that most reveals the sinfulness of sin. When at length David acknowledged his sins, and cried for mercy, he was met by God with wondrous grace. The promptness of the pardon proves that God does, indeed, delight in mercy. As in the case of the returning prodigal, David was scarcely allowed to finish his confession before the prophet exclaimed: "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." What we say of fire or water might have been truly said of Joab, David's commander-in-chief. He was a good servant, but a bad master. One of the evil results of the sins in the matter of Uriah was that it changed the position of Joab. Henceforth he was more like David's master than David's servant. For the sake of his dignity and honour and peace it was of first importance that the King should have full control over his impulsive and unscrupulous general; but how could he retain that control after the scene in front of the walls of Rabbah? From the moment that fatal letter was put into Joab's hand he must have felt that

David was utterly in his power. What a secret for a servant to possess concerning his master! A proper control over Joab could not have been the only power David lost through his sins. The power of rebuke was most essential to him. As a father, how much need there was for him to use it over his subjects; and, as a prophet, what need for him to use it in the Church! But, when he sinned so fearfully, he must have sinned away well-nigh all his force for rebuking others. We learn from several Psalms that David suffered much from slander. He was a successful man, and his success excited envy, and envy gave birth to calumny. Hence we hear him complaining of false accusations, and appealing from the aspersions of men to the judgment of God. It is not possible to fix the dates of all the Psalms in which he refers to these slanders, but we may be sure he was likely to suffer most from this cause after his backslidings. This would be especially true of such calumnies as those of which he complains so piteously in the forty-first Psalm. David prayed for pardon, for purity, and for a restoration of spiritual joy. It does not appear that this side the grave he received a large answer to the last request. Traces of the mischief which had been wrought were visible down to the latest hour of life. The splendour of his reputation and the exulting gladness of his spirit were never fully recovered. It was impossible, for, though God had forgiven, David could not forget. The life-long memory of his sins must have been a lifelong trouble. The more he realised that God had forgiven him the less he could forgive himself. It mattered not in what fair scenes and prosperous circumstances he was placed, his thoughts would be travelling back to that dark and doleful region, and fetching thence materials for present gloom and grief. (*C. Vince.*) *Divine correction consistent with Divine forgiveness*.—True excellence consists not so much in the singular display of one or more commendable dispositions, as in the combined and duly regulated exercise of the whole range of moral perfections. Here it is that the superlative excellence of the Divine character is discovered; and here is detected the imperfection by which the brightest specimens of human excellence are still marked. How difficult is it for man to combine a decided and appropriate expression of his disapprobation of the crime with that forbearance and mercy which, on many grounds, may be due to the criminal. Stern severity which exaggerates the real nature of the error, and entirely overlooks the avowed and apparently sincere contrition of the offender, too often usurps the name and place of just and necessary correction. While, on the other hand, a weak and mistaken tenderness sometimes so far relaxes all correction as to appear like connivance at what is evil, and to leave it after all matter of just suspicion how far the conduct in question is regarded as really deserving condemnation. Here, as in every case, the Divine conduct exhibits a pattern which should ever be kept in mind, and to which our own should, as nearly as possible, be conformed; justice, holiness, and mercy, are all shown in harmonious exercise.

I. **THE REPENTANCE AND PARDON OF DAVID.** 1. The sincerity of David's repentance. 2. The assurance he received of Divine forgiveness: "the Lord also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die." This may be intended to assure him of deliverance from the legal demerit of his crime. 3. The close and intimate connection between the repentance and forgiveness of David. Here two remarks suggest themselves (1) His repentance preceded the assurance of Divine forgiveness. (2) The assurance of Divine forgiveness followed immediately on the expression of David's repentance.

II. **THE AFFLICTIVE DISCIPLINE TO WHICH DAVID WAS NOTWITHSTANDING SUBJECTED** (ver. 14.) 1. The nature of the visitations he endured. In the manner in which God corrects his erring people, there is often so close an analogy between the sin and the punishment as cannot fail to make the connection evident to themselves, and to all aware of the real state of the case. This remark is strikingly illustrated in the case before us. 2. The reason assigned for the infliction of these visitations: by such conduct he "had given great occasion to the enemies of God to blaspheme." 3. The consistency of these visitations with the full and free forgiveness of which David had been assured. That these points are consistent with each other we must feel assured, from the fact that God has connected them. God still corrects, even where he pardons his backsliding people. (1) To render distinctly apparent his own abhorrence of their sin. That there could be no just reason to think the contrary, even independently of their chastisement, is admitted; but sinners might be ready to pretend there was. There shall be no room for this; and therefore, while God will show that he loves and pities the

offender, he will also show he hates the offence. (2.) To warn other Christians from being beguiled by so fatal an example. For the parent to allow one member of his family to sin without correction is but preparing the way for the offences of others. The due exercise of discipline in one case may be the happy means of salutary caution to others. (3.) As a probable means of preventing the hardening influence of his transgression on the minds of sinners. (4.) As a preservative against further declension on the part of the same individual. In conclusion, let the humbled and penitent backslider be encouraged to hope for pardon while he views the grace that was shown to David. (*Essex Remembrancer.*)

Forgiveness not impunity:—I. FORGIVENESS DOES NOT MEAN IMPUNITY. A man may be pardoned, and nevertheless he may be punished. God forgave David, yet bereaved him. And this no exceptional case; simply a notable illustration of a general law. In all ages sins of penitent men are forgiven them; in all ages penitent men have to endure the punitive results of the very sins that have been forgiven. Whatsoever they sow, that they reap, however bitterly they may repent having mingled tares with the wheat. Abraham sinning by taking Hagar to wife—sin forgiven, but strife and discord in his tent. Jacob deceived his father, defrauded his brother. God forgave him his sin, yet he had to eat bitter fruit of it through long years of labour, and sorrow, and fear. Peter sinned: was forgiven; yet had to go softly many days, to brook the pain of the thrice-repeated reproach, to find his sin recoiling upon him years afterwards (Antioch). II. THE MEANING AND MERCY OF PUNISHMENT. One very obvious reason why God does not detach their natural results from our sins even when He forgives them is that to do so would necessitate an incessant display of miraculous power, before which all law and certainty would be swept away, and our very conceptions of right and wrong confused. But though this familiar argument may prove a sufficient answer to reason, it has no balm for a wounded heart. To reach that we must consider the moral effects of punishment on the individual soul. And here David's experience will help us much. For it teaches how—1. Punishment deepens both our sense of sin and our hatred of it. Before punishment David not conscious of his transgression, nor alive to its enormity. He was blind to personal application of Nathan's parable until the prophet turned upon him. But then how deep his shame! Stands self-revealed, self-condemned. And this deep sense of personal guilt is a common and wholesome result of punishment. 2. Punishment deepens self-distrust and reliance upon God. David, who was but now so hot in his indignation against the wicked rich man, in whom he recognised no likeness to himself, finds that so far from having any right to judge or rule others, he has misjudged, he cannot rule himself. Now that he suffers the due reward of his deeds, he utterly distrusts himself; he can think no good thought, do no good act, offer no acceptable worship, save as God inspires and sustains him. 3. Punishment puts our repentance to the proof. It was not simply fear of judgment which led David to exhaust himself in confessions of guilt. It was rather shame and agony of finding himself out. Not even his child was foremost in his thoughts. It is not so much as mentioned in the psalm in which he poured out his soul before God. What touched him much was the awful estrangement which had crept in between his will and God's. It was this which he sought God to remove. Hence, when the child dies, David bows to the will of God. His penitence is put to a decisive test, and surmounts it. (*Samuel Cox, D.D.*) *Sin penalties*:—God is a God of infinite mercy to forgive sin, and yet "He will by no means clear the guilty." He will surely visit iniquity by fixing its consequences upon the sinner, and even also upon others for his sake. But, stated in this way, the principle is not readily acceptable to us. The righteousness of it does not lie upon the face of it. If God forgives the sin, why does He not also clear away the punishments and all the evil consequences of it? Surely, we say, "The way of the Lord is not equal." I. SIN PENALTIES THAT CAN BE REMOVED, SUCH AS REST ON THE SOUL. Sin has a twofold aspect, and calls for a twofold treatment by God. Every sin is both an act of transgression and a spirit of self-will. It has a sphere related to the body, and a sphere related to the soul. What, then, are the soul penalties which attach to sin inevitably? They are put into this expressive sentence, "The soul that sinneth it shall die." But this soul-penalty of sin can be remitted, put away, forgiven, lifted off the soul for ever. "The Lord hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die." The true sphere of the atonement made by our Lord Jesus, in His life and in His cross, is precisely this sphere of soul-penalties. II. SIN

PENALTIES THAT CANNOT NOW BE REMOVED—PENALTIES AND CONSEQUENCES OF SIN COMING ON OUR BODIES. In the Divine wisdom and goodness man's life on the earth has been arranged under certain conditions and with certain limitations. 1. Men and women are set together in family and social circles, so that the actions of any one of them shall affect the rest of them for good or for evil. No man is permitted to stand alone, the results of his conduct must reach to the good, or the misery, of somebody else. 2. God has appointed the order in which family and social life should be arranged and conducted. Keep the Divine order, and all will go well with us. 3. Sin, in its outward aspect, is the infringement of this Divine order, the breaking of these gracious and holy laws. 4. To every such infringement a natural penalty is attached. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." The redemption provided in Christ Jesus does not immediately touch these natural penalties of sin. The forgiving God "by no means clears the guilty." The child of the drunkard or the sensualist will not have the spirit of drink or of passion taken out of him, nor will he be renewed from his physical deterioration, because his father becomes a Christian. Consequences of sin stretch on until they get altogether beyond hand-grasp. Thick and heavy were the penalties which David had to pay for his sin. Can we vindicate the ways of God in this? Open two points. (1.) If it were not thus, adequate impressions of the evil and hatefulness of sin could not be kept before the eyes of men. (2.) These penalties which abide are not merely judicial, they have, in their own way, a gracious remedial power. The whole creation groans—"waiting for the redemption," full and final redemption, that is surely coming. (*Homiletic Magazine*.) *The stripes of the children of men*:—I. GOD'S CHASTISEMENTS. Bathsheba's little child was very sick; it was the child of sin and shame, but the parents hung over it; for seven days the mother watched it, and the father fasted and lay on the earth. Two years after one of his sons treated his sister as David had treated Uriah's wife. They say a man never hears his own voice till it comes back to him from the phonograph. Certainly a man never sees the worst of himself until it reappears in his child. When presently Absalom's rebellion broke out it received the immediate sanction and adherence of David's most trusty counsellor, whose advice was like the oracle of God. What swept Ahithophel into the ranks of that great conspiracy? The reason is given in the genealogical tables, which show that he was the grandfather of Bathsheba, and that his son Eliam was the comrade and friend of Uriah. The most disastrous and terrible blow of all was the rebellion of Absalom. Such were the strokes of the Father's rod that fell thick and fast upon his child. They appeared to emanate from the malignity and hate of man; but David looked into their very heart, and knew that the cup which they held to his lips had been mixed by heaven, and were not the punishment of a Judge, but the chastisement of a Father. II. GOD'S ALLEVIATIONS. They came in many ways. The bitter hour of trial revealed a love on the part of his adherents to which the old king may have become a little oblivious. It was as though God stooped over that stricken soul, and as the blows of the rod cut long furrows in the sufferer's back, the balm of Gilead was poured into the gaping wounds. Voices spoke more gently; hands touched his more softly: pitiful compassion rained tender assurances about his path; and, better than all, the bright-harnessed angels of God's protection encamped about his path and his lying-down. III. GOD'S DELIVERANCE. The raw troops that Absalom had so hastily mustered were unable to stand the shock of David's veterans, and fled. Absalom himself was despatched by the ruthless Joab, as he swayed from the arms of the huge terebinth. The pendulum of the people's loyalty swung back to its old allegiance, and they eagerly contended for the honour of bringing the king back. Many were the afflictions of God's servant, but out of them all he was delivered. When he had learnt the lesson, the rod was stayed. Thus always—the rod, the stripes, the chastisements; but amid all the love of God, carrying out His redemptive purpose, never hasting, never resting, never forgetting, but making all things work together till the evil is eliminated, and the soul purged. Then the after-glow of blessing, the calm ending of the life in a serene sundown. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Sin and its consequences*:—1. The permission of evil is an insoluble mystery. Perhaps the only light which can be thrown upon it is to be found in the words of St. Augustine, "God has judged it better to work good out of evil than to allow no evil. For seeing that He is supremely Good, He would in no way permit evil to be in His works, unless He were also Almighty as well

as Good, so as to be able to bring good even out of evil. In dealing with evil, He manifests His perfections—as the light of the sun becomes the rainbow with its beauteous colours, when it falls on the dark, dissolving cloud. The wisdom of God, for instance, becomes visible in the way in which, notwithstanding the interruptions and collisions of sin, His purposes are worked out. “Any one can be a pilot on a calm sea.” 2. Our thoughts are directed to a very remarkable instance of the permission of evil. It is remarkable, when we remember the description of David from the lips of Samuel, “The Lord hath sought Him a man after His own heart.” Some take the expression in its widest extent—one who is in mind and will clearly and fully conformed to the mind and will of God; whilst others seem to interpret it of one trait in David’s character—that of benevolence towards enemies. Perhaps the incongruity of the Divine estimate of David and his subsequent conduct is confined to his fall. I. **THE PUNISHMENT FOR SIN.** 1. It is first to be noticed that the sin itself had been pardoned. The history shows us that pardoned sin may have penal consequences. The removal of the guilt (*culpa*) does not necessarily include the removal of the penalty (*pœna*). David was pardoned for the breaches of the sixth and seventh commandments, although the guilt of sin is not transferable (Ezek. xviii. 20), the penalty is. The death, which was the penalty of David’s sin, was inflicted on the child. 3. Then the necessity for the punishment by the death of the child is traced by the Prophet not only to the intrinsic evil of the sin, but to the accidental aggravation which belonged to it from the circumstance that it was the king and prophet who had done this thing, and therefore had caused grievous scandal—“had given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme” (ver. 14). 4. In this instance, the terrible list of calamities which were to befall David and his house are distinctly traceable to David’s sin. They were its punishment and medicine. Suffering was necessary to show the Divine abhorrence of evil; and the Jew, who ever regarded sin and suffering as closely linked together, would be quick to read the signs of Divine wrath. II. **HOW DID DAVID BEAR IT?** 1. The child is “very sick.” For seven days the glow of life still lingered in the wasting form, and the king fasted and prayed, and fell prostrate upon the earth before his God, neither changing his apparel nor eating bread. This is not only a picture of natural affection, but also of evident anxiety for a sign that the wrath of God was stayed. Whilst we have here what Paley calls the “naturalness” of Scripture, we have also the penitent seeking a mark of restoration to Divine favour. 2. “While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept,” etc. It has been asked whether it was right to pray for the continuance of the child’s life, after the Prophet’s declaration that the child should “surely die.” In other words, whether David was trying to change or bend the Divine will into conformity with his will, after that will had been declared. Either David believed the words of the Prophet, or he did not. If he believed them, and yet prayed, that would be madness; if he believed not, that would be sin (*Tostatus*). The answer seems to be this: David regarded the declaration of Nathan as minatory. He thought to avert its accomplishment by prayer and fasting and tears. He was not certain about the Divine will; and God’s threatenings, like His promises, are conditional. III. **WHAT WAS HIS STAY?** 1. Belief in another world. “I shall go to him.” 2. No mock immortality could be this—the survival of matter, of fame, of ideas, of race, or of some vague, shadowy existence—a “transient air-people.” But a solid belief in a continuance of our personal existence, and in future personal recognition—“I shall go to him”—that alone could sustain the mourner in the presence of death. IV. **LESSONS:**—1. Here is an instance of the terrible truth, “Be sure your sin will find you out” (Numb. xxxii. 23), and that temporal penalties follow upon forgiven sin. Hate sin. 2. Let the sinner seek, as David, by prayer and self-affliction and tears, to avert sin’s penalties, until there is some irrevocable manifestation of the Divine will. 3. Imitate His constant conformity, when that will has been made clearly known. 4. Let the hope “full of immortality” be our stay in our dark hour. No “counterfeit immortality,” but the continuance, in a higher sphere of being, of the conscious, complete, personal existence, now certified by Christ’s resurrection. This can give patience in suffering and solace in death. (*The Thinker*.)

Vers. 22, 23. **While the child was yet alive I fasted and wept.**—*The loss of children*:—I. HIS AFFLICTION WAS THE DEATH OF HIS CHILD. The death of

a child is by no means an uncommon event. If our offspring are spared, and appear like olive plants around our table, we ought to be thankful, and to rejoice; yet to rejoice with trembling. When we reflect on the tenderness of their frame, and consider to how many accidents and diseases they are liable; and that many of their earliest complaints cannot be perfectly ascertained, and may be injured by the very means employed for their relief—the wonder is that they ever reach maturity. The death of David's child was predicted by Nathan, and was the consequence of the father's sin. "The landlord," says an old writer, "may distract on any part of the premises he chooses." We would rather say that there are many cases in which he requires us to walk by faith, and not by sight: that he does all things well, even when clouds and darkness are round about him; we would say that he indemnified this child by taking it to himself—while the father was punished, and suffered more relatively than if he had died himself.

II. THE BEHAVIOUR OF DAVID WITH REGARD TO THE AFFLICTION. 1. It takes in prayer—"He besought God for the child." Prayer is always proper: but how seasonable, how soothing, how sanctifying, in the day of trouble! Blessed resource and refuge! may we always make use of thee. 2. He also humbled himself: "He fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth." Much of David's distress arose from reflection on his sin: his grief was the grief not only of affliction but of penitence.

III. HE DEEMED THE EVENT UNCERTAIN. It is obvious that he did not consider the threatening as absolute and irreversible. He knew that many things had been denounced conditionally; and he knew also that the goodness of God was beyond all his thoughts. But what led him to assuage his grief? 1. Continued grief was unavailing. "Now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again?" 2. He contemplates his own death as certain: "I shall go to him." By this he intends the grave: and this part of our subject is common to all mankind. 3. He expects to follow his child not only into the grave, but into glory; and anticipates a renewed union with him in heaven. This was unquestionably David's case. (1.) First, as to the dead. We cannot join those in heaven who are not gone there; and all do not go there when they die. (2.) The second limitation regards the living. You cannot join those who are gone to heaven if you do not go there yourselves. Remember they are not separated from you for ever—you are going to them. They are waiting to receive you into everlasting habitations. On your arrival there you will know them, and they will know you; even they will know you there who never knew you here. (W. Jay.) *The philosophy of death*:—A most beautiful picture, and representation of parental sorrow and of rational, manly piety.

I. A LITTLE CHILD SUFFERING ON ACCOUNT OF THE SIN OF ITS FATHER. Now, I do not mean to say that the cause of every little infant's suffering is the same as this. This is a peculiar case. But that little children do suffer as a consequence of their parents' sin is a simple matter of fact. By immorality and sin some parents ruin their health, and their constitution, and thus plant those seeds of disease and death which manifest themselves in their children: their offspring may suffer, agonize, and die in their infancy because of their parents' sin. In a great many other ways also, parents may so modify the condition under which their children live as to cause them much suffering and premature death. The sin of the father is visited upon the child. The Bible does not make that fact. If there was no Bible the fact would be the same. It is affirmed by the Bible of Nature. If you get rid of the Book, you have the world, and you must read and interpret it. You must just do the best you can with the mystery. I do not know what you will do with it, but there it is. Sin introduced death, and death passed upon all men. But, observe, while the Bible thus associates death as a general fact with sin, it is not with the sin of an individual, not with the sin of the immediate parent of the child, but because of the sin of the first progenitor, because of that transgression which occurred at the commencement of the race.

II. THE PICTURE OF A FATHER DEEPLY AFFECTED THROUGH THE SUFFERING AND ILLNESS OF HIS CHILD; and in this case parental grief was aggravated and increased by the consciousness which David must have felt that the stroke had fallen upon the child directly from the hand of God on his account. Children may, and do die, as we know on account of the sins of their parents, but in the great majority of cases this is not the fact: you have not your deep sorrow aggravated by the thought that the stroke has fallen upon your child directly and immediately as a punishment for your sin. David, with that large

heart of his, with that paternal temperament—it is always a temperament of sensibility—and his devotion and love to God, experienced an aggravated sense of remorse on account of his sin. He would, doubtless, feel the most acute suffering. **III. AN AFFLICTED, GOOD MAN, EARNESTLY PRAYING TO GOD, BUT PRAYING IN VAIN.** The circumstances were desperate. The sentence had gone forth—the prophet had spoken the word, that the child should die on account of the sin of its father—but he thought that his sin would be forgiven, and that the child might possibly live. We may pray earnestly unto God for a certain blessing, or to be saved from some special suffering, but our prayer may not be answered because God sees it to be necessary to inflict that against which we cry to be delivered. But we have authority here for pleading earnestly under the most hopeless circumstance, that affliction may be removed; but we are to remember that God has reasons for His conduct. **IV. THE CONDUCT OF DAVID; HIS BEHAVIOUR AFTER THE MATTER WAS DETERMINED.** There are two or three points in this explanation of David which we shall do well to look at. 1. In the first place you see how he distinguished between the possible and the certain. While the child lived he fasted and prayed, because he thought that God would possibly have mercy and spare the child. But when God had determined the matter, then it was inevitable; another class of feelings was then to be brought into play; another class of duties was then to be fulfilled. 2. But David distinguished the next place between means and ends. He fasted and prayed, and his tears flowed as he laid upon the earth, he washed not his face, anointed not his head, and changed not his garments. His condition was becoming more and more sordid, because his grief was so intense. His fasting was continued in order that it might agree with the inward state of his mind, and sustain his devotion. 3. David distinguished between the proper time for prayer, and the proper world to which it has application. This idea is suggested to us—that he did not pray for the child after it was dead—for the repose of the soul of the child—that he did not follow the soul into the next world to make it a subject of prayer. 4. David distinguished between miracle and mercy. He distinguished between irrational expectations and religious hope. He could not pray for the child after it was dead, because he did not expect God to work a miracle and give him the child back again. No; “He will not come back to me;” but he did indulge a religious hope; a hope of mercy—“I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.” (*T. Dinney.*) *On the death of children.*—**I. THE GROUNDS OF DAVID’S RESIGNATION.** “Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.” The good Psalmist had bowed himself before the Most High God, and besought Him right humbly for his child. Death had signified it to be the Divine pleasure, that the child should be taken to another state of existence. To resist would be vain; to repine would be fruitless. It is true it would be a melancholy fortitude which these reflections produce if it were not strengthened and cheered by another consideration. Though fate forbade David to call back to his embrace his departed child, was he separated from him for ever? Verily, to the tender heart of the affectionate king, the thought had been insupportable. But he was consoled with far other expectations. The spark of being which the Almighty had kindled in his child was kindled to burn for ever. The Messiah had consecrated it to immortality. “I shall go to him,” though “he shall not return to me.” Even in the prospect of being joined to our departed friends in the noiseless tomb, nature finds a solace, suited to the gloomy state of her feelings in the hour of her bereavement. **II. THE MANNER IN WHICH IT MANIFESTED ITSELF.** Behold, he, who careless of attire lay weeping on the earth, arises and washes himself, and changes his apparel. He, whom no consideration could draw from the place where his child lay sick, goes forth spontaneously “into the house of the Lord, and worships.” He, whom the elders of his house had entreated in vain to receive some sustenance, himself gives orders to set on bread. He, whom his servants “feared to tell that the child was dead,” leaves their astonished minds below his fortitude, and discourses with them on the reasonableness and propriety of submission. How majestic in his affliction! What greatness and peace in resignation like this! It is worthy of particular observation that the first step of the Psalmist in the day of his sorrow is to “the house of the Lord.” It is in the holiness of the sanctuary that that “beauty” is found, which the Prophet was to give instead of “ashes,” to those “who mourned in Zion.” It is in the sacred vessels of the temple that the “oil of joy” is kept, which God’s people

are to have "for mourning." And here, we trust, when we are assembled "in His name," Immanuel is "in the midst of us," who furnishes from the wardrobe of heaven "the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." (*Bishop Dehon.*)

Parental sorrow and parental submission.—Those who distinguish themselves by sin God will distinguish by suffering. David would not have been so conspicuous a mourner if he had not been so conspicuous in his rebellion against the Lord. His chastisement was therefore just and compassionate, and though the form it took was common, it was to him one of the most painful he could have endured.

I. THE GRIEF OF A PIOUS PARENT OVER HIS DYING CHILD. Parental grief suggests to us:—1. The considerations which lead us to desire the lives of our children. Among these are (1) Our comfort and help. Great as are the cares they bring, still greater are the comforts; nor do we fail to anticipate the time, when sinking into infirmities, we shall receive from them tokens of attachment in return for all our anxieties. (2.) For the perpetuation of our name to posterity we desire the lives of our children; denied alike to those who are written childless and to those who are called to bury their offspring. (3.) To succeed us in our possessions and pursuits, we are anxious our children may be spared. 2. His faith in the power and mercy of God. He was assured that power belonged to God, and that if he would he could recover the child. 3. His confidence in the efficacy of prayer is also exhibited, for prayer was the chief employment when he withdrew—"David, therefore, besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in and lay all night upon the earth." Fasting was united to prayer, and probably sackcloth. If in such cases the good effects of prayer have been seen, though the main object may have been denied; how are we encouraged in all those instances in which no declaration of discouragement, or of absolute denial has been expressed! "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray." You cannot lose, but you may, you must gain. II. A PIOUS PARENT'S SUBMISSION, NOW THAT HIS CHILD WAS DEAD. "But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." This submission is still more significantly expressed in the narrative. So great was David's grief during the illness of the child that the servants feared to inform him of its death; but when he ascertained that he was dead "he arose from the earth and washed, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord and worshipped; then he came to his own house, and when he required they set bread before him, and he did eat." When the servants expressed their surprise at this conduct, he condescended to explain it, as in the text. His submission would be promoted by the fact. 1. That the providence was of God. What can be better than the will of God; so wise, gracious, and holy? Let our hopes perish, but let His will be supreme. 2. That the child is taken away from the evil to come is calculated to promote the submission of a bereaved parent. 3. The inutilty of grief is another consideration. "But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." He had besought the Lord to spare him; but he had now taken him, and neither prayer nor grief would avail, for the life that was taken away could not be recovered. 4. The future happiness of his child tends greatly to promote the submission of a pious parent when bereaved. And of this David appears to have had assurance. "I shall go to him." This, first of all, implies David's belief that the child still existed; consequently, that the soul of infants are immortal; and, as we know, he expected to be happy himself, and go to his child, he already considered it as possessing a happy immortality. 5. The thought of going to his child at death tended also to quiet the mind of David. "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." Heaven is presented in a variety of attractive aspects. To be with Christ, to behold His glory, and be like Him, constitute an idea of blessedness sufficient to enrapture the most exalted piety; but it is sometimes invested with associations suited to our earthly predilections. Hence we are told of "the things which are above;" "the spirits of just men made perfect;" and of sitting down with "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." The exposure of children to death should prevent our cherishing toward them an overfond attachment, and should exercise a just influence over our affections. We may and must love them, but only as creatures. They must not be idols; must not rival in our regard that God who must ever be its supreme object. The same consideration should lead us, at the earliest dawn of reason, to attempt to instruct our children piously. Oh! had we known how soon that infant mind would have opened to

the light and glory of the upper world, how would our assiduity in this respect have been quickened! We cannot too early fit them either for earth or heaven. How adapted to promote the eternal welfare of parents is the loss of children! Our earthly affections may, through the sanctifying grace of God, aid us in cultivating spirituality of mind. "Set your affection on things above" is an exhortation which powerfully recommends itself to such. "Lord, by these things men live, and these things are the life of our spirits." Young children should be made to consider their liability to death, whatever their health or strength, for it often happens that diseases incident to childhood act more powerfully on a robust than a slender frame. Little children, you are young and healthy, but you may soon die. Do not too certainly calculate on a long life. (*S. Hillyard*.) *David's conduct in affliction*:—The point of transition from the state of awful impenitence in which David had for so long a period continued, to a consciousness of his true position and to contrition for his crime, resembled the crisis of some perilous malady. The sovereign mercy and free grace of a faithful God brought him safely through the trial; and the result was "life from the dead." A well known, but not a less marvellous phenomenon of the natural world may serve to shadow forth the further stage of experience involved in David's complete restoration to a state of grace. When the blasts of winter have set in, and the sound of its unkindly storms sweeps over the listening ear—when mist and fog cloud the cheering light, and intercept the genial warmth of heaven—who has not felt it a sad and sickening task, to trace the change which even the fairest earthly paradise will present, as compared with its blooming spring, its fragrant summer, or its fruitful autumn? We walk amidst the drear and silent scene, like lingering mourners in nature's cemetery. The melody of the woods is hushed; the woods themselves are dressed in funeral garb; the streams hurry black and moodily through the bare and blighted scene—or else, arrested in their course, are held frost-bound in the chain of winter. Days, weeks, months pass on, and still the landscape frowns in sackcloth, amidst the gloom and chill and death which seems unalterable and fixed. At length there comes a wondrous and more than magic transformation. The sun walks forth in glory from his heavenly tabernacle, "as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." Such and so great—yea, rather, greater and far more blessed—was the revival wrought in the soul of David, after the beams of Divine grace had once more visited it with light and love. The streams of godly sorrow were unloosed, and the waters flowed; "the fruits of the Spirit," which seem to have sprung from a ground "high unto cursing," appear in all their former beauty; the Word of the Lord had gone forth with power. The passage immediately before us contains the penitent monarch's own account of that which, in the eyes of his sympathising servants, appeared mysterious and paradoxical. The explanation relates to two distinct periods; and accordingly, our consideration of it will lead us to notice David's conduct and the ground thereof. **I. DURING THE SICKNESS.** 1. In the first place, we read in the sixteenth verse that "David besought God for the child." He carried the burden which oppressed him, the grief which consumed him, to that merciful God who had so often heard the voice of his weeping. Instead of seeking many physicians, he repaired at once to the all-wise and all-powerful Physician; so that in his case was anticipated the apostolic prescription—"Is any afflicted? let him pray." 2. It is further related that he accompanied his supplications with deep humiliation: "he fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth." Regarding his trial as a chastisement for his transgression, he "humbled himself under the mighty hand of God." Was there anything surprising in all this? King though he was, yet as a sinner we feel that the posture he assumed became him. It was meet to lay aside the crown of pure gold which God had put upon his head, and to exchange his soft raiment for sackcloth. One of the most painful and mischievous consequences of wilful sin is the difficulty it occasions in even the awakened and anxious soul to realise the love and trust in the confidence of our compassionate God. A sense of ill desert awakens the suspicion that He is "altogether such an one as ourselves;" and, by checking the hope of success, too often silences the voice of prayer. If David thus clung to hope, and persevered in wrestling with God for a temporal blessing, on a mere peradventure of success, how much rather should you, when you would have the pardon of your guilt, the

conversion of your heart, or the victory over your besetting sins, cast yourselves upon His mercy, plead His promises, and resolve that you "will not let Him go, except He bless you!" In suing for these things you know that you are asking according to His will, and that He is "far more ready to hear than you to pray;" you honour Him most when you crave the most; you please Him best when you are most importunate. II. HIS CONDUCT, AND THE GROUNDS OF IT, AFTER THE CHILD WAS DEAD. It is a genuine touch of nature, which represents that "when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead." His parental fears and tender solicitude anticipated the tidings which their silence communicated. And now begins the seeming paradox, which caused his servants so much perplexity. Though our immediate object in dwelling upon this passage is to present the portraiture of a genuine penitent, yet it seems profitable, in passing, to gather lessons of counsel and encouragement for that spirit which is almost sure to form a part in every audience—the spirit of the mourner. The Lord's children are often robbed of a noble opportunity of glorifying Him, and of much previous advantage to themselves, by the tyranny of that cruel custom which would have it believed that there is something indelicate when the bereaved is immediately seen in the Lord's house. The case, I admit, is quite conceivable in which, from weakness of body, tenderness of spirit, or want of self-control, the mourner may be really unfit to take part in the outward communion of saints. Nothing would be gained by any external violence done to the over-wrought system; but I refer to that artificial code of pharisaic decency which renders it incumbent on the bereaved mourner to abstain from the comfort and the consolation with which his Father's house abounds. I do think it an affectation of delicacy of sentiment which sound reason and genuine piety should force us to discountenance. (*C. F. Childe, M.A.*) *Salvation of infants*:—Millions of the descendants of Adam expire in infancy. They just open their eyes upon the world, excite the hopes and affections of their parents, and then are convulsed, and in agonies sink into the tomb. While fastening our eyes on their little corpses, or hanging over their graves, there are two questions which we naturally ask: Why did these infants die? and, what is their present state? Unassisted reason is equally unable to decide what is the state in which the spirits of infants enter at their death. The universality of the salvation has been denied, not only by individuals of distinguished reputation, but also by whole churches. And, besides, in those who embrace the doctrine that I am about to establish, I have generally found that their belief was rather the expression of their wishes and their hopes than the result of a cool examination of the testimony of God. And nothing is more common than to hear even Christian parents defending infant salvation on grounds inconsistent with the Scriptures; on principles that oppose not only the doctrine of original sin which is so plainly taught in the word of God, but that also overtook the absolute necessity of the atonement and sacrifice of Jesus for the salvation of every child of Adam. It is in perfect consistence with both these doctrines that we maintain that God has ordained to confer eternal life on all whom he has ordained to remove from this world before they arrived at the years of discretion. The following are the chief sources of argument in defence of this doctrine:—1. The interesting history of which our text forms a part. 2. The conduct and discourses of the Saviour with regard to infants. 3. The attributes of God and His relation to infants. 4. The declarations that He has made concerning them. 5. The nature and extent of redemption through Christ. 6. The nature and design of the ordinance of baptism. 7. The mode of procedure at the final judgment. 8. The nature of the torments of hell. 9. The nature of the heavenly felicity, and the grounds of its conferment upon men. I must present to you a few inferences from this subject. 1. Learn from it the preciousness of the Word of God. 2. Praise God for His unutterable grace. This is the occupation of these departed infants. 3. Bereaved parent, rejoice in the dignity and elevation of thy child. To have this child in heaven is greater cause of triumph than if he swayed the sceptre over prostrate nations. 4. Bereaved parent, art thou ready to meet this child? In thy name he has taken possession of heaven? Art thou following the Redeemer, and living devoted to him? 5. And you who have passed through the period of infancy, remember, that to your salvation are required explicit acts of faith in Jesus, and lives devoted to him. (*H. Kollock, D.D.*) *Uselessness of unavailing regret*:—One of Kant's biographers dilates upon what he considers a singular feature in the Königsberg philosopher's

way of expressing his sympathy with his friends in sickness. So long as the danger was imminent he is said to have testified a restless anxiety, making perpetual inquiries, waiting with impatience for the crisis, and sometimes unable to pursue his customary labours from agitation of mind. But no sooner was the patient's death announced than he recovered his composure and assumed an air of stern tranquillity, almost of indifference." (*Francis Jacox.*)

Ver. 23. **I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.**—*Recognition of friends in heaven*.—The doctrine of our future meeting and recognition is intimated in the earlier records of Scripture. We are told that Abraham was gathered to his people, that Jacob was gathered to his people, that Moses was commanded to go up to Mount Pisgah and be gathered to his people, as Aaron had died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people. It may be said that this was simply a peculiar idiom of language signifying that they died. This, however, cannot be the case, inasmuch as in some instances it is expressly said they died, and then it is added, were "gathered to their fathers." Nor does it mean that they were buried with their fathers; for in several instances the phrase is employed when they were interred at a distance of hundreds of miles. Abraham was not buried with his fathers. Moses was not buried with his fathers. Aaron was not buried with his fathers. There would seem to be in the very heart of the expression some recognition that the fathers were still in existence in some state or other. As we advance to the New Testament we find that the twilight is broadening into the perfect day. It is not merely that we are told this in so many words. But it is that so many things are said which would not have been said, unless the doctrine had been true. It forms so much of the very warp of the teaching of our Saviour and His apostles. Like so many other doctrines, it is implied where it is not expressed; and is all the more significantly taught because it appears in this indirect manner. It is taught, for example, that in eternity and in Heaven we shall retain our personal identity. Death does not make us new men. It effects no change of personalities. By the aid of memory we can realise the fact that we are the same we have ever been. The subtle, solemn thread of consciousness binds together all the moments of our past life. We must also remember another fact, and that is that the departed just are not diffused through the universe, but are gathered in one place. It is where Christ is. They are with the Lord. They see His face; they are like Him. And they are not only with the Lord, but they are there in a family relation. We read of the whole family in earth and Heaven. It is a general assembly and church of the first-born; it is a well-ordered household. The saints are brethren, with one Lord, one faith, one baptism. Their Father is One. Now it is only needful to appreciate fully this fact in order to see that recognition, mutual recognition, is indispensable and inevitable. The saints will know at least that they are the redeemed from among men. They will be distinguished from angels who never fell. We do not dream that the spirits of the "just made perfect," dwelling in our Father's house, will sit in silent reserve side by side; and as little do we dream that their speech will never be concerned with the way by which the Lord has led them. They will inspire each other with a more glowing fervour of gratitude as they recount the history of their lives. Given—an eternity which we are to spend in Heaven, a memory which recalls the past with minute and infallible faithfulness, a gratitude quick and never-ending for all the mercies which have followed us all the days of our life; given—too, the love of saint for saint, a social fellowship closer and less reserved than even the most intimate fellowships of earth, and even though at the beginning of our celestial existence we knew not one of the innumerable throng, we should, with the flowing ages, grow into each other's knowledge; friend would find out friend; parents would some day have the ecstasy of embracing their children, partakers with them of a common salvation. You may be perplexed to know in what manner those who will be so changed by the very fact of their not dwelling in houses of clay will be able to recognise each other. Our whole earthly, human life is the learning at one stage the how of what was a mystery to us at an earlier stage. Who knows but that within the tenement of clay there are folded up powers and capacities which death is needed to release? The dull, creeping chrysalis which you are in danger of treading beneath your feet contains secret wings which one day will soar up into the heavens beyond your reach or sight; and so we may have within us powers

which are now imprisoned, and which will be emancipated in the hour of death. And among these may be the power of seeing spirits as well, or even better, than we can now see the bodies. There are, moreover, passages in the New Testament which seem incapable of explanation, except on the supposition of mutual recognition in Heaven. What, for example, shall we make of the language of our Lord, "Many, I say unto you, shall come from the east and the west, the north and the south, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven?" If we sit down at the same banquet of love with them, and yet know them not, why the distinct specification which is here given of their names? Would our Saviour mock us with the promise of giving us admission into an unknown company? His promises are not mockeries, but assurances that shall be verified to the full. When our Saviour was on the Mount of Transfiguration there appeared unto Him Moses and Elias. What were the circumstances which enabled the three apostles to identify these glorified companions of our Lord we are not informed, but in some way or other they knew them. And if there were mutual recognition between these prophets of God there can surely be no reason for supposing that the same recognition may not subsist among other spirits of the just made perfect. The apostle tells us that he preaches Christ, "Warning every man, and teaching every man that he may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." Again he says, "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing, are not even ye in the presence of the Lord Jesus at His coming? for ye are our glory and joy." Now, it would be impossible to find any meaning in these words, except on the supposition that he would see and know his converts at the last great day. And what meaning other than this of mutual recognition can we extract from the words in which St. Paul pours the balm of consolation into the souls of the Thessalonians who had lost their Christian friends? "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then shall we be for ever with the Lord; wherefore, comfort one another with these words." You cannot for a moment imagine that we shall be in ignorance of each other in Heaven without turning these words into mockery. (*E. Mellor, D.D.*) *The recognition of departed friends*:—If we part on earth shall we meet in Heaven? Two men are going to London or New York, and, not having appointed a special moment and a special place of meeting, they might wander about for months and years and never find each other; and how is it possible that we are going to find our departed friends in heaven when that city is larger than all the Londons and New Yorks and Cantons on earth put together? St. John went up on a mount of inspiration, and he looked off upon that city, and he said, "Thousands and thousands." Then he went up on a higher altitude of inspiration, and he looked off again, and he said, "Ten thousand times ten thousand." Then he came on a greater height of inspiration and he looked off and said, "A hundred and forty-four thousand and thousands of thousands." And then coming to a still greater height of inspiration, he looked off again and he said, "a great multitude that no man can number." Now, how are we going to find our departed loved ones in such a city as that, so vast, so infinite? Is this hope of meeting our departed friends in heaven a whim, a guess, a falsity, or is it a granitic foundation on which the soul may come and build a glorious hope? Now, when you are going to build a ship, you want the best timber, you want good stanchions, and planks and timber counter-knee, all of solid oak. You may build a ship out of lighter material, and may get along very well while the sea is smooth; but when the cyclone comes the ship will founder. And we may build a great many ideas of heaven out of our own fancy, and they will do very well while everything is smooth in life; but when the disasters of death come, and the hurricanes of the last hour, then we shall want a theory of future recognition built out of the solid oak of God's Word. 1. Now this theory of future recognition is not so positively asserted as it is implied; and you know that is the strongest kind of affirmation. Your friends come from travel in foreign parts; they tell you there is such a place as St. Petersburg, or Madras, or New York, or San Francisco. They do not begin by telling you of the existence of these cities; but all their conversation implies the existence of these cities. And so the doctrine of future recognition in the Bible is not so positively asserted as it is implied. What did David mean when he said in my text, "I shall go to him?" What was the use of going to his child if he would not know him? 2. In addition to the Bible argument, there are other reasons. I admit this theory of

future acquaintanceship in heaven, because the rejection of it implies the entire obliteration of our memory. John Evans, the quaint Scotch minister, was seated in his study one day, and his wife came and said, "My dear, do you think we shall know each other in heaven?" "Why, yes," said he. "Do you think we shall be greater fools there than we are here?" 3. Again, I admit this doctrine of future recognition, because we don't in this world have sufficient opportunity of telling to those to whom we are indebted how much we owe them. You who have prayed for the salvation of souls, you who have contributed to the great charities of the day, will never know in this world the full result of your work; there must be some place where you will find it out. Years ago there was a minister by the name of John Brattenberg, who preached the Gospel in Somerville, New Jersey. He was a faithful, godly man, but a characteristic of his ministry was no conversions, and when he came to die he died in despondency, because, though he had tried to serve the Lord, he had seen hardly any brought into the kingdom. But scarcely had the grass begun to grow on John Brattenberg's grave than the windows of heaven opened, and there came a great revival of religion, so that one day in the village church two hundred souls stood up and took the vows of the Christian—among them my own father and my own mother—and the peculiarity about it was that nearly all those souls dated their religious impressions back to the ministry of John Brattenberg. And shall he never know them? 4. Again, I accept this doctrine of future recognition, because there are so many who, in their last moments, have seen their departed friends, (*T. De Witt Talmage*.) *Divine consolation*:—Whenever it pleases God to take away from us one whom we love there are several sources of consolation open to us. 1. First of all, there is the thought which is expressed in the words of Eli: "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good." It is the will of God which is done, that will which has been for many a long year the subject of daily prayer whenever prayer has been offered, "Thy will be done." 2. But another topic of comfort is opened in such words as were borne from heaven to the listening ears of St. John the Divine: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, even so saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours." Here the prominent thought is not the will of God, but the blessed state of the departed, not God wills, but "they rest." In the former case the mourner is exhorted to resignation by the thought, "it is the will of God;" in the latter he is comforted by the assurance of the rest and peace which is the portion of his beloved. 3. It was, however, to yet another source of comfort that David betook himself in his bereavement when he gave utterance to the words of the text—"I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." But it was not only submission to an inexorable law which made him yield to his lot. He was buoyed up by the thought of a blessed future. The words, however, appear to contain far more than a mere assurance of a future meeting of parted friends. The human heart, with its strong affections, craves for something more definite. The parting is so real, the void is so real, that it longs to know of a surety that the reunion will in like manner be a reality. There has been such a close, intimate knowledge of each other, such interchange of thought, such an intense love, that nothing short of a renewal of these happy relations can satisfy the yearning of the soul. It is not enough to say, "You shall meet again." Still less bearable is that uncertain word of comfort which says, "It is possible we may know each other in heaven, but so little is known about that unseen world that none can say for certain that it will be so." One step further, and you hear it asserted as a fact that we shall not recognise each other in the future state. Christ, it is said, will be all in all, and we shall be as the angels in heaven, where they neither marry nor are given in marriage. But I often think that any uncertainty about this matter, and still more any such sad certainty as that to which I have referred, would add very greatly to the bitterness of parting from those we loved. True, Christ will be all in all to those who shall be counted worthy to enter into that kingdom, but surely it is because they are in Christ that these relationships are so true, and deep, and sacred. In Christ hearts are bound together; in Christ the members of His mystical body are joined not only to Him but to each other, so that when one member suffers or rejoices all the members suffer or rejoice with it. Living in Christ, they live one with another; parents are bound up in their children, and children in their parents; brethren and sisters love each other with a pure heart fervently, and when they fall asleep in Christ there is nothing to cause a sever-

ance in their love, but everything to intensify and deepen it. In Christ shall all be made alive, and who can for a moment imagine that love of the brethren, love of parents and children, of husband and wife, shall ever die out in those living ones? Death would indeed be a terrible thing if it had the power to put asunder and estrange from each other those who have been made one in Christ. True, "they shall be as the angels in heaven," but I have yet to learn that those holy beings who do the will of God are unconnected and unknown to each other, each one in his own separate isolated individuality doing his appointed service.—(*J. J. Blunt.*) *Individual Recognition in Eternity*:—The question very often rises to the mind, whether the intercourse of Christian friends separated by death, shall be renewed in heaven—whether there will be any recollection of past attachments, and of their attendant circumstances. This is an enquiry which flows from the warmest feelings of the heart, and frequently presents itself at seasons when the individual is ill fitted to answer it for himself. You know it has always been held that the concurrence of general opinion among mankind is entitled to considerable weight. If Socrates delighted himself in the prospect of conversation with Hesiod and Homer; if Cicero anticipated an interview with Cato amid the assembly of the gods; if the Greeks and Romans peopled their Tartarus and Elysium with spirits retaining all their ancient remembrances; if untutored heathens entertain sentiments in unison with this at the present day (and does not the mother in the Islands of the Pacific, mourning over her child, comfort herself with the belief that after her own death she shall rejoin it?—why does the Gentoo widow burn upon the funeral pile, but that she may be replaced with her husband?—why does the Indian of North America stretch his hands with joy towards the world beyond the summits of the blue mountains; is it not because he is confident that he shall renew his present existence in the society of cotemporary and kindred chieftains, and in conjunction with the spirits of his fathers?) may we not then suppose that one of the earliest presumptions of reason respecting futurity, would be, that Christian friendship should be revived beyond the grave, and with the eudearing consciousness that the attachment had commenced on earth? But I will dismiss the considerations arising from reason; because it must be admitted that the suggestions of reason, well founded as they may appear, are not enough of themselves, to satisfy the mind of the believer in the revealed will of God, upon this momentous subject.

I. THE DECLARATION OF SCRIPTURE:—1. Now, may we not consider this an averment of David's conviction that he should regain, and recognize his child in a future world? 2. The next passage to which I shall refer you, is in the fifteenth chapter of St. Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians, and the fifty-fourth verse: "So when this corruptible," etc. Now mark it is here declared that the consequences of sin constitute the sting of death, one of these consequences is the separation of relative from relative, and friend from friend. Now, if the victory of our Redeemer is to be complete, as undoubtedly it will be, must not all the consequences of sin be terminated and annihilated? Must not the associations of human friendship, with all their endearing consciousness and recollection, be replaced on that basis on which they would have rested for ever, if the ruin of man by the fall had not taken place? 3. Let me next point you to a few passages illustrative of the great interest which the holy angels have ever taken, and will continue to take in the welfare of man, and the permanent and blessed association which is to subsist in heaven between the angels and the righteous. "We are made," says the apostle, "a spectacle to angels." "I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven." "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: but he that denieth me before men, shall be denied before the angels of God." "Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels." "Ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels." Is it not, then, in the highest degree probable that in heaven there shall be intercourse between particular angels, and those to whom they have ministered: that the righteous shall be able to know, that those angels have been their unseen guardians and protectors through all the trials and dangers of mortality; that the gratitude on the one side, and increased attachment on both sides, shall thus be an augmentation

of bliss throughout eternity? 4. Our next quotations shall be from the gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke. First, from the eighth chapter of St. Matthew: "And I say unto you that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven." And in the thirteenth chapter of St. Luke, "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out." Now, is it compatible with the lowest degree of probability to suppose that when Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, are sitting together in the kingdom of heaven, Abraham shall have no conscious recollection that he is actually beholding his beloved Isaac, the child of promise, the ancestor of the Messiah in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed;—that Isaac shall have no consciousness that he is dwelling in glory with his revered earthly father;—that Jacob shall have no knowledge of his own parent, nor of "the father of the faithful," but that the three patriarchs shall be each to the other, as three individuals accidentally brought together from different countries, or from different planets? 5. The next passage bearing on this subject is connected with the transfiguration of our Lord: "And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias; who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." The discourse of our Lord indicated to the three apostles, who the gracious visitants were whom they beheld; and it tends, I think, to show, not merely that at the resurrection mutual recollection and consciousness will be revived, but that they experience no interruption from death; that memory suffers no fall. 6. Turn to the fourth chapter of St. Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians, from the thirteenth to the eighteenth verse: "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope; for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." Why were the Thessalonians not to sorrow as those who had no hope? Because they were fully warranted in having hope—but hope, not merely that their departed friends would rise again, or that holy men whom they had lost would be happy in a future existence—for on these points neither instruction nor consolation was required; but this was the question which depressed their hearts, whether at the resurrection they should regain their lost relations, whether friend should be restored to friend with retained remembrance and conscious affection. II. And if we carry forward our thoughts to THE DAY OF JUDGMENT, we shall find a very strong argument arising out of the details of that great day—an argument of immense importance in our present investigation. 1. "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, to give an account of the things done in the body." Now can it be supposed that we shall not at the time of judgment, possess a clear and comprehensive recollection of the actions, the motives, and the principles, of which an account is then to be rendered, and upon which the sentence is then to be pronounced? And must not the recollection of our personal deeds and desires necessarily involve a recollection of other individuals? It is incontestably true that the recollection will be perfect, and the recognition complete, before the throne of judgment; and I come to this conclusion, that if they are not to be prolonged into eternity, they must be extinguished subsequently to the day of judgment by a special act of Omnipotence, that when a man remembers on that day he shall forget immediately after. And where is our warrant for expecting, that all which is in our remembrance at the final day of judgment, shall be forgotten in the day that succeeds it—in that eternal day? 2. There remains only one more passage illustrative of the interesting point now under consideration, and it shall be from the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.—(R. C. Dillon, M.A.) *Meeting in Heaven*:—There is also a great deal of comfort in the fact that there will be a family reconstruction in a better place. From Scotland, or England, or Ireland, a child emigrates to America. It is very hard parting, but he comes, after awhile writing home as to what a good land it is. Another brother comes, a sister comes, and another, and after a while the mother comes, and after a while the father comes, and now they are all here, and they have a time of great congratulation and a very pleasant reunion. Well, it is just so with our families: they are emigrating towards a better land. Now, one goes out. Oh, how hard it is to part with him! Another goes. Oh, how hard it is to part with her! And another, and another, and we ourselves will, after a while, go over, and then we will be together. Oh, what a reunion! Do you believe that? "Yes," you say.

Oh! you do not. You do not believe it as you believe other things. If you do, and with the same emphasis, why it would take nine-tenths of your trouble off your heart. The fact is, heaven to many of us in a great fog. It is away off somewhere, filled with an uncertain and indefinite population. That is the kind of heaven that many of us dream about; but it is the most tremendous fact in all the universe—this heaven of the Gospel. Our departed friends are not afloat. The residence in which you live is not so real as the residence in which they stay. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *A father's thought over his child's grave*:—The context shows David in two aspects. First: Suffering as a sinner. He had committed a great sin, and the loss of his child was a retribution. Secondly: Reasoning as a saint. "And he said, While the child was yet alive." The text implies David's belief in three things. I. THE UNRETURNABLENESS OF THE DEAD. The dead return not again. "I shall behold man no more in the land of the living," said Hezekiah. 1. There is no returning to discharge neglected duties. 2. There is no returning to recover lost opportunities. If there is no return to the earth—(1) How foolish it is to set our hearts upon it. (2) How important to finish its work as we go on. II. IN THE CERTAINTY OF HIS OWN DISSOLUTION. "I shall go to him." 1. The certainty of death is universally admitted with the understanding. There is no room left for questioning it. 2. The certainty of death is universally denied by the life. All men live as if they were immortal. How morally infatuated is our race! III. IN THE RE-UNION AFTER DEATH. "I shall go to him." 1. The re-union he believed in was spiritual. 2. The re-union he believed in was conscious. 3. The re-union he believed in was happy. (1) He believed that his child was happy. (2) He believed that he was safe. He felt that he should go to him, be with him in that happy world. Let these thoughts of death aid us to fulfil the mission of life. (*Homilist.*) *On the due improvement of domestic bereavements*:—I. REMARKS DEDUCIBLE FROM THE NARRATIVE:—1. That it is not sinful in any case (with a reserve of the divine sovereignty, which is always implied or expressed) to deprecate the death of dear friends and beloved children. 2. God is pleased, in the course of his adorable providence, sometimes to visit the iniquity of fathers upon their children, of progenitors upon their posterity. You see a striking instance of this in the case before us. 3. Prayer is the proper exercise of the soul, amid afflictions and bereavements, felt or feared. "Is any man," saith James, "afflicted, let him pray." And to prayer David betook himself, on this very trying occasion. 4. Humiliation and fasting are exercises specially befitting times of trouble. To these also the afflicted monarch had recourse, at this time. 5. Submission to the will of God, under the loss of children or other bereavements, is the duty of all; and, when spiritual strength is ministered from on high, will be the attainment of the good. 6. The sanctuary of God is that place to which the bereaved mother may, most aptly, resort. 7. We should not only feel and cherish, but also exemplify submission to the divine dispensations. So did the son of Jesse; for when apprized that his son was dead; he rose from the earth, anointed himself, changed his apparel, and went into the house of God to worship. 8. The conduct of the children of God under painful bereavements, may often appear strange to others, though it be founded upon the best principles, and be capable of being justified by the best arguments. II. THE VIEWS CONTAINED IN THE TEXT ITSELF, "I shall go to him; but he shall not return to me." 1. It is the sorrowful declaration of one who had just been bereft of a beloved son the only son of his mother. 2. The statement before us presents to our view a person, amid his sorrows, meditating solemnly upon eternity, and solacing his soul with this contemplation. This was the state into which the son of David had just entered. 3. The intimation of the text is the utterance of one who is anticipating the hour of his own departure. "I shall go to him." There is but one way, as there is only one event, for all mankind. "It is appointed to all men to die." 4. The bereaved mourner is here contemplating death as an irrevocable step in existence: "I shall go to him, but he cannot return to me." 5. David is here anticipating a happy re-union with his beloved child, in a better world. Nothing loss, doubtless, could have either satisfied his faith, or soothed his spirit. III. FROM THIS SUBJECT WE MAY LEARN WHAT WE HAVE ALL TO EXPECT, IN SUCH A WORLD AS THIS. It is, that death will, sooner or later, invade our families, and snatch from us the dearest objects of our affection. 2. The views that we have been taking also admonish us, that parents must do much good, or much ill, of the most influential kind, to their children. 3. We are taught,

again, what reflection the disappearance of others from this earthly scene should suggest most naturally to our minds. It is the thought of our own departure. Finally. Amid dissolving assemblies, and the disruption of the dearest connections on earth, let us think upon that period and that state, when all the family of God shall meet, not one lacking, and the congregatoin of the redeemed shall be convened never to be broken up. *The living go to the dead:—THE DEAD WILL NOT RETURN TO THE LIVING.* God has placed a barrier between this and the other world; but what that barrier is we know not: we only know that it is completely sufficient to prevent all intercourse between the living and the dead. He says the dead shall not return, and he does not allow them to return. They have gone to their long home, where they must abide for ever; and where the living can never see them without going to them. And this, II. **THEY MUST ALL SOONER OR LATER DO.** And it is said, "There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war." It does not depend upon the choice of the living whether they shall die and go to the dead. They are under a natural necessity of dying, either by disease, accident, violence, or the infirmities of old age, which none can escape who escape all other causes of death. And when the dust returns to the dust, the spirit must go to God who gave it. Though we cannot say anything upon this question to gratify curiosity; yet we may say some things which we all ought to know and realize. Here then it may be observed, 1. That for the living to go to the dead implies their passing through the change of death. 2. For the living to go to the dead, implies their committing their bodies to the dust from which they were taken. Whether their bodies are emaciated or full of vigour and activity when they leave them, they must see corruption, which is the natural and unavoidable effect of death. 3. For the living to go to the dead implies that they must follow them not only into the grave, but into eternity. The Bible gives abundant evidence of the existence and activity of the soul after it leaves the body. 4. The living must go to the dead, not merely to see where they are and what they are, but to dwell with them for ever. **IMPROVEMENT.** (1) If the living must go to the dead, then their separation from one another will not be of long duration. 2. If the living must go to the dead, it cannot be a matter of great importance whether the time be longer or shorter, before they go into the world where their departed friends have gone. 3. If those who die go immediately to the dead, then every instance of mortality may be as affecting to the inhabitants of the other world as to those in this. 4. If the living will go to the dead in the manner that has been described, then we may see one reason why good men have often been willing to die. Job said, "I would not live alway; all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come." Good old Simeon said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word." Paul said in the name of Christians, "We are confident, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." 5. If the living must go to the dead, then we may learn one reason why mankind in general are so loath to die. It is not always owing to men's reluctance to leaving this world, but their dread of going into another. 6. If the living must go to the dead, then a realising sense of this solemn truth would have a happy tendency to qualify the grief of mourners, and turn their thoughts into a proper channel. Finally, it is the immediate and indispensable duty of every person of every character, age and condition, to prepare to go to those who have gone from them and will never return. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *Consolations under Bereavement:*—The text presents us with a noble model of what should be a Christian's conduct under bereavement. 1. **THE CONSOLATIONS WHICH SHOULD ANIMATE A CHRISTIAN UNDER BEREAVEMENT.** 1. And foremost among these is the recollection, that death is not the end of existence. 2. Remember, as a second consolation, that death is the commencement of an existence far more glorious than the present. 3. Further: as our consolation we have the assurance that death neither dissolves nor weakens the ties of relation or of love. 4. Further: we remark that, after a brief separation, we shall be re-united. 5. Once more: once re-united, we shall part no more. II. **THE LESSONS WHICH THESE BEREAVING PROVIDENCES SHOULD TEACH US.** (*F. Greeves.*) *The believer's comfort under bereavement:*—I. **THAT SURVIVORS MAY DERIVE COMFORT FROM THE REFLECTION THAT THEIR DEPARTED CHRISTIAN FRIENDS SHALL NO MORE RETURN TO THEM.** "He shall not return to me." When men close their eyes in death, their connection with earth and the things of earth is

dissolved for them. They go to the place "from whose bourn no traveller returns." We may be comforted by the truth, they "shall not return to us," when we are reminded:—1. That at the gate of death the righteous bid adieu to sorrow. There is much in the present world that harasses the children of God, and on account of which "rivers of waters run down their eyes." 2. That by death the righteous are taken away from approaching danger. "The righteous is taken away from the evil to come." What this "evil" may be, in any particular case, it is not for us to determine. It is their heavenly Father's account of the matter, and therewith let us be content. 3. That by death God does not only take His children from evils to come, but He brings them also to their promised rest. It is thus He answers the Redeemer's prayer. "Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory." II. THAT AMIDST OUR SORROWS ON ACCOUNT OF DEPARTED CHRISTIAN FRIENDS, WE MAY BE EDIFIED AND COMFORTED BY THE SOLEMN, YET CHEERING TRUTH, THAT WE MUST SOON FOLLOW THEM. 1. We shall go to them in death. We also are mortal, and we too must die. (1.) The same necessity to die lies on us, as was laid on those who have already passed through the portals of death. They died because they had been appointed unto death. We are under the same appointment, nor can we reverse the decree. Nor does the Divine decree apply only to the fact that man must die, the time of his departure is likewise appointed. Nay more, the immediate cause of our dissolution, and the very circumstances with which our death will be attended, appear also to have been arranged by Him who knoweth the "end from the beginning." (2.) The same procuring cause of death operates in every mortal body. It has triumphed over those whose loss we deplore; it is accomplishing the same end in us; and we shall go to them in death. 2. We must go to them in their state of separate existence. Here we learn that though death shall decompose and separate every particle of the body, yet it shall leave the soul unscathed, in a state of conscious existence, capable of exercising its high and immortal faculties on the objects which shall then be spread before it, and susceptible of those exhaustless pleasures, or those never-ending pains, into the enjoyment or endurance of which it is immediately introduced. Admitting that while the body of the believer slumbers in the dust, his soul is in a state of active being, we must remember that when we die we too shall enter instantaneously on a new and untried state. 3. That if we die in the faith of Christ Jesus, we shall go to the sainted dead, and be enshrined with them in all the blessedness of the world of glory. Application 1. Are we mourners? then let the subject teach us piously to acquiesce in the dispensation with which we have been visited. 2. Are we mourners? then let us be deeply impressed with the nature of that moral and spiritual change which must have passed over us, before we can adopt the language of the text, and rejoice in the prospect of following departed friends. "We shall go to them." 3. Are we mourners? let the subject teach us to moderate our grief for those who have been removed by death. (*J. Gaskin, M.A.*) *Deceased children not lost*:—Years before Robert Leighton retired to Broadhurst, death had entered the mansion in spite of the struggles of love to keep him out, and had carried away a child altogether dear. Nothing could be tenderer than his words of solace to his brother-in-law, words which uttered the home sickness in his own breast. "Indeed it was a sharp stroke of the pen that told me your little Johnny was dead. . . . Tell my dear sister she is now so much more akin to the other world, and this will quickly be past to us all. John is but gone an hour or two sooner to bed as children used to do, and we are undressing to follow." There, and not here, Leighton confessed, is the morning without clouds, and the perfect day, and the life which is life indeed; and our Father unclothes us that he may deck body and brain with the better garment of everlastingness. (*Alexander Smellie.*) *Reunion beyond the grave a comfort to the bereaved*:—God will give me back my friends who have reached the shore in advance of me. By His guiding hand I shall come, as Henry Montague, the Earl of Manchester, wrote, "into my own country, into Paradise, where I shall meet, not as in the Elysium of the poets, Cato, Scipio and Senevola, but Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the patriarchs my fathers, the saints my brothers, the angels my friends: my wife, children and kinsfolk that are gone before me, and do attend me, looking and longing for my arrival there." Thus the dews of sorrow are lusted by His love. (*Ibid.*) *Associations with the*

land beyond:—On a narrow, rugged ledge of rock, called Chicken Rock, a lighthouse has been built. But in consequence of the lack of space there is no accommodation for other than the actual keepers themselves. Their wives and families have therefore to live in cottages on the mainland, separated from the lighthouse. But these people have a pretty custom by which the fathers and children keep in touch with one another. On Sunday mornings, after they have dressed the little ones all in their best, the mothers take them down to the edge of the sea, and they all stand there, looking and waving towards the lighthouse out on the rock. And there high up in the lighthouse stand the fathers, and through their telescopes they look down to the little bay on those whom they love dearest in all the world. And as I read this story, I thought how it was a picture of those who, doing their duty from day to day, look through the telescope of faith to that pleasant shore where their loved ones have gone before, and go bravely on with their work till the time when they not only see them, but will be with them. (*Ibid.*) “*All is well now*”:—Those who have lost a loved child, perhaps an only one, cannot but derive some comfort from words which Luther spoke just after his daughter Madeleine's death. When she was placed in the coffin he gazed long at her and said, “Dear little Madeleine, all is well with thee now.” And to his wife, “Think where she is gone. She has certainly made a happy journey. With children everything is simple. They die without anguish, without disputes, without bodily grief, without the temptations of death, as if they were falling asleep.” (*Querer.*) *Divine revelation alone gives certainty of an after life*:—Cicero's letter to his friend Atticus, on informing him of the death of his darling little son, is one of the saddest memorials of family grief in the whole range of literature. The great orator and philosopher wails, without a note of consolation, over his woe. He will never see his dear little boy again. They have parted for all eternity. In the view of such sorrow, unmitigated by a single ray of comfort, how great is the contrast afforded by the light of the Gospel! (*Christian Commonwealth.*)

CHAPTER XIII.

Vers. 1—29. Absalom the son of David had a fair sister.—*The wickedness of Amnon*:—No other book but the Bible dare have inserted such a chronicle as this and yet have hoped to retain the attention and confidence of the whole world through all ages. A chapter of this kind is not to be read in its singularity, as if it stood wholly alone and unrelated to other currents of human history. Coming upon it as an exceptional story, the only possible feeling is one of intense and repugnant disgust. If this chapter, and a few others almost like it, occupied any considerable space in the Bible, without being relieved by a context of a very different quality, they would certainly and properly wreck the fortune of the whole book as a public instructor and guide. Amnon did not represent a human nature different from our own. It must always be considered that such men as Amnon and Judas Iscariot represented the very human nature which we ourselves embody. The difference between the sweet child and the corrupt and infernal Amnon may in reality be but a difference in appearance and form. Time alone can tell what is in every human heart, and not time only, for circumstances sometimes awaken either our best selves or our worst selves and surprise us by what is little less than a miracle of self-revelation. Again and again, therefore, let it be said—for the tediousness is well compensated by the moral instruction—that when we see the worst specimen of human nature we see what we ourselves might have been but for the restraining grace of God. A relieving feature in the whole record is certainly to be found in the anger which was felt in regard to the outrage committed by Amnon. The outrage was not looked upon as a mere commonplace, or as a thing to be passed by a casual remark; it aroused the infinite indignation of Absalom, and in this case Absalom, as certainly as Amnon, must be taken in a representative capacity. Whilst, therefore, it is right to look upon this most heartrending and discouraging aspect of human nature, it is right also to remember that those who observed it answered the unholy deed with burning indignation. It is thus that the Spirit of God reveals itself through the

spirit of man. This is not the voice of Absalom alone; it is the voice of the Spirit which fills and rules the world. We need men who dare express their angriest and holiest feelings in indignation that cannot be mitigated or turned aside; we need men who have courage to go forth and make their voices heard in moral darkness. Absalom killed Amnon, and killed him in a somewhat cowardly way; yet it would be difficult to blame Absalom for this act of fraternal reprisal and justice. Still, it is just at such critical points that the spirit of Christian civilisation intervenes and undertakes to do for the individual man what the individual man must not be permitted to do for himself. Here is the mystery of society. It would seem a short and easy method for every man who is outraged immediately to cause the criminal to suffer, but on second thoughts it will appear, first, that this is impossible, and, secondly, that it is utterly impracticable: impossible because in many cases the criminal may be stronger than the man who has been outraged, and impracticable because the criminal may by many cunning methods evade the punishment which the righteous man would inflict. These records are written not only for our instruction but for our warning. The most puristic mind may well pause before the record of this chapter and wonder as to his own possibilities of apostasy. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." "Be sure your sin will find you out." What is done in secret is to be proclaimed from the house-tops, and a sudden light is to unveil that which is supposed to be covered by the densest concealment. Society would be rent in twain by the very suspicion that there may be Ammons within its circle, but for the conviction that the Lord reigneth, and that all things wake for righteousness and justice under his beneficent rule. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Absalom and Amnon*:—A living sorrow, says the proverb, is worse than a dead. The dead sorrow had been very grievous to David; what the living sorrow, of which this chapter tells us, must have been, we cannot conceive. It is a very repulsive picture of sensuality that this chapter presents. One would suppose that Amnon and Absalom had been accustomed to the wild orgies of pagan idolatry. Nathan had rebuked David because he had given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. This in God's eyes was a grievous offence. Amnon and Absalom are now guilty of the same offence in another form, because they afford a pretext for ungodly men to say that the families of holy men are no better—perhaps that they are worse—than other families. In Scripture some men have very short biographies; Amnon is one of these. And, like Cain, all that is recorded of him has the mark of infamy. We can easily understand that it was a great disaster to him to be a king's son. To have his position in life determined and all his wants supplied without an effort on his part; to be so accustomed to indulge his legitimate feelings that when illegitimate desires rose up it seemed but natural that they too should be gratified; to be surrounded by parasites and flatterers, that would make a point of never crossing him nor uttering a disagreeable word, but constantly encouraging his tastes—all this was extremely dangerous. And when his father had set him the example, it was hardly possible he would avoid the snare. There is every reason to believe that before he is presented to us in this chapter he was already steeped in sensuality. It was his misfortune to have a friend, Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, David's brother, "a very subtil man," who at heart must have been as great a profligate as himself. For if Jonadab had been anything but a profligate, Amnon would never have confided to him his odious desire with reference to his half-sister, and Jonadab would never have given him the advice that he did. What a blessing to Amnon, at this stage of the tragedy, would have been the faithful advice of an honest friend—one who would have had the courage to declare the infamy of his proposal, and who would have so placed it in the light of truth that it would have shocked and horrified even Amnon himself! In reality, the friend was more guilty than the culprit. The one was blinded by passion; the other was self-possessed and cool. The cool man encourages the heated; the sober man urges on the intoxicated. The plan which Jonadab proposes for Amnon to obtain the object of his desire is founded on a stratagem which he is to practise on his father. He is to pretend sickness, and under this pretext to get matters arranged by his father as he would like. If anything more was needed to show the accomplished villainy of Amnon, it is his treatment of Tamar after he has violently compassed her ruin. It is the story so often repeated even at this day—the ruined victim flung aside in dishonour, and left unpitied to her shame. We think of those men of the olden time as utter barbarians who confined their foes in dismal dungeons, making their lives a continual torture, and

denying them the slightest solace to the miseries of captivity. But what shall we say of those, high-born and wealthy men, it may be, who doom their cast-off victims to an existence of wretchedness and degradation which has no gleam of enjoyment, compared with which the silence and loneliness of a prison would be a luxury? Can the selfishness of sin exhibit itself anywhere or anyhow more terribly? If David winked, Absalom did nothing of the kind. Such treatment of his full sister, if the king chose to let it alone, could not be left alone by the proud, indignant brother. He nursed his wrath, and watched for his opportunity. Nothing short of the death of Amnon would suffice him. And that death must be compassed not in open fight but by assassination. And now the first part of the retribution denounced by Nathan begins to be fulfilled, and fulfilled very fearfully—"the sword shall never depart from thy house." (W. G. Blaikie, D.D.) *Parental failure*:—Every one must have been struck by the remarkable fact that while David was so admirable as a governor of a kingdom, he was so unsuccessful as a ruler of his own house. 1. First of all, in accounting for the troubles of his house, we have again to notice his plurality of wives—a sure source not only of domestic trouble, but of ungodliness too. The training of the young, and all the more since the Fall, is attended with very great difficulties; and unless father and mother be united, visibly united, in affection, in judgment, and in piety, the difficulty of raising a godly seed is very greatly increased. In David's house there must have been sad confusion. There could have been no happy and harmonious co-operation between father and mother in training the children. Hence the paramount importance of the apostle's exhortation—"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." 2. Further, David's own example, in certain respects, was another cause of the ill-ordered state of his family. A parent may have a hundred good qualities, and but very few bad, but the risk of his children adopting the bad is much greater than the likelihood of their copying the good. The bent of their fallen nature inclines them to the one; only Divine grace can draw them to the other. The character of David was singularly rich in fine qualities, but it was also marked by a few glaring defects. One was, proneness to animal indulgence; another, the occasional absence of straightforwardness. These were the very defects which his children copied. 3. A third cause of David's failure in the government of his family was the excessive, even morbid tenderness of his feelings towards his children—especially some of them. Perhaps a fourth reason may be added for David's ill success in his family—though of this there is less positive proof than of the rest—he may have thought of his family circle as too exclusively a scene for relaxation and enjoyment—he may have forgot that even there is a call for much vigilance and self-denial. Men much harassed with public business and care are prone to this error. In truth, there is no recreation in absolute idleness, and no happiness in neglect of duty. True recreation lies not in idleness, but in change of employment, and true happiness is found not in neglecting duty, but in its performance. (*Ibid.*) *Amnon and Absalom*:—*Examples of short-circuited lives*:—The wires became crossed; there was a flash, a beautiful pyrotechnic display, and then the machinery that ought to have lasted years longer was still—a mass of inert matter fit only to go to the shop and undergo extensive repairs. "She got short-circuited, and burned herself out," was the explanation of the engineer. No one questions that selfish indulgence and sin yield more intense and feverish pleasure than a life of self-control and unselfishness. All normal pleasures are moderate, because it is the wise design of nature to have them often repeated and continued through a long period, culminating at the end. To yield to a desire for immoderate indulgence of any kind, whether it is the pursuit of the pleasures of appetite, or of business successes, or of social excitement, or intellectual dissipation in novel-reading or the play, is simply to short-circuit our lives and burn out in a few fitful flashes the possibilities of enjoyment that should have been extended over a long and happy lifetime. *Vengeance upon the wrong-doer*:—Tarquinius' son Sextus, lawless and flagitious, had committed a rape on Lucretia. The dead body of the violated Lucretia was brought into the forum, and Brutus, throwing off his assumed disguise of insanity, appeared the passionate advocate of a just revenge, and the animated orator in the cause of liberty against tyrannical oppression. The people were roused in a moment, and were prompt and unanimous in their procedure. Tarquinius was at this time absent from the city, engaged in a war with the Rutulians. The Senate was assembled, and pronounced a decree which banished forever the tyrant, and at the same time utterly

abolished the name and office of king. (*Tytler's History.*) *Purity at all cost* :—Dr. Arnold, of Rugby, finding that two or three of the boys had been guilty of impurity of both speech and action, he promptly dismissed them from the school. The directors, meeting later on, took the Doctor severely to task for the drastic measures he had resorted to, and said "at that rate the college would soon be empty." He simply replied that he "would rather see the number reduced to twelve, and have purity of thought and action, than bad moral influence to have a foothold." (*Newton Jones.*)

Vers. 30—37. **Absalom hath slain all the king's sons.**—*Chastisement* :—The fulfilment of the curse on David's house now begun. I. **OBSERVE THE JUSTICE OF GOD'S DEALINGS IN CHASTISEMENT.** A comparison of David's sin and its punishment shows that free forgiveness does not remove consequences in this life. 1. David had wounded Uriah in his best affections. He himself was allowed to suffer the keenest sorrow through the son he best loved. 2. He had to see the evil heritage of lust develope in that favourite child. 3. He took the one ewe lamb. Absalom stole the hearts of all Israel. 4. David made Joab his tool to carry out his treachery. Henceforth he was Joab's tool, obliged to bear with him, and leave his punishment to Solomon. II. **SIN HAD WEAKENED HIS POWER.** He no longer possessed the respect of the nation. The reins of government were dropping from his hands. Yet he recognised love in it all, and God meant it in love. (*R. E. Faulkner.*)

CHAPTER XIV.

Vers. 5—20. **And she answered, I am indeed a widow woman.**—*The parable of the woman of Tekoa* :—The contrast between this parable and the one preceding it is very great. The parable of the ewe-lamb was spoken of by a prophet inspired by God. This one was spoken by a theatrical persons at the instigation of a man of the world, one who, though thoroughly unprincipled, could read human character and discern human motives through a very small crevice. The parable of Nathan was the introduction to a scorching reproof of David's iniquity, the parable of the Tekoan is full of fulsome flattery. The prophet's parable was uttered to induce repentance in David; this one had for its end only the promotion of Joab's schemes of self-interest. I. **THE ARGUMENT OF THE PARABLE.** 1. That those who grant mercy abroad should first begin at home. The first reason which the woman urges why David should forgive his son is the willingness with which he would have forgiven hers. A king who is merciful to his subjects is inconsistent with himself if he is not forgiving towards the members of his own family. 2. That enmity ought to die before those who are at enmity die. "For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again" (ver. 14). If Absalom were to die before a reconciliation had taken place, the father's heart would be deeply grieved; and if he himself were to die before his son's return to favour he would go down to his grave mourning the estrangement. 3. The Divine Father's example in relation to His "banished ones." II. **ITS IMMEDIATE AND REMOTE RESULTS.** The immediate result was the recall of Absalom without outward reconciliation. "Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face" (verse 24). Evils arose from this half-measure. Joab was disappointed, and Absalom was irritated. **LESSONS** : 1. That the most worthless characters sometimes have the best pleaders. We find this the case occasionally in our law courts. Men with no character, but lacking nothing else, with money and influence in abundance, can have the benefit of the most skilful barristers to bring them out of the grip of the law. 2. That imaginary narratives of human life have most influence when they find a counterpart in our own experience. The power of a story may be very great even when it contains nothing in it that has any likeness to anything that has happened to ourselves. 3. That those who are conscious of having committed great sins are not fit to deal with other offenders. The sin of David included the crimes of both

his sons, and the consciousness of this made him weak in purpose, and unsteady in his dealings with them. 4. To restore to favour unconditionally is a sin against the person forgiven. (*A London Minister.*)

Ver. 14. **We must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground.**—*The instability of human things:*—I. **THE INSTABILITY OF ALL HUMAN THINGS.** Most men talk wisely on the instability of the world. We are not weak enough to deny that which the history of every day compels us to admit. But our lives too often contradict our sentiments. Philosophers in opinion, we are, as to this point, children in conduct; and worship the very relics of that image of the world which we have previously stamped to dust, and trod under foot. II. **THE COMPARATIVE EMPTINESS AND WORTHLESSNESS OF ALL HUMAN DISTINCTIONS.** III. **THE INACCURACY OF ALL HUMAN CALCULATIONS.** It is astonishing to what a degree men are tempted to become the architects of their own plans of life, instead of consulting the models which are laid up for them in Scripture. Pride is always seducing us into a belief that we can choose and act better for ourselves and for others than our Heavenly Father would choose for us. But let our calculations be of the most profound nature, let them proceed upon the most unquestionable facts and principles, how soon does a single unforeseen circumstance confound them all! IV. **THE VANITY OF ALL HUMAN HOPES.** V. **THE TRANSCENDANT VALUE OF REAL RELIGION.** (*J. W. Cunningham, A.M.*) *The necessity of death:*—I. **MAN "MUST NEEDS DIE."** 1. We "must needs die," because of God's unalterable decree; "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." 2. Moreover, we "must needs die," because of the diseases to which we are subjected in consequence of sin. Had man stood he never would have known anything of disease. (1.) There are three views which we may profitably take of death. Contemplate it in the pains which it inflicts. Troops of malignant diseases attend "the king of terrors;" fevers burn, consumptions waste, plagues depopulate, and diseases of every kind attack the human frame. (2.) Contemplate death in the changes which it produces. The withering of the grass, the fading of the flower, the fleeing of the shadows and the vanishing of the vapour are emblems, used by the inspired writers to illustrate and impress upon us the nature of death. Oh! what an awful and indescribable change does it produce! (3.) Contemplate death in the dissolutions which it effects. The body and the soul are closely and intimately united, though we cannot tell how spirit acts upon matter; the psalmist remarks "we are fearfully and wonderfully made;" but when death comes, he dissolves the mysterious union, and then is brought to pass the saying that is written "The silver cord is loosed and the golden bowl is broken." 3. But let us now come to character; and I remark that the righteous and the wicked "must needs die." The wicked "must needs die," that he may fully prove the truth of God's threatenings. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." The righteous "must needs die" in order to receive the reward of their doings. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God;" the Lord first gives grace, and then crowns it with eternal glory. II. **THE FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE OF THE TEXT.** The body, when the spirit has fled, is compared to "water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again." This language may appear to some to argue against the doctrine of the resurrection; but the Scriptures do not contradict themselves. When water is shed upon the dry and parched earth it cannot be collected again in the same purity and quantity; but "the things which are impossible with men are possible with God." It is written, "Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it remaineth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." And as sure as the harvest follows the first fruits, so surely shall the resurrection of the saints to life eternal, and the resurrection of the wicked to everlasting damnation come to pass. (*D. Delaney.*) *Justice and mercy:*—I. **THE AFFECTING CONDITION OF MANKIND.** 1. Their mortality. "We must needs die." Solemn and affecting truth! We live in a dying world, and behold! we die daily, and sometimes suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye. 2. The helpless and irretrievable circumstances in which we are placed. "We are as water spilt upon the ground which cannot be gathered up again." What a fearful figure this! and yet, how true! As to ourselves and our own natural powers, we are entirely lost, past all recovery, "as water spilt upon the ground." II. **THE JUSTICE OF ALMIGHTY GOD TOWARDS MANKIND.** "He respecteth not the

person of any." He is an impartial dispenser and rewarder; he doeth justly, and loveth mercy, and is "no respecter of persons." As "in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." III. **THE GRACE AND MERCY OF GOD VOUCHSAFED TO THEM.** "Yet doth he devise means that his banished be not expelled from him." (*F. Ellaby.*) *Death and banishment:*—I. **THE UNIVERSALITY OF DEATH.** 1. "We must needs die." Well, why must we needs die? not only because the sentence has been denounced, but because without this charge we could not enter on the future state, when the trumpet shall sound and the dead be raised. 2. We must "needs die" also that we may attain a more perfect resemblance to Jesus than is attainable upon earth. Hence the apostle says, "We are buried with him by baptism unto death, &c." 3. There is yet another reason why we must "needs die," that we may enjoy the glorious recompense prepared for those who believe in Christ. "This is not our rest, for it is polluted." Here we are "strangers and pilgrims." II. **THE CONDITION TO WHICH SIN HAS REDUCED US.** 1. Banished. And how affecting is the account recorded in Genesis iii. respecting the banishment of our primogenitors from the beautiful paradise where they were placed. 2. Though they are "banished," they are "God's banished ones." O it is this that gives us courage, that emboldens us; that animates with hope the soul condemned in the court of conscience. But how are they His? "We are bought with a price," redeemed not with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with the precious, atoning, cleansing, "blood of Christ." III. **THE DIVINE PROCEDURE FOR MAN'S RECOVERY.** Here we learn: 1. That though salvation is all of grace, yet are sinners saved by the intervention of means. 2. That the success of these means originates, not in the cunning of man, but in the power, wisdom, and goodness of God. (*J. Wilcox, M.A.*) *An unexpected provision of mercy:*—In these words of the wise woman there was a great principle of truth, which was wrongly applied in this instance. David had no right whatever to interfere with the law of God. The law of God said that the murderer should die, and David had no authority to interfere with what God had designed. There was provision made that by fleeing to one of the cities of refuge Absalom might have his case legally investigated; and if there was any doubt as to his being the culprit he might be legally acquitted. David had power to interpose this legal examination, but he had not power to interfere with the due course of the law, as laid down by God Himself, except indeed there should be any doubt respecting the application of God's law to the present case, or except there should be any doubt as to Absalom's guilt. But we will not dwell further upon the immediate application of the words: the principle contained in them is one of universal application. "We must needs all die, and be as water spilt upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up again." I. **DEATH MUST BE CONSIDERED IN ITSELF AS AN EVIL.** We have in this generally admitted truth an intimation or proof that there is a quarrel existing between man and his Maker, between the creature who is crushed sooner than the moth, and the Creator who is "the Ancient of days," the eternal and infinite God. Is it of no consequence that such a quarrel as this exists? Can we contemplate the reality of it, as evidenced by the death of our fellow-creatures, and our own liability to death, without serious thought taking possession of our minds, as to the necessity of reconciliation with God? The quarrel must be made up, or we are ruined for ever; the quarrel ought to be made up immediately, or we may be beyond the reach of reconciliation. II. **THE UNEXPECTED PROVISION WHICH GOD IN HIS GOODNESS HAS MADE FOR OUR COMFORT AND PEACE.** We read in the text, "Neither doth God respect any person: yet doth He devise means that His banished be not expelled from Him." You will see this rendered in the margin, "Because God hath not taken away his life, He hath also devised means that His banished be not expelled from Him," which intimates that, although a quarrel does exist between the sinner and his Creator, God does not proceed at once to determine the quarrel, seeing that He has made provision for that sinner's restoration and security; He has devised means by which the banished may be restored, and meanwhile preserved. Now, see this provision of God's goodness typified under the Jewish law. The manslayer who had unwittingly slain a brother or a neighbour was by the law expelled from society; but there was a provision made that if he fled to the city of refuge, and it should be proved there that he had not intentionally slain his brother or his friend, then at the death of the high priest he should be set at liberty, and allowed to return again to his family circle. You observe in this that God "devised means by which His

banished might not be for ever expelled from Him." We see the same provision also in the case of the leper. See, again, how this provision is announced in the Gospel of Christ. All the typical institutions of the law were intended to shadow forth the great truths of the Gospel. The manslayer and the leper betoken the state of the sinner under the condemnation of the Divine law, and unfit, on account of his pollution, for the society of God and His angels. He is therefore considered in the eye of God as a banished person, who can never obtain admittance into the kingdom; but God has devised means by which the banished may be restored. The Lord Jesus Christ has come into the world and died for the sinner's guilt; He is now the great Refuge to whom, if the sinner flee, he shall be saved from the condemnation which he deserves. The moral and spiritual leprosy is thus cleansed; "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." (W. Cadman, M.A.) **Yet doth he devise means that his banished be not expelled from him.**—*The king's son coming home from exile*:—I. THE PLAN OF SALVATION BEGAN IN GOD'S OWN HEART, FULL OF LOVE FOR US. The idea has been sometimes presented that God was only willing to save men after Christ had died for us and paid our debt. But the whole plan of salvation, and the coming of Jesus Christ to die for us on the cross, began in God's own heart. II. SIN ALONE EXILED US FROM THE PRESENCE AND FAVOUR OF GOD. Absalom fled from his native land and from the presence of the king, his father, because he had not only sinned against David's love and fatherhood, but had broken the law of the land. It was his own deed which sent him into banishment. So it is not because God has ceased to love us and long for our salvation that sin makes us unhappy and that the sinner is the victim of remorse and fails to find peace; it is rather that man was made to find happiness in the presence of God and in the consciousness of harmony with him. III. IT IS POSSIBLE FOR THE SINNER TO THWART GOD'S LOVE, and make all the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ of no effect so far as he is concerned. Absalom did just that with those who sought so earnestly to save him. (L. A. Banks, D.D.) *God's banished ones*:—I. GOD'S BANISHED ONES. Strip away the metaphor, and it just comes to this—you cannot be blessedly and peacefully near God unless you are far away from sin. If you take two polished plates of metal and lay them together they will adhere. If you put half a dozen tiny grains of sand or dust between them they will fall apart. And so our sins have separated between us and our God. They have not separated God from us. His thought, and His knowledge, and His tenderness, all come to every soul of man. But they have rent us apart from Him, in so far as they make us unwilling to be near Him, incapable of receiving the truest nearness and blessedness of His presence. That banishment is self-inflicted. God spurns away no man, but men spurn Him, and flee from Him. Many of us know what it is to pass whole days, and weeks, and years, practical Atheists. God is not in all our thoughts. Away down in the luxurious islands of the Southern Sea you will find degraded Englishmen who have chosen rather to cast in their lot with savages than to have to strain and work and grow. Those poor beach-combers of the Pacific, not happy in their degradation, but wallowing in it, are no exaggerated pictures of the condition, in reality, of thousands of us who dwell far from God, and far, therefore, from righteousness and peace. II. GOD'S YEARNING OVER HIS BANISHED ONES. The woman in our story hints at, or suggests, a parallel which, though inadequate, is deeply true. David was Absalom's father and Absalom's king; and the two relationships fought against each other in his heart. The king had to think of law and justice; the father cried out for his son. The young man's offence had neither altered his relationship nor affected the father's heart. All that is true, far more deeply, blessedly true, in regard to our relation, the wandering exile's relation, to God. The whole preciousness of the Revelation of God in Scripture is imperilled unless we frankly recognise this, that His love is like ours, delights in being returned like ours, and is like ours in that it rejoices in presence and knows a sense of loss in absence. And it is you, you, that He wants back; you that He would fain rescue from your aversion to good and your carelessness of Him. III. THE FORMIDABLE OBSTACLES TO THE RESTORATION OF THE BANISHED. The words "banished" and "expelled" in my text are in the original the same; and the force of the whole would be better expressed if the same English word was employed as the equivalent of both. Now, note that the language of this "wise woman," unconsciously to herself, confesses that the parallel that she was trying to draw did not go on all fours; for what she was asking the king to do was simply by an

arbitrary act to sweep aside law and to remit penalty. She instinctively feels that that is not what can be done by God, and so she says that He "devises means" by which He can restore His banished. If there are to be any pardon and restoration at all, they must be such as will leave untouched the sovereign majesty of God's law, and untampered with the eternal gulf between good and evil. God's law is the manifestation of God's character; and that is no flexible thing which can be bent about at the bidding of a weak, good nature. The motto on the blue cover of the *Edinburgh Review*, for a hundred years now, is true, "The judge is condemned when the guilty is acquitted." David struck a fatal blow at the prestige of his own rule when he weakly let his son off his penalty. And, if it were possible to imagine such a thing, God Himself would strike as fatal a blow at the justice and judgment which are the foundations of His throne if His forgiveness was such as to be capable of being confounded with love which was too weakly indulgent to be righteous. 2. Further, if there are to be forgiveness and restoration at all, they must be such as will turn away the heart of the pardoned man from his evil. The very story before us shows that it is not every kind of pardon which makes a man better. 3. If there are to be forgiveness and restoration at all, they must come in such a fashion as that there shall be no doubt whatsoever of their reality and power. IV. THE TRIUMPHANT, DIVINE SOLUTION OF THESE DIFFICULTIES. The work of Jesus Christ, and the work of Jesus Christ alone, meets all the requirements. That work of Christ's is the only way by which it is made absolutely certain that sins forgiven shall be sins abhorred; and that a man once restored shall cleave to his Restorer as to his life. God has devised a means. None else could have done so. We are all exiles from God unless we have been brought nigh by the blood of Christ. In Him, and in Him alone, can God restore His banished ones. In Him, and in Him alone, can we find a pardon which cleanses the heart, and ensures the removal of the sin which it forgives. In Him, and in Him alone, can we find, not a peradventure, not a subjective certainty, but an external fact which proclaims that verily, there is forgiveness for us all. (A. Maclaren, D.D.) *Means for restoring the banished*:—I. A GREAT AND UNIVERSAL OUTLAWRY proclaimed by God against us all, as members of a rebel race. We have all broken His law, wilfully and wickedly have we rebelled against the majesty of heaven; we are, therefore, in our natural estate, banished ones, expelled from his love and favour, waiting the time when the sentence of His wrath shall be fulfilled, and "Depart, ye cursed," shall flash its lightning flame into our spirits. The ever-blessed God has devised means by which we may be delivered from this state of exile; and the means are very similar to that which was alluded to by the woman of Tekoah, and precisely what occurred to the manslayer occurs to us. Now, what did happen to the manslayer? First of all, as soon as he had killed a man inadvertently, knowing that the next of kin would be after him to avenge the death, he fled hot foot, as we say, to the nearest city of refuge; and when he had once reached the gates of that city he was secure. Even thus the Lord Jesus Christ was to us in days gone by a city of refuge, and we fled to Him. But though this is the grand means for restoring exiled man to communion with his God, yet through the depravity of our nature it would fail to be of any service to us, did not God further ordain means to make us willing to avail ourselves of it. In most cases it is the preaching of the Gospel which restores the wandering. The preaching of the Word is God's great saving agency among mankind. But besides the vocal preaching of the Gospel, the printed word of God itself is a preacher through the eye. Many are brought to repentance and faith by sickness. So, too, with Christian influence. II. OUR SECONDARY BANISHMENTS. Alas! the people of God sometimes fall into sin; they grow careless, and they walk at a distance from their best friend, and then sin prevails against them; but the Lord has provided means for bringing them back from their wandering. "He restoreth my soul." The Holy Spirit, though grieved, will return, convince His servants again of sin, and lead them with weeping and supplication to their Saviour. There is another kind of banishment which is produced not so much by sin primarily as by despondency. III. A PRACTICAL LESSON TO BE GATHERED FROM ALL THIS. 1. The first application of that rule is this: there may be some one—a father, a mother, or some other relative, who has been compelled, as he has thought, to deny and no longer to acknowledge a child or a brother. Great offences have at last brought anger into your bosom, and, as you think, very justifiable anger. Oh, celebrate this day by a full forgiveness of all who have done aught against you! And do not merely

say, "Well, I will do it if they will ask me;" that is not what God does, he is first in the matter, and devises means. Try. Consider. Devise means. "Would you have me lower myself?" Sometimes to lower ourselves is to make ourselves much higher in God's sight. The last application of the lesson shall be this: let every Christian devise means for bringing to Jesus those banished ones who surround Him. We must, as a Christian Church, be indefatigably industrious in seeking out the Lord's expelled and banished ones who live in our neighbourhood. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Exiles brought back*:—What do you mean by banishment? Well, it means being driven away, and wearing fetters. It means bitter absence from home. It means in some places, and on some occasions, an expatriation to Siberia to delve in the mines, and to be fastened in a chain gang. Yes, the whole race is banished. Our first parents banished from Paradise. The recreant angels banished from heaven. The whole family banished from peace. Where is the worldly man who has anything worthy of the name of happiness? What are those anxious looks of the brokers, of the bankers, of the merchants, of those men in the club house, of that great multitude of people who tramp up and down Broadway? Banished from God. Banished from peace. Banished from heaven. You are banished, "Yet doth God devise means by which the banished ones shall not be expelled from Him." Well, what are some of the means that "God has devised that the banished be not expelled from Him?" I. In the first place, **THE FOOTPATH UP THROUGH THE RIFTS OF SKULL-SHAPED CALVARY**. Constantine has designated that hill as the one on which Jesus died. Dean Stanley says there are on that hill shattered fragments of limestone rock cleft evidently of the crucifixion earthquake. And it is through that fissure of the rock that our path to pardon lies; through the earthquake of conviction, under the dripping crimson of the cross. II. Among the means that God has devised that the banished be not expelled from Him, I notice still further, **SPIRITUALISTIC INFLUENCES**. I do not mean any influence gone up from earth and etherialised, but the Divine Spirit. Some call Him the Comforter; it is best for my purpose that I call Him the soul-saving power of the nations. When that influence comes upon a man how strangely he acts. He cries. He trembles. He says things and does things that five minutes before he could not have been coaxed or hired to say or do. O it is a mighty spirit. III. Among the means that "God has devised that the banished be not expelled from Him, I notice, also, **CHRISTIAN SURROUNDINGS**. There is the influence of ancestral piety. Was there not a good man or woman in your ancestral line? Is there not an old Bible around the house, with worn cover, and turned-down leaves, giving you the hint that there was some one who prayed? Was there a family altar at which you used to bow? The carpet may have been worn out, and the chair may have been sold for old furniture, and the knee that knelt on the one and beside the other may never again be pliant in earthly worship; but you remember—do you not remember? Ah! that Christian homestead, the memory of it to-night almost swamps your soul. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *A foregleam of the Gospel*:—Expositors generally consider that the woman of Tekoah, in this appeal, alludes to the merciful Divine provision by which a manslayer might, at the death of the High Priest, return to his home from the city of refuge, to which he, red-handed, had fled from the red-handed avenger of blood. Doubtless David would understand more; and to us, Gospel in hand, the words mean more than to her or to David. They illustrate the great facts: 1. **THAT SINFUL MEN ARE MORAL EXILES**. This is borne out: 1. By Scripture (1) in statement, (2) intimation, (3) parable; 2. By the experience of the sinful; 3. By the confession of the penitent. II. **THE GOSPEL IS GOD'S MEANS OF RECOVERING MORAL EXILES**. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself." The Gospel: 1. Reveals clear way of return; 2. Supplies sufficient motive; 3. Promises abundant help. (*U. R. Thomas.*) *The restoration of God's banished ones*:—These words occur in the course of a very wonderful piece of womanly pleading. With marvellous power, and with a woman's keen instinct where the heart is concerned, this otherwise unknown Tekoite pleads the cause of the ill-starred Absalom. Though Joab's was the mind that directed her, hers was the art which threw such a colour upon the cause she had to plead, that the king's soul was touched, and her suit was gained. It is not quite easy to see the force of the reasoning which links together these statements. Probably, instead of being logically connected, there is a gradation in thought, so that the closing phrase is the strongest, and intended to do the most effective work. The thing the woman wants is the restoration of the banished one; and she refers to the

Divine clemency in order to provoke and to justify the human. I. HIS BANISHED ONES; WHO ARE THEY? In a sense we are all banished ones, since for the present our relation to the Infinite Father is obscured; even those who have in them the stirrings of the spiritual sonship, though they may say, "Now are we the sons of God," must yet add, "it doth not yet appear what we shall be." And those who have not entered into the light and sweetness of that recognised sonship are very far, as one may say, from their true home. Time would fail, even to epitomise the story of God's banished ones. The wanderings of David; Elijah's flight into the wilderness; the captivity of the tribes; and the story of the prophets, all illustrate the truth of our text. They are not God-deserted even in the strange land. The story of the outcasts is ever interesting. Look at the scattered flock through the persecutions, now of the Jewish, now of the Romish authorities. Come down to more recent times and read the story of the Waldenses, the Huguenots, and the Scottish Covenanters. These men also knew how God devises "means that His banished ones be not expelled from Him." Take away their outward freedom of worship; drive these men into the wilderness; let their bodies be incarcerated in foul prisons, or given up to torture or death; the spirit finds its way to the secrecies of Divine love, and summers in its smile. Though outcast, they are not expelled from Him. But come yet nearer home; individual life even now illustrates the truth. Take the case, not at all an uncommon one, of the compelled retirement and withdrawal of any one from all that had before seemed helpful, even essential, to the religious life. II. GO BACK TO THAT GARDEN-SCENE, TOLD US IN THE FIRST BOOK. When we come to that story, and hear how the man and woman were expelled the garden; if we were to read it thoughtlessly, we should say—How terrible a thing to lose so much; and now of course God is always angry. "So He drove out the man;" and he was banished, and, into whatever gardens he may have entered, he has not entered the garden of Eden since. All his life now is in some sense a groping after Eden. How strange—had we never read something like it out of our life-story and the story of men's lives from day to day—God seems to contrive against Himself. He banishes, "yet doth he devise means that His banished be not expelled from Him." One thing leads on to another; whither doth this banishment lead? Why, it leads to a thorn-covered earth; yes, but also to a thorn-crowned Saviour. It leads to much toil and bitterness of men's hearts, but it also leads to God's labour and Christ's travail of soul, of which He shall be satisfied. The way from Eden becomes (through God's devising) the way back to Eden; an Eden, we may say truly, where palms wave and laurels bloom, to wave over and deck the conqueror's brow. III. THE VARIED AGENCIES BY WHICH THIS GOOD THOUGHT AND FEELING OF GOD ARE CONVEYED TO HIS BANISHED ONES. What do I mean by this? But that all the varied network of Christian endeavour is proof of the priesthood of the whole Church of God. And it is this priesthood that needs more clear manifesting. The interlacings of what we call Divine and human effort may be in a few simple words set forth. When we come much into contact with men, I mean with that which betrays their inner life, while we find much in them that pains and perplexes us, we do not fail to find repeated and startling proofs of the truths of the Bible, and especially of the truth I am trying to unfold. Well, although in these and countless ways we see proof of the exigency and earnestness of God's love, it is for those who are enlightened from the Light Divine to stretch forth the torch and give a meaning to the vague and unexpressed cravings of the human heart after God. Among the God-devised means are those ties of kinship, of common humanity, which, being sanctified by the love and illumined by the light of God, are only rightly directed under the guidance of Him who came to seek and to save that which is lost. Lost, yet His! "His banished," though their natures be sadden through with the cruel damps of their long wilderness banishment. His, not to be passed over by Him. O think of it in the light of your neglect of them, and your neglect of Him too. The King and the Father unite in this, the restoration of the banished ones. (G. J. Proctor.) *The Tekoite and Divine devising*:—I. THOSE WHO ARE IN A STATE OF EXILE OR ALIENATION FROM GOD ARE SO BY THEIR OWN ACT AND WISH, NOT BY GOD'S. Like Absalom, who was vain, cruel, treacherous, selfish, heartless, ambitious and murderous, we have yielded to sin. Like him, conscious of guilt, but finding temporary security in the Court at Geshur, we have known we were sinful, but we have thought that any time would do to acknowledge it. We in this world are where God can reach us. Hope and restoration are possible here; but, alas; there is a state in which

alienation can become eternal, in which hope and faith in Divine mercy are impossible. Banished now, alas, by our own act, by our own hardness and unbelief, we may be, we can be, certainly still further banished. God pities us but He cannot and will not compel us to love Him. A stream among the Mendip Hills, after rising in the darkness far away under the hills, pursues for miles its rapid, winding way among the caverns, and then, just beneath one of those rocky buttresses of the sky," in the Cheddar gorge, suddenly emerges into the light, spreads itself in a small lake, then rushes over a weir, turns a mill, cleanses pampas grass, receives the poisonous washing and refuse of paper mills, plunges under dark tunnels, then away through the open meadows to the sea. Thus with our life, rising in mystery it pursues its way subject to various evil influences, and can either be cleansed or can plunge again into the caverns of darkness or be carried on into the bright open sea. We are in the light now. We have the power, which is denied to a river, of refusing to be subject to the inflow of evil. We can pray. We can look up to God. We can say pardon, cleanse, save us. We can implore God to turn again our captivity as streams in the South. We can say with intensity, "God, save thy banished from being expelled from Thee!"

II. THE MEANS GOD DEVISES TO SAVE MAN FROM FURTHER ESTRANGEMENT. The Tekoite in speaking of God as "devising means" to bring back the banished, had caught a marvellously clear glimpse of a coming Gospel. This was one of the rays shot up above the sombre hills of intervening years and ceremonial observances, telling of that rising sun of Divine love that afterward shone in mid-day effulgence from the cross on Calvary.

1. The Sabbath is His institution to give man rest and an opportunity of thinking of his eternal interests. It was "made for man," and was intended not only for physical rest but spiritual.
2. Revelation is another way of bringing man back. To Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, Peter, Paul, God has revealed Himself. Through them and others He has spoken to us.
3. By the institution of public worship, whether round the altar on the hill-top, in the tent at Shiloh, in the temple at Jerusalem, in the synagogues scattered in many lands, or in the churches that have risen all over the world. He has been arranging to draw men from sin and make them glad when they "go up to the house of the Lord."
4. The arrangement of a sacrificial system is in harmony with the ideas of all ages and all races as a means of restoration to the Divine presence. In the sacrifice of Christ our restoration is assured by the death of Him who suffered, "the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." The sacrifice of Calvary was not a mere device, but the natural outcome of the Divine love. Through the intervention of the woman of Tekoah, an exiled son was restored, but only to yield to deeper sin. When we are brought back by Divine mercy, it should be to let the purity of the life emphasise the gratitude of the heart. Christ intercedes; God waits to receive the banished; but the means He has devised are not always availing. Man's indifference and devilish opposition, alas! can spoil the effect of even the Divine devisings. (*F. Hastings.*)

The return of the banished:—The arrow went straight to the mark. The pity that was aroused had its current turned at once to Amnon, and Joab arose and fetched home the banished one from Geshur, and once again Absalom dwelt at home. For us who look back on the Old Testament scene through all the light and glory of the Cross of Christ these words have a blessed fulness of meaning. "Yet doth He devise means that His banished be not expelled from Him."

 1. It may be that in the clearest and most literal sense of these words the appeal needs to be made as it was made to David. The wise women of Tekoah, they come into our midst to-day and take their places before some of us, and make the appeal that we fetch home the banished. You have been wronged and hurt, but you do yourself a greater wrong by nursing your bitterness. You have been vexed, ashamed, humiliated. True. Yet is it not time that by-gones should be by-gones? You cannot undo the mischief. There it is. But does not your perpetual thought and talk of it make it all a thousand times worse? Is it not better to let the dead bury the dead than to keep a dead past alive by thought and anger, and to give it such power to hurt and annoy? Remember that this hard and bitter spirit is a grievous sin. You undo your own prayers and choke the better life within you by this nursing of your wrath. How can you bow and ask God's forgiveness if you withhold your own forgiveness? If this woman, with her stratagem, could prevail with the king, surely the Cross of Christ should prevail with us. Lift up your eyes to the Crucified. For His dear sake fling open wide the door of the heart, and let love flow forth as freely,

as graciously as His love greeted us. Devise means. Be ingenious in finding out ways of love. We have but one life. 2. But further: Here is a blessed word for all of us. This is the story of all ages: a summary of the Gospel. Time began with the scene of the banished ones as they go forth from the Garden of Eden. Then comes the centre of all time, of all things—Christ and the Cross, the Cross whereon hangs the Saviour of the world, bringing us who are afar off nigh unto God by His blood. And far away we see the end of all time in the scene of the banished ones brought home; and the cry is heard, "Hallelujah! for the Tabernacle of God is with men." What means hath our God devised that His banished be not expelled? The gift of His Son, the great provisions of His grace in Jesus Christ, the appeal of love and wisdom and glory in Him, the thousand precious promises that speak to us from the Word, the prompting and influence of His Spirit, the force of holy example and teaching—all these are means of His devising for bringing us home to Himself. How ingenious is the love of God, how unwearied and skilful! How many devices have to be baffled, how many entreaties have to be resisted, if we will still persist in dwelling in the far country. Never any circumstance is there in the daily life, never any occasion, but the blessed Spirit seeks to turn to account for our home-coming. Think of these banished ones; let them pass before us. Like Absalom they dwelt of old time in the palace of the King. The happy freedom of the King's chamber was theirs; they sat at the King's table and saw the King's feast; they had the joy of a communion deep and constant, and easy was it for them to pass softly within the banquetting chamber, and rest in the peace of His love. What music filled the soul! They laughed at fear. All was deep peace and thankfulness that knew no want, and scarcely knew a desire beyond Himself. Alas! of how many, of how very many all this is true. They came up to the city from the country, from some little company of Christians, happy and devout, where glad service for Him filled all the days. But here the attachment was loosened. There was, perhaps, no welcome as the stranger came and went. Perhaps the country shyness as well as the city indifference had something to do with it. At any rate, it came about that old ways were forsaken; doubtful things were trifled with until they became almost necessities; doubtful companions were tolerated until they became friends and their ways had to be accepted. By a stratagem the pity of the king was roused, and Joab fetched home the banished, but for two whole years he dwelt in Jerusalem and saw not the face of the king. Oh! not so is it that our Father deals with us. Listen, let the heart take hold of it: "When he was yet a great way off his father saw him and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him." Nothing was enough to do; nothing was enough to give. That great love could not be satisfied. (*M. G. Pearse.*) *The atonement a necessity*:—Now, observe, David did not cease to be a father because he was a king, and he did not cease to be a king because he was a father. Now, contemplate the everlasting God in the relationship in which He stands to His creature man. Observe, first, in a certain limited sense, God is the Father of us all. "We are all His offspring." But remember, this is only in a certain definite sense; that is to say, every one is a child of God, inasmuch as he is the offspring of man, who was created by, and received his life directly from, the Supreme Being, and inasmuch as each of us are called into existence by His sovereign will. Now, you will find that those who are indisposed to accept the Atonement will always lay great stress upon this view of the fatherhood of God. They will say, "Is not God a Father? and if He is our Father, is it not natural for Him to grieve for His children?" To which I reply by pointing to our story. Was not David a father, and had he not a father's heart? Yes. Why did not David forgive Absalom? Because he was more than a father: he was a king. You tell me that God is your Father. Yes, I am ready to admit that in the sense I have defined He is. Let me point out, however, that He is not the Father of us all in the full sense of that word. If you have not received "the Spirit of His Son"—that "spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father," you are not occupying the filial relationship towards Him to which you have a right, and hence you are not entitled to draw such inferences as you otherwise might from the analogy of the earthly relationship. Now let us look closely at this picture. I observe, first, that the heart of the old man David is yearning over his son Absalom. Though Absalom is a criminal, the father would fain forgive him; but justice and honour forbade his doing so. How eager was he to do it: but then, you know, he was a king. Another thought rises up against the ardent desire: "I am king, and if I forgive

my own son, people will say I am guilty of favouritism." Well, what was to be done? It won't do for the king to become depressed and miserable about the matter. Somehow or another Absalom must be got back. So Joab felt, moved, no doubt, partly by sympathy, and partly by policy, hoping to make the best of his relations both with the present and with the future monarch. So he devises a plan. He gets hold of a wily woman, as crafty as himself, and sets her in the king's way; and as the king passes by, she gains his ear with a dolorous wail of distress—"Help, O king!" One was dead; she could not get him back, and the sacrifice of the life of her only remaining son would not recall him to life. He was dead; and now the representatives of the law were coming to take the last support, the only joy she had left her in the world. The widow gained the day, but what had happened? Mercy had triumphed over judgment. And what is the sequel of this victory of mercy over judgment? By-and-by, the crushing and overwhelming outburst of Divine indignation upon those guilty tribes and their guilty leader. I see the forest of Mount Ephraim reeking with human gore, and twenty thousand corpses strewn upon the ground, and suspended on yonder oak—a spectacle for all time—I see the traitor-hearted parricide, with the javelins in his heart! That is the sequel. And, as I contemplate the blood-drenched battlefield; as I think of the tears of the widows and the wail of fatherless children; as I think of the misery, the devastation that cursed the land; as I hear the wail of a stricken country ringing up into the ears of God, I discover what mere fancy does, when mercy is allowed to triumph over justice. I point to the vast holocaust, to the ghastly corpses piled one over another, and I ask, "Who slew all these?" The reply is, "Mercy slew them." Not least, I point to yonder fatal oak, where the body of Absalom hangs suspended, with the javelins thrust through his quivering body, and into his very heart, and I ask, "Who slew that miserable wretch?" and the answer is, "Mercy slew him." He never would have been present at that battlefield, or have been in a position to raise that standard of revolt, and so he would never have brought on his own head that terrible retribution, if he had not been the object of that royal mercy to which he had no claim. Mercy was the undoing of him; this is the solemn moral of this tragic tale. With such a lesson as that before our eyes, shall we turn to the Mighty Monarch of the Universe, and venture to say, "O God! why shouldest Thou require an atonement? Why shouldest Thou not forgive us without any atonement at all?" I wonder what sort of a world we should have if God were to act on such principles. I wonder what sort of a universe we should have if God were to act on such principles. God does not. God will not. Now, I proceed to ask, what would have been needed in order that Absalom might have been brought back from his banishment without danger to his king, his country, or himself? Two things, at least, would have been required. First, it would have been necessary that the moral dignity and majesty of law should be vindicated in an exemplary manner. Surely not less than this was demanded by the circumstances of the case. If Absalom is to be recalled to the king's court, it must somehow or other be so arranged as that the law shall not suffer by it—that the criminal shall not be able to point to that prince, and to say, "Ah! there is a premium upon sin." Second, and not less, it would have been necessary that a radical change should have been effected in Absalom's character, so that a repetition of such offences might have been rendered most improbable, if not impossible. But mere mercy did not, could not, produce this; on the contrary, it might be expected to breed callousness and indifference to the threats of the law, and to dispose the pardoned culprit to think lightly of an offence which could be so readily overlooked. He was the same man morally after receiving the king's pardon as before—as vindictive, ruthless, treacherous, cruel. Hence, his presence at David's court was a necessary danger to society, and the results that followed are not surprising. We conclude, then, that these two things are necessary before the prerogative of mercy can be exercised by a sovereign wisely and well, and without injury to his authority, to the state, or to the individual recipient of it. Keep these in mind, and then you will be better able to understand the necessity of the atonement. First, the vindication of the majesty of the law; and, second, the complete transformation of the character of the offender. David could not compass either in this case. No human ingenuity could solve the problem; so in justice and right there could be nothing for it but that Absalom should remain in bonds. Now we have observed that this wise woman of Tekoah, when she argues the matter with David, points to God's dealings with man as her justification of

her plea; but it is worthy of notice that she does so in a very cautious and guarded way. The truth is, she knew a deal more theology than many of our modern professors. What does she say? If you examine her argument carefully you will see that, strictly speaking, it does not carry its own conclusion. There is a logical fallacy in it. Put it thus—"You should follow the example of God, David; you can't be wrong in doing what God does. God devises means whereby His 'banished' shall not be expelled from Him—therefore you may recall yours without devising any means at all, but by a mere arbitrary and despotic exercise of the prerogative of mercy. You may not be able to do it as God does it, but, means or no means, get it done." You see the argument does not hold water. It was a sophistry; but it was a sophistry that carried the day, because it was addressed to the heart rather than to the head. Now she teaches us here a great truth. God indeed "devises means whereby His banished shall not be expelled from Him." What are the means? I point unhesitatingly to Calvary's Cross, and I say, "There are the means." You may be sure that if any other means would have answered the great purpose, God would have adopted them. If anything else would have met the requirements of the case, surely, surely, in some other way the mighty problem would have been solved. But there was only one means—I say it reverently—that even the wisdom of God could suggest. "We preach Christ crucified." The Jews called this a stumbling-block. They did not see their need of an atonement; they wanted a king. Do you believe that God can show mercy? I suppose we certainly all agree to that, at least. Those who repudiate the atonement admit that God can show mercy. Next, do you believe that God should show mercy? Surely here also we are all agreed—we are all of us poor, frail, fallible creatures, and under these circumstances it is very necessary that mercy should be extended to us. Very good; we start with two points in common. Is this as far as we can go together? Can we not find another point in common? Will you not agree with me that, in showing mercy, God has a right to condition the exercise of His sovereign prerogative in any way that seems most in accordance with wisdom and goodness? Surely you will not object to that position, will you? If I am giving away favours, free favours, unmerited favours, and I choose to attach any condition to those favours, surely I have a right to do so if I will. Is not that so? Certainly. Does mercy come of right or of grace? Surely you will agree with me that it comes of grace. No sinner has a claim on the Divine mercy. Well, if it comes of grace—that is, if it is a free gift—God has a right to qualify it according to His own mind, whatever that mind may be. "Well," you reply, "but God does not act on any such arbitrary and despotic fashion." Quite true. But what if God chooses to qualify His administration of mercy in such a fashion that mercy, instead of being a premium on crime, shall be a preventive of crime? What about that? Oh, if men who despise the Atonement could only see the wonderful wisdom, the true philosophy, that lurks underneath the Atonement, we should have an end to the supercilious criticism which so often stands between the soul and God. When God elected to extend mercy towards the fallen world, He also made up His mind that that mercy should be a double blessing; and in order that it might be a double blessing He took care that His mercy should not be bestowed promiscuously, so to speak, but that it should be bestowed in such a form that, on the one hand, the majesty of God's law and the eternal and changeless antipathy of God against sin should be clearly manifested to the eyes of all; while, on the other hand, the moral character of the sinner should be so completely changed and revolutionised that instead of mercy being a premium upon guilt, on the contrary, mercy should render sin impotent, and strip the tyrant powers of hell of all their dominion over man. That is the true meaning of atonement. How is it to be done? "God devises means whereby His banished shall not be expelled from him;" and the first means is that He vindicates His law, and makes it honourable. You say it was not just that He should bear our sins. Stop a moment. It would not have been just if He had been anything less than God. It would not have been just if the everlasting God had laid the burden of one creature's guilt upon the head of another: but do you mean to tell me that God has not a right to do what He likes with Himself? Do you mean that God has not a right to vindicate His own law? And the second is that not only was the Sufferer Divine, but that He suffered in human form, and as a man, and that as such there was a "joy that was set before Him." What was that joy? The joy of pure benevolence; the joy of being able to rescue the children of earth on their way to perdition; the joy of

being able to restore a fallen race, and reconsecrate to His Father a desecrated world; the joy of triumphant love. The crown and the reward of the Man Christ Jesus is to be obtained by Him in His humanity according to the words of the prophet, "When He shall see His seed"; "When He shall see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied"; when a ransomed Church gathered in His presence, and clustering round His person, shall pour forth through a bright eternity the continuous offering of unwearied, grateful praise to Him who hath loved them and given Himself for them. Well now, there it is; God's wondrous means. Have you anything to say against it? Had not God a right to provide such a means if it seemed good to Him? Now let us consider its effects. First, we have a supreme vindication of God's attitude towards sin. What more is wanted? One thing more, or the Atonement may yet fail of its purpose. One thing more is demanded by the circumstances of the case. What is it? That the acceptance of the benefit shall necessarily involve a radical transformation of the sinner. How is it to be effected? By a man's trying to turn over a new leaf. No; that won't effect it. If I do turn over a new leaf, I am still the same man now as I was yesterday, with the same motives, the same impulses, the same temptations, the same infirmities. Do you mean to say that you can make a new man of yourself by a resolution? How silly of people when they talk in this way. Do they not know something about the force of habit? "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature." When the weary soul makes its way to the Cross of Calvary, what does it see? The first thing it sees is a dying man. You have seen that, all of you. You ask what His life has been. You read the record of it here, and you say, "Why, what evil has He done?" and even while you wait in vain for an answer, you look again, and this time you discover, under the form of a dying man, the august presence of the living God. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself." Then, bewildered and amazed, once again you turn your eyes on this strange spectacle. More inquiringly than ever, you fix your gaze upon the overwhelming sight. What does it mean? You have seen the dying man; you have seen the present God; what do you see now? The thing above all others that is opposed to God—sin. "He was made sin for us who knew no sin." But observe—it is sin crucified, not sin triumphant—sin nailed to the tree and executed, not sin doing its own deadly work. Once again you turn your gaze to the cross of Christ. Is there anything more to be seen? You strain your powers of vision to the utmost, with the eager concentrated gaze of faith. What do you see now? You have seen the dying man; you have seen the Son of God; you have seen crucified sin. What do you see there now? I will tell you what I see. I see my guilty self nailed to that cross—myself, the felon, represented in the person of Him, the Holy One, who has voluntarily consented to identify Himself with me; I see my corrupt "old man" obtaining what its sin has deserved. St. Paul saw this as he looked at the cross, and boldly exclaimed, "I am crucified with Christ." What then? If I be crucified with Christ, then, thanks be to God, between me and my old self, upon which the law of God has done its work, there is an actual separation. I have done with that old life of mine. The crucified old nature is left in Jesus' tomb; there the burden of my sins is cast. Henceforth the power of my sins is broken, and I enter into a new life, and into novel and blessed relationships. "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Do you not see that a man cannot claim the benefit of the Atonement without admitting first the justice of the sentence illustrated by the Atonement; and, in the second place, without seeing himself by faith as cut off by force of that sentence, thus undergone, from all connection with the former life of sin; nor, in the third place, without entering into a new and glorious relationship with the living God. He who is buried and raised again with Christ is already in possession of the power of an endless life, and thus enjoys a new moral force, animated by new motives, and fired with new desires. Thus he goes forth from the cross a "new creature" in Christ Jesus. You cannot afford to dispense with the Atonement. Your heads need it, your hearts need it, your lives need it. Would to God we all understood its mystic power more! Now, our text states that God has devised means whereby His banished should not be expelled from Him. At this moment we are banished, but, thank God, we are not yet expelled. Those of you who are not yet restored to the Divine favour are banished. The joyful light of God's mercy does not rest upon your lives or upon your hearts. You are banished; the terrible sentence of banishment has already been recorded against you. Young men, do you know what it is to be in anything like spiritual communion with

God? Is God a reality to you—a present Friend? Does He dwell in your hearts? Nay: for you are banished—already banished—some of you. But remember, though you are banished, the heart of God is yearning over you. The message from the Cross to you—if you will but hear it—surely amounts to this: “Come home, come home, ye banished! Come home, come home, ye wandering souls! ye who have found your way out from the Divine presence, and have lost your way in a desolate world, come home!” (*W. Hay Aitken, M.A.*) *The banished restored*.—I. **THE BANISHMENT.** Absalom is living at Geshur. It is not his native place, it is not his fatherland; he is there an exile and a foreigner; he is living a life of banishment. As a transgressor Absalom is under sentence of the law, and in order to escape that sentence he is living at Geshur, a banished man. He has banished himself; his conscience acknowledges the crime that he has committed, and the justice of the doom that hangs over him, so he flees from his country, from his father's house. Here we have a picture of man's state as a sinner. Man, as a sinner, is living in banishment. Sometimes this banishment will make itself felt: there are times in which the soul of man will cast a longing thought back upon the Father's house, like the prodigal in the far-off land, when the famine pinches, when the pleasures of sin have worn themselves out, and a sense of want presses; then the memory of home comes up. These longings are but the memories of home, the sighing of men in banishment, for though the banishment has gone on through long generations, the memories of home have not altogether faded from the soul. II. **THE MEANS DEVISED.** “Yet doth He devise means, etc.” The expression seems to imply that there was a difficulty in the way. Means must be devised, wisdom must set to work to discover a plan, a scheme whereby the banished might be restored. What was the difficulty? The king was very anxious that Absalom should come back (chap. xiii. 39). He made no secret of it. Joab perceived it. Here, then, was the king longing after his banished son. He loved him though he was a transgressor. Now translate the temporal into the spiritual. There is man, as we have shown you, in a state of banishment, an exile from God's presence on account of sin, living far off from God; and there is God, full of love to the banished, longing for his return; but there is the difficulty—His love cannot set aside His justice. “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” What means shall be devised? Where shall wisdom be found to solve the difficulty? The text says, God doth devise means. In the history you see there is a third person brought upon the scene. The king says nothing of bringing Absalom back. Absalom sends no request to be restored; but Joab takes the matter up, and by the political craft of which he was such a thorough master, he gains his end. Now in the means that God has devised, a third person appears, one comes between the Father and the banished one. He sees the Father's heart yearning over the lost; He knows that while God hates the sin He loves the sinner, and so he undertakes the matter. “Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God.” Here is the means that He doth devise. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” “Yet doth He devise means.” The gospel message is just the declaring of this. The difficulty is overcome; the barrier is removed; the way is open; there is nothing now to prevent God from receiving back the sinner, nothing to prevent the sinner from coming back in confidence to God. When the king was pacified toward Absalom, because of Joab's intercession, Joab, we read, went to Geshur, and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. There was no hesitation, no unwillingness on the part of Absalom to return. Joab told him that all was made right with the king, that the king longed for his return, and so he came at once to Jerusalem. But in spiritual things the matter is very different. The ambassador of Christ is continually urging the exiles to return. He tells them that peace has been made, propitiation for their sin, and that the Father is longing for their return, ready to welcome them, and receive them in His embrace of love. Yet there is hesitation, indifference, disinclination, procrastination, if not absolute neglect and scorn. Is banishment so sweet, is exile so to be desired? You know you are not happy, you cannot be, away from God, away from home. Then why hesitate; why demur; why halt between two opinions? Is it that you think of what you will have to give up? What! things which cannot satisfy, can impart no solid happiness, but must perish in the using, put them all into the balance, and you shall find them lighter than vanity itself. III. **THE RESULT.** You have it in the last verse. “The king kissed Absalom.” That kiss was the kiss of peace. It told

of perfect forgiveness, it told of a reinstatement in the father's heart of love. So with those who accept the gospel message, and by faith in Christ return to God. They have the Father's kiss of peace. Theirs the promise, "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins." "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." They are reinstated in the Father's favour and affection. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us that we should be called the sons of God." "The king kissed Absalom." There was no distance, no reserve. Freedom of access to God at all times through Christ is the portion of every true believer. The Father has no word of reproof or upbraiding for his repentant child. It is written, "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." (R. Page, M.A.) *The Christian scheme a device of love* :—It is a Divine device, consisting of means arranged by our Father in heaven to prevent his banished ones being finally expelled from him. It is not a scheme for awakening God's compassion, but a design which manifests and reveals and expresses and conveys the mercy which endureth for ever. This Divine design is therefore a scheme of Divine paternal love. And seeing that love in its ordinary forms cannot reach objects when they sink below their normal state, the love which planned the Christian system is that variety of love which we call "grace," that is, love going after its objects as they retire clad in the scarlet robe of guilty shame, love clinging to its objects when they have proved themselves most unworthy, love overcoming evil with good, and love assuming a gracious form to the unloving and unlovable. Such love is like a plant of renown, or a flower of paradise, blooming in a horrible pit; it is like a choice vine or a tree of precious produce bearing its golden fruit, not in its own rich and warm soil, but in cold and miry clay; it is like an ark of refuge floating on waters so stormy that they have caused every other craft to founder; it is like precious light lingering above the horizon after the sun has suddenly set in awful storms. It is like—ah! to what shall we liken it? We want a high class of figures beyond all we have ever seen, and a style of metaphors which we have no power to create. Never do we feel our poverty and helplessness as when we try to speak of the grace of God. But what we wish now to say is that the Christian scheme is created by the genius of Divine grace. All love can devise and design, but this form of love is most skilful and fertile in invention. The genius of the imagination can write poetry, but the expressions of grace are the sweetest, deepest, divinest poetry. The former can paint beauty, but grace creates and restores beauty, giving beauty for ashes. The former may represent life, but grace restores life. The Christian scheme is the product of Divine love. (Samuel Martin.)

Ver. 25. But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty.—*Absalom a contradiction* :—The ancients, and in particular the Orientals, were very fond of remarking upon a man's height. Their notion was that the greater the stature the more fit the man was for the society of the gods. The Old Testament is to a large extent a book which takes notice of outward features, and praises physical excellence, and estimates at high price all material blessings. But what an irony there is in such a case as Absalom's! Given, a grand physique and a little soul, and say if any irony can be more ghastly and humiliating. Such contradictions we are to ourselves sometimes, and to one another. Our circumstances may be the best part of us: the house may be greater than the tenant; the furniture may be more worthy than its owner. What, then, is to be done? A blot like this ought not to be tolerated. Wherein a man is conscious that he represents this irony, he should look about him, and say that to-day shall end the intolerable disharmony, and at least seek to introduce a reconciliation as between the outward and the inward, so that the soul may prosper and be in health as the body, or the body may prosper and be in health as the soul, according to the special circumstances of each individual case. (J. Parker, D.D.)

Vers. 29—32. Absalom sent for Joab . . . but he would not come to him.—*The barley-field on fire* :—Absalom had fled from Jerusalem under fear of David's anger; he was after a time permitted to return, but he was not admitted into the presence of the king. Earnestly desiring to be restored to his former posts of honour and favour, he besought Joab to come to him, intending to request him to act as mediator. Joab, having lost much of his liking for the

young prince, refused to come; and, though he was sent for repeatedly, he declined to attend at his desire. Absalom therefore thought of a most wicked, but most effective plan of bringing Joab into his company. He bade his servants set Joab's field of barley on fire. This brought Joab down in high wrath to ask the question, "Wherefore have thy servants set my field on fire?" This was all that Absalom wanted; he wished an interview, and he was not scrupulous as to the method by which he obtained it. The burning of the barley-field brought Joab into his presence, and Absalom's ends were accomplished. Omitting the sin of the deed, we have here a picture of what is often done by our gracious God with the wisest and best design. Often he sendeth for us, not for his profit, but for ours; he would have us come near to him and receive a blessing at his hands, but we are foolish, and cold-hearted and wicked, and we will not come. He, knowing that we will not come by any other means, sendeth a serious trial—he sets our barley-field on fire, which he has a right to do, seeing our barley-fields are far more his than they are ours. In Absalom's case it was wrong; in God's case he has a right to do as he wills with his own. He takes away from us our most choice delight, upon which we have set out heart, and then we enquire at his hands, "Wherefore contendest thou with me?" I. THE TEXT WITH REFERENCE TO BELIEVERS IN CHRIST. We cannot expect to avoid tribulation. If other men's barley-fields are not burned, ours will be. If the Father uses the rod nowhere else, he will surely make his true children smart. Your Saviour hath left you a double legacy, "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in Me ye shall have peace." Gold must be tried in the fire: and truly the Lord hath a fire in Zion and his furnace in Jerusalem. 1. You have first, this sweet reflection, that there is no curse in your cross. 2. That your troubles are all apportioned to you by Divine wisdom and love. As for their number, if He appoint them ten they never can be eleven. As for their weight, he who weigheth the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance, takes care to measure your troubles, and you shall not have a grain more than His infinite wisdom sees fit. 3. That under your cross you have many special comforts. There are cordials which God giveth to sick saints which He never putteth to the lips of those who are in health. Dark caverns keep not back the miners, if they know that diamonds are to be found there: you need not fear suffering when you remember what riches it yields to your soul. There is no hearing the nightingale without night, and there are some promises which only sing to us in trouble. It is in the cellar of affliction that the good old wine of the kingdom is stored. You shall never see Christ's face so well as when all others turn their backs upon you. When you have come into such confusion that human wisdom is at a nonplus, then shall you see God's wisdom manifest and clear. 4. That your trials work your lasting good by bringing you nearer and nearer to your God. (1.) Our heavenly Father often sends for us and we will not come. He sends for us to exercise a more simple faith in Him. (2.) At another time He calls us to closer communion with Himself. We have been sitting on the doorstep of God's house, and He bids us advance into the banquetting hall and sup with Him, but we decline the honour. He has admitted us into the inner chambers, but there are secret rooms not yet opened to us; He invites us to enter them, but we hold back. Jesus longs to have near communion with His people. (3.) Frequently the call is to more fervent prayer. (4.) Often, too, He calls us to a higher state of piety. II. A few words to THE SINNER. 1. God also has sent for you. O unconverted man, God has often sent for you. Early in your childhood your mother's prayers sought to woo you to a Saviour's love, and your godly father's first instructions were as so many meshes of the net in which it was desired that you should be taken; but you have broken through all these and lived to sin away early impressions and youthful promises. 2. If God is sending these, are you listening to them? (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Burning the barley field*:—Now, just as the shrewd young prince dealt with Joab in order to bring him unto him, so God employs a regimen of discipline very often in order to bring wayward hearts to Himself. Many a reader may have had his barley-field set on fire; there are some even now whose fields are wrapped in flames or are covered with the ashes of extinguished hopes. With backsliders this method is often God's last resort. He sees that the wayward wanderers care more for their earthly possessions than they do for His honour or His service. So He touches them in the tenderest spot, and sweeps away the objects they love too well. They have become idolaters, and He sternly dashes their idols to atoms. *Compulsory measures*:—For two whole years Joab paid no attention to

the returned son of David, but the moment his barley-field was set on fire he paid Absalom a visit of inquiry. It was crafty on the part of Absalom. Perhaps he looked upon it as a last resort and thought the end would justify the means. But there is a spiritual use of this incident which is well worth considering. Is it not so that when we will not go to God lovingly, voluntarily, He sets our barley-fields on fire, saying, Now they will pray? We desert His Church, we abandon His book, we release ourselves from all religious responsibilities; God calls, and we will not hear; then He sets all the harvest in a blaze, and we become religious instantaneously. We are richer if we have lost a barley-field, and found the God of the harvest. He will make up the barley-field to us, if so be we accept the providence aright, and say, "This is God's thought concerning us." (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 39. And the soul of King David longed to go forth unto Absalom.—*A father's tender solicitude for his son:*—"I well remember," says a present-day writer, "the effect produced on my mind on being told by a servant, soon after I had recovered from a dangerous illness, that during the crisis of the malady my father was seen to shed tears. Though far from being a stern parent, he was not an emotional man; and the statement was a revelation to me, at least in degree. It is now more than half a century ago, but it will never be forgotten."

CHAPTER XV.

Vers. 1—37. Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him.—*Absalom; or, the fast young man:*—The Bible resembles a portrait gallery adorned with the faces of remarkable historic men, where every variety of feature and every type of character may be found. An imaginative person, visiting such a gallery, and gazing at the silent faces which look down upon him from the walls, until lost in the thoughts and reflections awakened by them, may fancy at length that they are alive. As we study the characters of the people there portrayed, we recognise in them permanent types of different classes. As such they live again to us. We have known such persons; they have lived in our time; they have acted anew the parts, and displayed the qualities which of old distinguished or disgraced them. They reappear in every age. It is this typical character of the Bible that gives such value to this ancient book. In reading it, we forget that it is an old book. It seems a new book, from exhibiting the latest phases of human conduct, from setting before us moral qualities and actions which we recognise as familiar, and, connecting with them timely lessons for our instruction and warning. Such reflections are awakened by the perusal of the story of Absalom. It is a typical story, and he was a typical character and representative of what is called the fast young man. I. IT TEACHES THE VANITY OF PERSONAL BEAUTY AND OUTWARD SHOW APART FROM MORAL WORTH. In the pictures of Hogarth, and other painters of society, we find that such superior beauty is the common heritage of the fast young man. It has been called a "fatal dower." It is so regarded because it is apt to make the possessor the petted darling of parents and friends, and liable to be spoiled by the thoughtless admiration and flattery lavished upon him. Thus an exaggerated estimate is placed upon mere physical charms. Beauty of face and form is set above the higher excellence of character, whereby vanity and frivolity of mind are engendered, and amiability of disposition and goodness of heart sacrificed. But there is truth in the homely adage that "Handsome is who handsome does," and all beauty which is not united with fair doing is only a poor sham. II. The story of Absalom reveals THE TYPE OF CHARACTER THAT IS MOST DANGEROUS AND DREADFUL. His was not an impulsive nature, hurried away by gusts of passion into sin. There is much allowance to be made for such hot-tempered spirits. The misdemeanours of which they are guilty are not, as a rule, so reprehensible as those which are perpetrated by their authors in cold blood. They are more likely than the latter to be only escapades from virtue—exceptions to a course that is ordinarily straightforward and well-meaning. Absalom's wickedness was deliberate and studied. His character is evinced in the way he avenged the outrage done

by Amnon to his sister. III. This fast young man, of desperate type, becomes AN INTRIGUING POLITICIAN. Absalom is the earliest specimen on record, we believe, of a finished demagogue. As we consider the subtle arts by which he courted popularity and wound himself into the favour of men—his attendance at the gate, where the king's judgment seat was, his affability and condescension towards the people who brought causes for adjudication, and his pretended sympathy for their grievances on account of the delay of justice, we seem to have come upon the original model after which the modern opposition candidate has shaped himself. It agrees with the character to be forever arraigning those in power for neglect of duty and malfeasance in office, and to promise a complete reformation in case the party of the critic is entrusted with the conduct of affairs. When the outs are in, and the ins are out, all wrong shall be righted, and the millenium will come. So Absalom laboured to make the flattered people believe. IV. Another aspect in which Absalom appears is that of A WAYWARD, UNDOCTFUL SON. The fast young man causes agonising heartache to his aged father or distressed mother. In the eyes of the Jews, with their traditions of the patriarchal period and its form of government, where the father was both priest and ruler of his household, such a child was a monster of depravity, worthy only of death. Hence the emphasis put upon the fifth commandment, "the first commandment with promise;" hence the sternness of their legislation with respect to unfilial conduct, and the fearful denunciation their proverbs utter against it. "The eye that mocketh at his father," says Agur, "and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it." V. The story of Absalom contains another lesson, without which it would be incomplete, namely, the lesson of SIN'S RETRIBUTION. It is a striking example of the declaration: "As righteousness tendeth to life, so he that pursueth evil, pursueth it to his own death." The last act of the tragedy is short and impressive. David and his adherents stayed not in their flight until they found shelter behind the walls of Mahanaim, in the land of Gilead. There opportunity was given to recover from panic, and organise their strength; and thither Absalom and his forces leisurely pursued them. (A. H. Charlton.) *David and Absalom*:—I. IN HOW MANY WAYS MEN SERVE THEMSELVES IN SERVING OTHERS. 1. We may serve ourselves, strengthen our position, advance our temporal interests, when we are truly serving others. But when we are doing them disservice, encouraging them, helping them, to evil, we are our own enemies as well as theirs. We have something higher than temporal interests to think of. Gold is far from everything. In the protest of conscience how the fine gold becomes dim! And when conscience is seared, and the heart dead to all sensibility, at what a cost has anything, however desired by men, been secured. 2. We truly befriend ourselves by unselfishly serving others. And this we can do as we make everything a Divine service. Sometimes we may seem on the vanquished side, like true-hearted Ittai, staunch to David in his flight, but the end will justify us. To be on the side of honesty, truth, purity, is ever at the last to be on the side that wins. So he who forgets himself in doing the things right in the sight of God will be vindicated in the sight of the world as "good and faithful servant," as having "well done" for himself as well as others. II. IN ABSALOM WE SEE HOW THE MOTIVE DETERMINES THE VALUE OF CONDUCT. This appears in his bearing towards Amnon. Similarly with Absalom's conduct when seeking to ingratiate himself with the people. The animating motive of what we do should be tested by us. Could we read others as God reads us, could we "look at the heart" as He does, with what rejection would we meet much that is now welcomed by us! But if we cannot appraise the lives of others by their motives, and if they cannot thus appraise ours, there is One ever thus testing us. There is One who pierces every mask of hypocrisy. There is One who looks through our outward appearance of truth, purity, devotion, and sees whether there is a corresponding inward reality. With Him the motive makes the act. III. IN ABSALOM WE SEE TO WHAT CRUEL LENGTHS UNCHECKED AMBITION WILL LEAD A MAN. That was his ruling passion; the explanation, I think, of his long-delayed stroke at Amnon. Ambition goaded Absalom from crime to crime till he had wrapped the land in the horrors of civil war—of all wars the most prolific in misery—and nerved him to assail a father's life that he might, over his dead body, step up into the throne. It will not do for us to say that in all this there is no beacon to us. There are many thrones. Some of us, it may be, eager to get into one—to be over others; kings and queens of influence in our little kingdom. There can be ambition in a cottage as well as in a court. There

may be wretched envy, the evil eyeing of an imagined rival, the wicked gladness that hears, and that with pretended reluctance retails the disparaging slander; the sly persistence that insinuates itself, or the rough resolution that tramples its way into the petty throne. God save us from such ambition! In His kingdom the thrones are for the lowly. IV. IN DAVID WE SEE THE THREATENED PUNISHMENT FOR HIS SIN. Penitent for his great wickedness in the matter of Uriah, his life had been spared, but the sword was not to depart from his house. Sin has broken him, even forgiven sin. A thing to be remembered. He may never have been wisely firm enough in the training of his children. But that foul transgression of his loosened the filial bond that bound his children to obedience, and encouraged them to crimes that laid his kingly head in the dust. Sin finds men out, even godly men. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." He who sows to the flesh, though he be a David, shall of the flesh reap corruption. Well, then, for us to "stand in awe and sin not." V. IN THE DARKNESS OF CALAMITY THE BETTER DAVID SHINES TO US. In the bowed, barefooted man weeping his way across the Kedron, and up Olivet, it is a king we see. It is David again. A Divine permission he recognises in all that is befalling him. He has no superstitious trust in the ark—let Zadok and Abiathar carry it back to Jerusalem. In God was his trust. "Let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Him." So on—one of the most pathetic figures of all history—goes weeping David—on towards the plains of the wilderness. And as he passes out of our sight do you not hear such words as these? Sorrow by sin! Peace by pardon! Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven! "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." (*G. J. Coster.*) *Absalom: a study*.—Untrained, except in self-admiration and self-indulgence, imperious, ambitious, quick to take offence and slow to forgive, hot with the riot of youthful blood, the young man—so fathered, so mothered, so brought up—is suddenly flung upon the world, and exposed to the temptations of a court in which the Uriah and Bathsheba scandal is being discussed in all its forms and incidents. And the first grave adventure he meets in it is the intolerable wrong and shame inflicted on his beautiful sister by the heir to the throne! Will not the king avenge so dreadful a crime? No; David is very wroth with Amnon, but does not care "to vex his spirit, because he is his first-born." By all Eastern as well as by Hebrew law, then, public justice having failed, Absalom is the goel, the avenger of his sister; it is no crime, but a duty, to wipe out her shame with blood. But as David will not "vex the spirit of Amnon, his son"—and there is a world of weak unfatherliness in that fatherly phrase—so neither will he suffer it to be vexed. Hence Absalom is left to brood over the wrong in silence for a couple of years, till, by a treacherous ruse, he makes way for his revenge, and Amnon is stabbed as he sits at his brother's table and drinks his brother's wine. We blame the deed, and, above all, the manner of the deed: but can we very severely blame the man? Not if we remember what the wrong was which he avenged, and how the world has always allowed a certain latitude to the avenger of such wrongs. Not if we remember that the justice, which the king ought to have been forward to execute, had been deliberately refused, and how imperative were the duties imposed on the goel both by Eastern custom and Hebrew law. Amnon was his half-brother, indeed—a thought which might well have given him pause; but have we yet to learn that brothers born in the harem are born enemies, rivals from the first to the last? And it was not Absalom's fault that harem manners and jealousies had been introduced into Israel. If "beauty is a gift," "beauty is also a snare." To few has the gift been so largely accorded as to Absalom; to few has it proved a snare so deadly. In him the personal comeliness and vigour of Jesse's line seems to have culminated. Of Absalom we are told simply that his beauty was without blemish and beyond compare; but it seems probable that it may have been of that rare type in the Hebrew race which stirs even them to an unwanted admiration. It may have been because of his rare and superb beauty that, while still a child, he was called Absalom, "father of peace," though he proved to be a "father of strife" rather than of peace; for it may not unnaturally have been thought that a child so exceptionally lovely would kindle smiles and win a kindly welcome wherever he went. It adds the last touch to our conception of his beauty if we note that it sprang from the most vigorous physical health, as his magnificent fell of hair indicates. For, then, we can only think of him as quick with life and energy, and accomplished in all the exercises of peace and of war. Now if we think of this young prince with his hereditary bias, his defective

training, never taught to rule or deny himself, coming out into a lax world—tall, graceful, strong, his blue eyes swimming in light, his fair locks falling thickly on his broad shoulders—we shall understand that his very beauty may have been a fatal gift to him. Met with smiles, welcome, and an easy compliance with his whims and desires, on every hand, hardly any one saying "No" to him, he never saying "No" to himself, what wonder if he became wilful, bold, insolent? What wonder if, his will once thwarted, he should kindle into a blaze; or, if he hid his fire, he should nurse and feed it till it found vent and swept him beyond all bounds of law and duty? Is it not plain that position, training, temperament, habits, gifts, even the gift of beauty, all worked together to make him self-willed, capricious, restless, imperious, and, if crossed, violent and revengeful? Even in the brief space he occupies in the Sacred Record, we have many proofs that there was something reckless and desperate in the man, that he was apt to throw the reins on the neck of his lusts, and let them carry him where they would. That David and his men had some such suspicion of him, that they held him to be at least capable of an excessive and criminal violence in order to serve his ends, is proved by the fact that when an exaggerated report of Amnon's assassination reached them, when they were told, "Absalom hath slain all the king's sons, there is not one of them left," they found nothing incredible in the horrible rumour, but rent their clothes and cast themselves on the earth, and wept for the goodly young men cut off in their prime (2 Sam. xiii. 30, 31.) If the tale were not true, it was only too likely to have been true. A touch of the same recklessness and desperation comes out in the manner in which he joggled the drowsy memory of Joab (2 Sam. xiv. 23.) It was by the intervention of Joab that Absalom was called back to Jerusalem from his three years' banishment in Syria. It was on Joab's intercession that he relied for an entire reconciliation with the king, who for two years after his return, refused to see his face. Joab may have been doing his best, or he may not. In any case he did not move fast enough for the imperious prince. He sends for Joab, therefore; but Joab having no good tidings to give him, will not come. He sends a second time, and still Joab will not come. Whereupon he sends servants into Joab's farm to fire his standing barley, and so compels the old warrior to wait upon him, and to listen to his complaint that he would rather die than continue to live such a life as his. But, of course, it was in his long-planned and artfully prepared rebellion against his father and king that all that was vehement, self-willed, unrestrained in the man found full vent. With Absalom's tragic end the bolt of retribution flew right home. And yet the pity of it! For, had Absalom been reared as hardily and piously as David was, in the home and on the hills of Bethlehem; had he been snubbed, laughed at, kept down, as David was, by a band of tall, stalwart brothers; had he, like David, been tried by stroke on stroke of adversity and undeserved reproach through all the opening years of manhood, there seems little reason to doubt that he might have been no worse a man morally than his father was; or, at least, no room to doubt that, by such a severe and pious training in duty and obedience, he might have been saved from the crimes by which his life was stained, and from the shame by which his memory is oppressed. In him, too, the spiritual man might have conquered the natural man at the last, and stilled and controlled the fever of his blood. As it is, we can but use his name "to point a moral," for we can hardly add "and to adorn a tale." And that moral is, of course, the immense danger of suffering the animal man in us to overget the spiritual man. The bias of our blood and temperament may not jump with his; our training may have been better than his; our faults, our passions, our gifts, may not resemble his; and certainly we are not, most of us, tempted to an indolent self-indulgence and self-will by a splendour of personal beauty and charm which makes it hard for any one to resist us. And yet no one who knows himself will doubt that the brute is strong in him; that he, too, has inherited cravings, passions, lusts, which must be subdued if he is to be saved from sins as fatal, if not as flagrant, as those of Absalom. And the flesh is not to be subdued and starved in any of us save as we feed and cherish the spirit. We can only overcome evil as we follow after that which is good. But if we seek to subdue the flesh by nourishing the spirit, whether in ourselves or in our children, He who makes large allowance for us all will largely and effectively help us all. (S. Cox, D.D.) *Absalom's rebellion*:—The monument to Absalom in the valley of the Kidron is buried deep in stones, cast against it by the Jews, as through generations they have passed, in token of their execration of this un-

natural prince—the counterpart, in the Old Testament, of Judas in the New. These stones are the true monument of Absalom. Let us add our tribute to make it a prominent and permanent landmark in religious history. This instructive example is held up before us in great detail. It is a warning, especially to young men. The methods by which it was secured are carefully stated. The instance is particular; but the application is as general as mankind. I. **ABSALOM PERVERTED HIS NATURAL ADVANTAGES.** He was a gifted and handsome young man; he came of a well-favoured stock, and he was its flower. He had a fine head of hair; he paid strict attention to it. It became a matter of national interest when Absalom cut his hair. He had a sheep-farm. We do not know the particulars of his clip of wool; but the weight of his annual poll of hair is carefully noted as two hundred shekels, or more than three pounds. The hair of Absalom represents all natural advantages. For personal gifts play an important part in securing success in this world. II. **ABSALOM HAD A PERVERSE ENERGY OF CHARACTER.** He had persistency of purpose in a high degree—a masterful trait. He was calculating and deep. He was a tenacious man. Many men of fine powers fail through want of tenacity. The good man in the famous ode of Horace was tenacious of his purpose. So our bad man, Absalom, did not fail here. When Amnon wronged his sister Tamar he concealed his resentment for two years. He bided his time. When he determined to undermine David's throne he showed a like steadfastness of resolution. He rose promptly in the morning. David rose early to pray; Absalom rose early to plot. This course of patient, insidious plotting Absalom continued for months, perhaps for years, until he was known throughout the kingdom as the poor man's friend. III. **ABSALOM PERVERTED THE STUDY OF HUMAN NATURE.** He studied the weaknesses of men. This is called by men of his base aims the study of men. The vices and the foibles are noted; the theory being that for one who would play effectively on this fine instrument what is especially necessary is a Wagnerian mastery of discords. The adventurer, the opposition politician, the quack doctor, the fortune-seeker, give themselves to men have succeeded as Absalom succeeded—in politics, in professional life, in Absalom's study of human weakness. Upon this knowledge their success depends. IV. **ABSALOM HAD UNLIMITED AND PERVERTED SELF-ASSURANCE.** With all his shrewdness in measuring others, he had no proper sense of his own weaknesses. To scrutinise the weaknesses of others he closed, so to speak, one eye—that one whose outlook was upon his own heart. Exaggerated self-confidence is typical of this class of men. To the ordinary man with his misgiving and fear of himself it is surprising, dazzling. His own modesty prepares him to yield to the most audacious and preposterous claims of another. Perhaps the wonderful physician can work a cure of the incurable. He says he can. And what hair he has! Perhaps the politician can redress the evils of society which have baffled the wisest statesmen. He says he can. He is a remarkable-looking man. Perhaps one can be safely given a place of trust, though it would seem as if he can have had no experience to fit him for its delicate duties. He says he is competent. There is a degree, and, it is an amazing degree oftentimes, to which men will give confidence to bare pretension. Absalom's pretension was most shrewdly calculated. V. **ABSALOM PERVERTED THE CHOICE OF COUNSELLORS.** He chose sagacious, but evil advisers; masterly, but unprincipled. Ahithophel was the oldest statesman in the nation. Absalom improved the opportunity. He sent for Ahithophel. The bad old man came to him—a man after his own heart. We must recognise the dangerous wisdom of the councils of this world. This wisdom is necessary to worldly success. If one heeds it, he greatly increases his prospects of accomplishing all worldly aims. VI. **ABSALOM PERVERTED THE USE OF RELIGION.** It has been suggested here that when David rose early to pray he and Absalom may have met. It may be that the crafty prince first shared his father's devotions on the way to the gate. He saw the hold which religion had upon David and upon the nation. It would not answer for him to have the reputation of being irreligious; he must guard his religious standing. He made a religious excuse for visiting Hebron. It was a natural one. He had made a vow, he explained, while he was in Geshur in exile for the murder of Amnon. It was a nicely-calculated excuse. David believed in vows. He would look upon the handsome prince with heightened tenderness, touched by his manifest sensibility. Religion, in all times, is one of the readiest and most servicable of cloaks. It especially serves the purposes of one who would win success in a religious community. Thus Satan comes among us disguised as an angel of light. VII.

ABSAKOM STUDIOUSLY SECURED THE SUPPORT OF GOOD MEN, WITH THE SAME STEADY PERSEVERANCE. He valued them. They could help him. He wanted the approval of such men at large in the nation. He despised them. He wanted them only as tools. But he knew the value to his cause of having men of character associated with his followers. The rebellion triumphed without a blow. It was one of the best considered and most brilliant enterprises in history. Absalom seemed to be repaid for all his self-denial, his unsavoury wiles, his clever hypocrisy, his long patience. He had reached his goal. He was king. Many society. You may be tempted to cherish the low aim. But look at Absalom at the goal of his hopes, in the full flush of success! Even then who would take his place? What had he accomplished but the fatal perversion of a life capable of greatest things. Look into his heart, and try to conceive the thoughts which must have been there in the very exaltation of his triumph. Then look again upon that sombre background, the forest of Ephraim, the figure of a man dripping with blood from many wounds, hanging and swaying in the awful twilight in the terebinth tree, suspended by his beautiful hair. Ah! this, then, is a part of what Absalom was planning—that part of which he was all unconscious, but the inevitable end! Learn from this history how the noblest gifts may be perverted, industriously, painfully, fatally, to secure the false success. How are you using your life? your fine natural advantages? How are you treating the privileges of religion? Who are your chosen counsellors? For what aim of life are you fostering deep, tenacious, self-sacrificing purposes? What a man Absalom might have been with a right aim! What a man you may become if you set your heart on the one end worthy of a Son of God—to be a prince of the kingdom of light: in love and loyalty and honour, to be one of the pillars of His temple. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *The rebellion of Absalom*:—I. ABSALOM'S CONDUCT BEGAN IN THE EXERCISE OF THE BASEST INGRATITUDE. He assassinated Amnon at a banquet, and then fled to his grandfather's city Geshur for a refuge. There he remained for some years; the popular soldier Joab caused the woman of Tekoa to go to David with a parable and an entreaty; and the king reluctantly permitted his son to return to Jerusalem, but he would not meet him in the palace. That gave Absalom a chance again. And now we have two lessons to learn at once. 1. One is this: what a man sows he must also reap. David's boys divided up David's crimes between them, and repeated his guilt there under his own roof. That was an instance of sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind. It is wise to remember that harvests are greater than seed. 2. The second lesson is, there is no gain in discipline unless it leaves behind it a better heart. "Even after a shipwreck," the old philosopher Seneca remarks, "there are hosts who still will seek the sea." It is not for any man to say that affliction sanctifies; of itself it sours a heart which is not sanctified beforehand. And he has lost much who has lost a discipline at God's hand; he has had all the weary pain of it without any of the good; he has had the roughness of the ploughing without any of the fruit from the furrows. II. THIS REBELLION DISCLOSED ITSELF IN THE MERE SHOW OF PERSONAL VANITY. That is the only significance of such gorgeousness of equipage, and a half a hundred men to run before this conceited creature Absalom's chariot. There is not a sign of patriotism in his course. So here we have another lesson to learn: all true leadership is taught by the discipline of endurance under fierce distress. It was with David as with Jesus Christ; he that is to be a Captain of salvation unto God's people must consent, as our Divine Saviour consented, to be made "perfect through suffering." III. THIS OUTBREAK OF ABSALOM WAS CONDUCTED WITH THE HYPOCRISIES OF MALICIOUS DECEIT. How plausibly the man talked; how venomous were his insinuations; how false were his kisses; yet thus it was that he won the people's hearts and undermined his father's throne. The lesson that comes to us just here is: there can be no dependence on mere personal advantages unless they are put to a serviceable use. The record which is familiar to us all reminds us of the old commendations of Saul in the day when he came out before the people a head and shoulders above any one of those who cried "God save the king!" We have a kindling picture of Absalom's attractions of person and form. The old honest historian of the Greeks says with a creditable frankness that Themistocles was able to make his insipid son, Cleophantes, a good horseman, but he failed in every particular when he endeavoured to make him a good man. And that same failure has been reached a great many times since. IV. THAT THIS INSURRECTION WAS RELENTLESSLY CONTINUED THROUGH A LONG PERIOD OF TIME. Not "forty years," surely, as one of the verses seem to

say; such a chapter can be found neither in David's nor in Absalom's biography. It is impossible to put the reckoning anywhere. Josephus states the time, with the authority of the Syriac and the Arabic version behind him, as being four years instead of forty. And that is long enough certainly for an ungrateful son to continue mischievously to plot against his father in so villanous a way. There can be no value in a noble lineage unless the position is employed nobly. Absalom had nothing to do with the item of his birth; it would be a credit to him or a shame according to what he should do with it. Honour and wealth from no condition rise. The Bible makes short work with primogeniture; in almost every instance the chieftainship goes away from the sons earliest born. Later history is suggestive. Cleanthes lived by watering gardens; Pythagoras was the child of a silversmith; Euripides was brought up to help his brothers till the fields; Demosthenes was the son of a cutler; Virgil's father was a potter. There is no pretension more impertinent than that which is forcing itself forward on the merits of mere parentage and position. V. THAT THIS WILD REBELLION IS CONSUMMATED AT LAST WITH A LIE IN THE NAME OF RELIGION. This was at once the meanest and the shrewdest of all Absalom's subterfuges. In order to cover his absence from suspicion, and put David off his guard in Jerusalem, he trumped up this pretext of an old row. God sometimes leaves wicked people to the retribution of apparent success. Absalom comes to Jerusalem, is actually crowned as king, has a few military victories; then his downfall is swift and heavy; the triumph of traitors is short. In a part of one year is dissipated all the fortune of the four years the treacherous son had plotted against his father. Ahithophel closes his career with a suicide, and ere long the rebellion is ended; David sits in his throne and sings brighter songs even while he mourns in his heart. VI. We mention A FEW REFLECTIONS CONCERNING THE DEATH WHICH THIS REBEL PRINCE DIED. 1. There is a limit beyond which patience, both human and Divine, cannot be expected to go. When the heart of this royal ingrate became fixed in his wickedness, the Lord simply withdrew from all interposition; so he was left to his fate; he died the rebel he had lived. Here is an inspired warning: "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after." 2. When a false leader falls, he drags down his favourites in the failure. The most interesting feature of this story has always been the immediateness with which the rebellion subsided when those darts went through Absalom's heart. What ultimately became of those who had perilled all their fortunes upon his success we are not informed. Their hopes failed; they had attributed many excellences to that young and beautiful prince; possibly they had not studied the future carefully, into the abysses of which they had now plunged. Hereafter they were outlaws and wanderers. 3. There can be no advantage in having "a fair chance" in life unless one hastens to improve it for the good of others. The fact is, we instinctively hold this man Absalom responsible all the more sternly because he had opportunities so fair and abused them so basely. His sin was the more heinous on account of his conspicuous position. 4. The hour of retribution is likely to be an hour of melancholy review. Confidence in the successful issue of evil purposes only deepens the humiliation of defeat. There is even to this day pointed out in the valley close by Jerusalem a lofty structure of stone called "Absalom's Tomb." The Scripture has given us a hint concerning its true origin, but not of its date: "Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself a pillar, which is in the king's dale: for he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance: and he called the pillar after his own name: and it is called unto this day, Absalom's place." That particular structure is perhaps replaced by this: tradition says it is not a sepulchre, but a monument; and Josephus goes so far as to insist that it was called Absalom's Hand," and bore at its summit a hand as the symbol of power and victory. (C. S. Robinson, D.D.) *Absalom's rebellion*:—After domestic broils and the violent death of Amnon in circumstances full of horror and disgrace, and after Absalom's banishment and return, this adroit and unscrupulous man, impelled by his own ambition, and having no idea of co-operation with Deity in the punishment of evil, sets about dethroning his own father and, if possible, possessing himself of the crown. When one thing is radically wrong, other wrong things follow in the train of it. Like woes, sins cluster. The city-gate was the place for the administration of justice (Ruth iv. 1), and those who were charged with dispensing it held court early in the day. On the approach to the court an anxious litigant is greeted with frank courtesy by the handsome and stately Absalom, who with the

deepest interest inquires about his residence and his business. Won by the affability of such a distinguished and exalted questioner, the man tells his place and his grievance. The hollow courtier has the same story for each. He reaches a verdict without the trouble of a hearing of the case or the appearance of the other side. The man is delighted. He is at rest. And when the simple provincial, in addition to such intelligent sympathy with his wrongs, found himself taken by the hand and kissed by the handsome pretender, he was sure to go back to his own town and say that David had become useless as a king and was neglecting his duties, and that things never would be right until Absalom, who was as wise as he was elegant, filled the throne. Alas, poor human nature! It is the same to-day that it was in David's time. "Ambition," as a word, comes from the Roman politicians going about in their canvass for votes, fawning upon and flattering the people. English ladies of rank have gone and coaxed and caressed butchers whom they scorned to secure their votes for their husbands or their protégés. Members of legislatures have kissed the children and hobnobbed with their parents to make reputation among them. Doctors have sat as "friends" by the bedside of the wealthy, hinted their regrets that more vigorous measures were not adopted and more hopeful views taken by the physicians in attendance, only dropping their smooth generalities when the device succeeded and they were called into consultation, and regard for their reputation compelled them to agree with the rest. It is all in the same line with the policy of the mean, smooth-mannered traitor who (v. 6) "stole the hearts of the men of Israel." It took three years to carry out his schemes, make his party and arrange for his being proclaimed. So he made a pretence of going to Hebron, the old capital, which probably resented the loss of its prestige, where friends of his youth probably lived and could be counted upon, and where his father had been crowned. It is not needful to ask if his vow were a reality. He was now at his ease in lying, and could readily supply the details of v. 8. To keep up the show of things, Absalom offered sacrifices, in which all who partook were to be held as pledged to his support. Men of this sort will use religion for their own ends. History since the Reformation has many a sad case of rulers shaping their religious courses so as to secure popular sympathy. Meanwhile, and in order to have him at the banquet, Absalom invites Ahithophel, a man of influence, whose adhesion would carry great weight, as he was David's counsellor. Absalom probably knew his feelings of discontent and dissatisfaction with David. Absalom's plans now seemed sure to succeed. "The conspiracy was strong." He had many friends throughout the tribes. The fascination of his personal approaches, the fair promises he had informally made, the relation he sustained to royalties already—all these things influenced the people, and his following "increased continually." Ill-news will commonly travel fast. "A messenger"—from some friend perhaps—to David announced the extent of the movement, no doubt with details of Absalom's plans as far as they were known or inferred. The afflicted king realised the danger, and at once decided upon flight. There were two good reasons for this: No preparation had been made for the defence of Jerusalem, and an attack on it would have been disastrous in the extreme. But such an assault would have been the natural and politic course of the rebels if David remained there and attempted to hold the city. It was both humane and politic to quit the capital. At the same time, the flight must be prompt and rapid, "lest he overtake us suddenly and bring evil upon us." This suggests the second reason: Flight gave time for the development of events and for calm reflection on the part of the people. This shrewd view was held, it will be noticed, by Ahithophel (ch. xvii. 1, 2), and also by Hushai the Archite (ch. xvii. 7-13). They looked at it simply as managers and political observers. The following points may be emphasised with profit:—1. The home and the public welfare are inseparably linked. Samuel's sons took bribes and proved unfit for continuing the system of judges. David's family-life was not as it ought to have been, and murder, widespread rebellion and slaughter, with indescribable dishonour and disgrace and danger to the kingdom, are the results. The suffering, too, falls on the sinning family first of all. 2. Bad morals on the part of rulers relax the ties of obedience and make government contemptible. The plausibilities of the rebel son drew their force from real faults of David's administration. We may well pray for just and pure men in places of power. 3. But over and above these natural effects we have the just rule of Jehovah. David in his misery and penitence owns this. There is a difference between him and an enemy of God (ch. xv. 25, 26). Hence

his language regarding the cursing of Shimei (ch. xvi. 11). 4. The life of Absalom speaks to both parents and children, setting in a clear light the weakness, folly, and sin of unreasoning parental indulgence, and on the other hand the atrocious character of ingratitude, selfishness and disobedience on the part of a child. Vices go in groups. They deaden sensibilities; one prepares for another. The impure and lustful will be ready for dishonesty, violence, and unnatural crime. (*J. Hall, D.D.*) *An ungrateful son*:—Everyone recognises that ingratitude is a grievous defect in a character. The ingrate is invariably condemned by the opinion of his fellows and by posterity. Who, for example, has not sympathised with poor Beethoven, when at the close of a laborious, self-sacrificing life his heart was broken by the knowledge that the boy to whom he had given all he possessed had repaid his love with cold selfishness and cruelty? There can only be one opinion as to the blameworthiness of the pampered ingrate. Ingratitude is all but universally regarded as one of the worst of faults. (*J. R. Campbell.*) *A struggle for a crown*:—"A man will venture a knock that is in reach of a crown." The ambitious will run all risks of cruel wounds, and death itself, to reach a throne; the prize hardens them against all hazards. Even so will every wise man encounter all difficulties for the crown of life; and when, by faith, he sees it within reach, he will count all afflictions light through which he wades to glory. "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Ambition*:—The brilliant, but erratic, Marie Bashkertsheff, wrote in her diary: "It is the New Year. At the theatre, precisely at midnight, watch in hand, I wished my wish in a single word, 'Fame!'" This is frank, but tragic. Yet if men were equally honest with themselves and at New Year's breaking, or any time of solemn impression, spoke their candid feelings, one would cry "Pleasure," another "Gold," another "Fame," another "Power," and, thank God, not a few would cry "To me to live is Christ." Ambition in itself is not evil; all depends on its quality, its supreme aim. Paul had three ambitions, and each of them was noble and worthy of a Christ-purchased and Christ-possessed soul.

VERS. 2—6. And Absalom rose up early in the morning.—*Courtesy wins hearts*:—Lady Montague, speaking of gentle manners, remarked: "Civility costs nothing, but buys everything." Said Burleigh to Queen Elizabeth: "Win hearts, and you have the brains and the purses of all." *Servile flattery*:—Compare the description of Bolingbroke's behaviour which Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Richard II.:—

"Ourself and Bushy, Bagot here and Green,
Observed his courtship to the common people;
How he did seem to dive into their hearts
With humble and familiar courtesy,
What reverence he did throw away on slaves,
 Wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles."

King Richard II., Act 1, Sc. 4.

(*A. F. Kirkpatrick, M.A.*)

VERS. 7, 8. I pray thee let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the Lord.—*Diplomatic insincerity*:—Of royal dissemblers like Absalom history records numerous parallels, notably Charles II., who, in his dealings with the Scots, solely to win them over to his cause, took the Covenant with all the solemnity of a pious Covenant, also Napoleon Bonaparte, who, when in Egypt seeking to reconcile the people to his rule, announced: "We Frenchmen are true Mussulmans. Have not we destroyed the Pope, who called upon Europe to make war upon the Mussulmans." After the capture of Cairo this adept at diplomatic insincerity was to be seen "seated in the great mosque at the feast of the prophets, sitting cross-legged as he repeated the words of the Koran, and edified the sacred college by his piety." (*Charles Deal.*)

VERS. 14—24. Arise and let us flee.—*David's flight*:—The motive for the flight was probably a patriotic one. David would not let the city be destroyed by civil war. Like Louis Philippe, he could not bear to shed his people's blood. This tenderness of disposition, so unlike the spirit of the times, is characteristic of him. (1 Chron. xxi. 17.) 1. Notice the different classes of people who went out with the king, displaying different aspects of loyalty. (1.) The servants of the household (v. 15). Unqualified obedience, whatsoever (John ii. 5, xv. 14). (2.)

The sympathising people. (3.) The bodyguard. Cherethites and Pelethites (1 Kings i. 38-44). (Foreigners, Ezek xxv. 16; 1 Sam. xxx. 14; Eph. ii. 19.) (4.) Ittai and his Gittites—mercenaries become volunteers. Story of Ittai. From Gath, a Philistine city, probably (v. 19), an exile from his own country, who had taken refuge with David. The special lessons he teaches. (2.) True service must be voluntary. (Ps. xl. 8; Deut. xxviii. 47.) "Whose service is perfect freedom." It becomes so in proportion as we know and love the one served. (2 Cor. v. 14; Cant. i. 4.) Duty a lower motive—power than love. (Duty would have constrained Ittai to fight well, but not to endure exile.) All soul-satisfying religion centres round a person, not a system, or a doctrine. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," not only in His work for you. A man the real object of love and trust. The God-man—Emmanuel. (*R. E. Faulkner.*) *David retires from the capital to the east of the Jordan*:—David is evidently taken completely by surprise. The reasons for his hasty resolution to leave his fortified capital are not clear from the narrative before us. Had he grounds for suspecting the loyalty of the population, perhaps still predominantly Jebusite? Of no single day in the whole course of the recorded history of the Hebrews have we so detailed a record as we have of the day on which David fled before his undutiful son. From the time when, in the morning hours, he passed in haste through the eastern gate until, before the next day dawned (xvii. 22), he and all his following had safely crossed the Jordan, every hour is crowded with life and incident, and every line of the narrative is instinct with the emotions and impulses, good and bad, that mould the lives of men. (*Century Bible.*) *A king's flight from his capital*:—James II. was fleeing from his English subjects. At three in the morning of Tuesday, the 11th of December, James rose, took the great seal in his hand, laid his commands on Northumberland not to open the door of the bed-chamber till the usual hour, and disappeared through a secret passage. . . . Sir Edward Hales was in attendance with a hackney coach. James was conveyed to Milbank, where he crossed the Thames in a small wherry. As he passed Lambeth he flung the great seal into the midst of the stream, whence, after many months, it was accidentally caught by a fishing-net and dragged up. (*Macaulay's England.*)

Ver. 17. And the king went forth and tarried in a place which was far off.—*Expatriation*:—Far up and far back in the history of heaven there came a period when its Most Illustrious Citizen was about to absent Himself. He was not going to sail from beach to beach. He was not going to put out from one hemisphere to another hemisphere. But He was to sail from world to world, the spaces unexplored and the immensities untravelled. Out and out and out, and on and on and on, and down and down and down He sped, until one night, with only one to greet Him when He arrived, His disembarkation so unpretending, so quiet, that it was not known on earth until the excitement in the cloud gave intimation to the Bethlehem rustics that something grand and glorious had happened. Who comes there? From what port did He sail? Why was this the place of His destination? I question the shepherds. I question the camel-drivers. I question the angels. I have found out. He was an exile. But the world had plenty of exiles. Abraham, an exile from Haran; John, an exile from Ephesus; Kosciuszko, an exile from Poland; Mazzini, an exile from Italy; Victor Hugo, an exile from France; Kossuth, an exile from Hungary. But this One of whom I speak had such resounding farewell, and came into such thrilling reception—for not even an ostler went out with his lantern to light Him in—that He is more to be celebrated than any other expatriated exile of earth or heaven. 1. I remark that Christ was an imperial exile. He got down off a throne. He took off a tiara. He closed a palace gate behind Him. His family were princes and princesses. Vashti was turned out of the throne-room by Ahasuerus. David was dethroned by Absalom's infamy. The five kings were hurled into a cavern by Joshua's courage. Some of the Henrys of England and some of the Louises of France were jostled on their thrones by discontented subjects. But Christ was never more honoured, or more popular, or more loved than the day He left heaven. Exiles have suffered severely, but Christ turned himself out of throne-room into sheep-pen, and down from the top to the bottom. He was not pushed off. He was not manacled for foreign transportation. He was not put out because they no more wanted him in celestial domain, but by choice departing and descending into an exile five times as long as that of Napoleon at St. Helena, and a thousand times worse; the one exile suffering for that he had

destroyed nations, the other exile suffering because He came to save a world. An imperial exile. King eternal. 2. But I go further, and tell you He was an exile on a barren island. Christ came to this small Patmos of a world. When exiles are sent out they are generally sent to regions that are sandy or cold or hot. Christ came as an exile to a world scorched with heat and bitten with cold, to deserts simoom-swept, to a howling wilderness. It was the backdoor yard, seemingly, of the universe. 3. I go further, and tell you that He was an exile in a hostile country. Turkey was never so much against Russia, France was never so much against Germany as this earth was against Christ. It took Him in through the door of a stable. It thrust Him out at the point of a spear. 4. I go further, and tell you that this exile was far from home. It is ninety-three million miles from here to the sun, and all astronomers agree in saying that our solar system is only one of the smaller wheels of the great machinery of the universe turning around some one great centre, the centre so far distant it is beyond all imagination and calculation, and if, as some think, that great centre in the distance is heaven, Christ came far from home when He came here. Have you ever thought of the homesickness of Christ?—I have read how the Swiss, when they are far away from their native country, at the sound of their national air get so homesick that they fall into melancholy and sometimes they die under the homesickness. But oh! the homesickness of Christ. You have often tried to measure the other pangs of Christ, but you have never tried to measure the magnitude and ponderosity of the Saviour's homesickness. 5. I take a step further, and tell you that Christ was in an exile which He knew would end in assassination. Holman Hunt, the master painter, has a picture in which he represents Jesus Christ in the Nazarene carpenter-shop. Around Him are the saws, the hammers, the axes, the drills of carpentry. The picture represents Christ as rising from the carpenter's working-bench and wearily stretching out His arms as one will after being in contracted or uncomfortable posture, and the light of that picture is so arranged that the arms of Christ, wearily stretched forth, together with His body, throw on the wall the shadow of the cross. Oh! that shadow was on everything in Christ's lifetime. Shadow of a cross on the Bethlehem swaddling clothes. Shadow of a cross on the road over which the three fugitives fled into Egypt. Shadow of a cross on Lake Galilee as Christ walked its mosaic floor of opal and emerald and crystal. Shadow of a cross on the road to Jerusalem. Shadow of a cross on the brook Kedron, and on the Temple, and on the side of Olivet. Shadow of a cross on sunrise and sunset. Constantine, marching with his army, saw just once a cross in the sky, but Christ saw the cross all the time. For this royal exile I bespeak the love and service of all the exiles here present, and, in one sense or the other, that includes all of us. All of us exiles. This is not our home. Heaven is our home. Oh, I am so glad when the royal exile went back He left the gate ajar, or left it wide open! "Going home!" That is the dying exclamation of the majority of Christians. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*)

Ver. 19. Ittai the Gittite.—*Ittai the Gittite*:—Ittai of Gath was not only a heathen but a heathen of the heathens, a member of a race the most malignant of all the foes of the Church. Yet among the events of this day—a day over which the historian fondly if sadly lingers, more minutely and at greater length described than any other day of Old Testament history—an episode of which he is the hero finds a prominent place. It is not much we can know about him; but what we can that we desire to learn. Let us look at his environment and at himself; his People, his Position, and his Personality. I. HIS PEOPLE. Probably in a degree in which it can be said of no other country, Palestine has been the meeting-place and battleground of nations. From earliest historical times we find wave after wave of conquerors breaking upon, settling down, or passing over it; and there are not wanting indications that long before history began to be written the monotonous process had commenced. The shadowy forms of the earlier races can be dimly discerned, ghost-like, before the rising of the historic sun. Amongst the many pre-Hebrew arrivals and settlers—and, historically, the most important of them all—was the people to whom Ittai belonged, the Philistines. Concerning their origin, the events which led to their migration into Palestine, and the development of their power there, we know almost nothing—hardly sufficient to suggest a few guesses. A reference to the genealogical table in Genesis (chap. x. 14) suggests an Egyptian origin, whilst the Book of Deuteronomy and the Prophets Amos and Jeremiah speak of them as "Caphtorim out of Caphtor"; but the

endeavour to fix a site for Caphtor has not yet been attended with success. Capadocia, Cyprus, and Crete are all claimants; but the balance of opinion seems to incline in favour of the last-mentioned of the three. From whatever race they sprung, from whatever quarter they came, we find a tribe of them at the extreme southern limit of Palestine, on the route down to Egypt, as far back as the time of Abraham, though their very name—"strangers," or "emigrants"—indicates that they were arrivals in the country, and not aboriginals. We shall probably not be far wrong if we suppose a small swarm of "Caphtorim from Caphtor" (say, Cretans from Crete) hiving off and settling down upon the southern border of Palestine, where the fertile land shades off into the desert on the way to Egypt; there multiplying their number and developing their genius for war; civilising, casting off nomadic habits, and acquiring those of dwellers in cities; and in due course acquiring a greater proficiency in the arts and arms than any of the rude tribes around them. Then comes the great commotion to the North consequent upon the invasion and conquest by Joshua and his Israelites. The Philistines are too far off in their southern corner to feel the shock in any direct way; but their next-door neighbours, the Avites—who occupied the great plain lying between them and the new-comers, and on whose rich corn-fields they had doubtless cast many a longing eye—are shaken to their centre. Already three of their principal towns have fallen; the great Tribe of Judah, under the hero son-in-law of Caleb, presses sore upon them; half of the plain ("Shefela") is no longer theirs. We can then conceive of them, in their extremity and desperation, invoking the aid of their warlike and rising rivals along their southern side, who had already begun to intermarry and mingle with themselves. Nothing loth, the desired assistance is given, and soon Philistine swords—for the first time, but not for the last, by many a score—cross and crash with Hebrew spears. Four results follow:—1. The first is a decided stop to Hebrew extension in that quarter. The captured cities are regained, and for many a day are thorns in the side of Judah, Dan, and Simeon. 2. The next is a permanent occupation by the Philistines of the territory into which they had come as allies. It was the richest part of all Palestine, excelling even the beautiful Esdraelon, and, moreover, its coast embraced the two best harbours between Egypt and Phœnicia. 3. Another result is a new name for that portion, and eventually for the whole, of Canaan. Henceforth the Plain is known from them as "Philistia"—a name which, thus derived from a heathen tribe in its south-western corner, has, curiously enough, in a slightly altered form, spread over, and to this day covers all of the Holy Land. It is an illustration of the irony of history that a name which we fondly cherish as a name holy and revered, should be thus a child of a pure heathen parentage. In vain Israel cultivated exclusiveness; ever and anon God compelled an indication of the universalism that was wrapped up in His Call. The very name which the Holy Land bears is a standing memorial of that "making of both one," which, being one of the counsels of God from the beginning, became realised in Him in whom Jew and Gentile find their meeting-place with one another and both with Him. 4. The fourth result is a great and rapid development of the Philistine power. The supposition of a second migration from Crete, though quite possible, does not seem to be necessary. The fertility of their new possessions—the granary of Palestine—their commercial advantages, the great increase of numbers through the absorption of the Avites, Anakim, and possibly other tribes, including an influx of fugitive Amorites and Canaanites, and the separation of the dominant race as a warrior or fighting caste to the art and practice of war—these are considerations quite sufficient to account for such rapid development of power as the facts of the narrative require. With the institution of the monarchy and the establishment of a central authority in Israel, implying some amount of national cohesion in place of tribal isolation, the tables were turned. Saul inflicted many grievous defeats upon them; and after the accession of David and the perfecting of his military system they had small chance of success, in aggressive warfare at least, against their more numerous foes. But, cooped up within their narrow borders, and forbidden aggressive war, this nation of soldiers seeks an outlet for its superfluous manhood in foreign service. As it was with Scotland and Switzerland three centuries ago, so was it with Philistia in Ittai's time. What the Scottish and Swiss Guards were at the Court of France, what the Varangian Guard was to the Greek Emperors at Constantinople, what the "Free Companies" were to the cities and princes of Italy, that was the Philistine guard at the Court of Pharaoh and the Court of David—a reliable body

of mercenaries, whose duty it was, in a general way, to fight the sovereign's battles, and, in a special way, to guard the royal person. The nucleus of this guard appears to have been enlisted by David during his sojourn at Gath, where for a time he found a refuge from the persecuting jealousy of Saul. II. **ITTAI'S POSITION.** He was captain of these mercenaries, the Philistine guard, "the Cherethites and Pelethites," in David's service. We must conceive of him as a stranger among strangers, a soldier in a foreign employ, an exile from home and country—either voluntarily, through a desire to push his fortunes, or by necessity, because of some disagreement or quarrel with the "Lords of the Philistines." He is among those who, however much they may appreciate his sword, hate himself, his race, and his religion. He and his comrades belonged to a people who, possessing the qualities of strength and pertinacity, were by temperament sluggish, heavy, and dull-witted. Such is the character everywhere implied in the pictures of them given in Scripture: "They were almost the laughing-stock of their livelier and quicker neighbours—the easy prey of the rough humour of Samson, or the agility and cunning of the diminutive David" (Stanley's "Jewish Church.") In the city, and at the Court of Jerusalem, he and they would feel and would be regarded very much as Hereward and his Varangians felt and were regarded in the City and at the Court of Constantinople, as conceived by the historic imagination and pictured by the faithful pen of Scott in his "Count Robert of Paris." Ittai and his guard would be the objects and the butts at once of the contemptuous civility of the courtiers, and the stinging spite of the citizens. Almost inevitably, they would draw off, isolate themselves, and as a caste, hated and hating, live there lives by themselves, reserving all their sympathies for those within the limits of their own order. Thus were these "Cherethites and Pelethites"—outside the sympathy of the people and remote from the gossip of the bazaar—when the shameful rebellion of Absalom bursts upon the astonished guard as a bolt out of a clear sky. Meanwhile David and Ittai have met. The king looks into the face, illumined with the light of the noblest feelings that shine out from the heart through the windows of the eyes: nobility meets nobility; magnanimity accepts what magnanimity offers. Two great souls meet, embrace, and grapple each to each with hooks of steel. The simple acceptance of the service proffered; the delicate recognition that further remonstrance would have been almost an outrage; the tacit treatment of the question as closed; and the renewed enrolment into a service that is to last for life—all this and much more is enwrapped in the "Go, and pass over." The king's son was a rebel, his counsellor a traitor; how heart must have swelled and eye filled in the presence of devotion so unselfish and so strong in the stranger.

III. **THE PERSONALITY THAT IS HERE PRESENTED TO US.** We know nothing concerning him save what we gather from these scenes. We see him only twice: once as, beside the brook Kedron, within stone-cast of Gethsemane, he vows the fealty he kept so well, and once as he marches out of Mahanaim at the head of his well-drilled corps. But as the naturalist from a single typical bone can construct the whole physical frame of the animal, so from these scanty yet typical facts the moralist can give the whole moral build of the man. We experience no difficulty in the endeavour to reproduce Ittai's moral structure. He is simplicity, fidelity, and affection embodied.

1. **Simplicity**, for there was no double purpose in his mind, nor double speech in his tongue; he had one loyalty and one only, a soldier's surrender to the king whose soldier he was; one aim and one only, a servant's service to the master whose man he was.
2. **Fidelity**, for selfish views and considerations seem to have found in him no place at all; he never asked, "Where is the sunny side of fortune, that I may seek it?" or, "Where the shady side, that I may shun it?" but, "Come weal or woe, be it life or be it death, I follow where faith leads."
3. **Affection**, too, for manifestly this wondrous poet-king had won his love and held his heart. There was about this David a marvellous power of attracting, subduing, and holding men. (*G. M. Grant, B.D.*)

A specimen of nobleness:—It is the darkest period of David's life. He is fleeing, barefooted, in fear of Absalom's approaching army. Yet he is not altogether alone. A few loyal hearts cling to him. And, amid the desolating sorrow, appears this Ittai. He is not a Hebrew; he is a Gittite—that is, a Philistine. But he is among those who will cast in their fortunes with the fleeing king. Only recently he seems to have come to Jerusalem. David sees the resolve of splendid devotion in Ittai. It will be useless to try to dissuade him further. The noble devotion of Ittai teaches these lessons:—**I. THAT SUCH DEVOTION I SHOULD SHOW**

TOWARD JESUS CHRIST. There must have been a singular attractiveness and winningness about the personality of David inspiring devotion to him. There is more attractiveness in Jesus Christ, and to Him, therefore, I ought to be more devoted than Ittai was to David. 1. Think of the purity of Jesus. Tennyson wrote: "I am amazed at Christ's purity and holiness, and at His infinite beauty. The forms of religion may change, but Christ will grow more and more in the roll of the ages. His character is more wonderful than the greatest miracle." 2. Think of Christ's sympathy. I have read how, before they knew of mines of diamonds there, a boy in South Africa flung a stone at a stranger. The man picked up the stone, and found it diamond, and it became his treasure. So Christ finds the diamond in us. Whom others cast away He regards, receives, redeems. Matthew the publican; the woman taken in her sin, etc. 3. Think of the sacrifice of Christ. His atoning cross tells it. This Christ of purity, sympathy, sacrifice, is worthy limitless devotion. II. WHAT DOES DEVOTION MEAN AND INVOLVE? 1. Definite decision for its object. Ittai decided for David. There were no ifs or buts, about his decision. It was downright. So I should decide for Christ. 2. Confession. "And Ittai answered the king and said." A real devotion does not hesitate about telling itself forth. 3. Marching under the standard of its object. Ittai followed David's flag. If I have real devotion to Christ I will join and march with His church and people. 4. Persistence. Ittai went the whole way with David in that long march from Jerusalem to Mahanaim. So I should persistently follow Christ. 5. Service. Ittai was one of the commanders for David in the subsequent battle with Ahsalom. So I should give myself to service for Christ. Christ will accept my devotion as David did that of Ittai. And the object of one's devotion is the discriminating and deciding test for life. The ignoble life has other than the highest object of devotion. (*Homiletic Review*.) *Ittai of Gath*:—Heartbroken and spiritless, David leaves Jerusalem. And as soon as he has got clear of the city he calls a halt, in order that he may muster his followers and see on whom he may depend. Foremost among the little band come six hundred men from Gath—Philistines—from Goliath's city. These men, singularly enough, the king had chosen as his bodyguard; perhaps he was not altogether sure of the loyalty of his own subjects, and possibly felt safer with foreign mercenaries, who could have no secret leanings to the deposed house of Saul. Be that as it may, the narrative tells us that these men had "come after him from Gath." Here they are, "faithful among the faithless," as foreign soldiers surrounding a king often are—notably, for instance, the Swiss guard in the French Revolution. It is a beautiful nature that in the depth of sorrow shrinks from dragging other people down with itself. Generosity breeds generosity, and this Philistine captain breaks out into a burst of passionate devotion, garnished, in soldier-fashion, with an unnecessary oath or two, but ringing very sincere and meaning a great deal. As for himself and his men, they have chosen their side. Whoever goes, they stay. David's heart is touched and warmed by their outspoken loyalty; he yields and accepts their service. Ittai and his noble six hundred tramp on, out of our sight, and all their households behind them. I. WHAT GRAND PASSIONATE SELF-SACRIFICE MAY BE EVOLVED OUT OF THE ROUGHEST NATURES. 1. A passionate personal attachment; then, that love, issuing as such love always does, in willing sacrifice that reckes not for a moment of personal consequences. 2. And we see in these words a supreme restful delight in the presence of Him whom the heart loves. And wherever, in some humble measure, these emotions are realised, there you get weakness springing up into strength, and the ignoble into loftiness. Astronomers tell us that, sometimes, a star that has shone inconspicuous, and stood low down in their catalogues as of fifth or sixth magnitude, will all at once flame out, having kindled and caught fire somehow, and will blaze in the heavens, outshining Jupiter and Venus. And so some poor, vulgar, narrow nature, touched by this Promethean fire of pure love that leads to perfect sacrifice, will "flame in the forehead of the morning sky," an undying splendour, and a light for ever more. You have all that capacity in you, and you are all responsible for the use of it. What have you done with it? Is there any person or thing in this world that has ever been able to lift you up out of your miserable selves? Is there any magnet that has proved strong enough to raise you from the low levels along which your life creeps? Have you ever known the thrill of resolving to become the bondservant and the slave of some great cause not your own? Or are you, as so many of you are, like spiders living in the midst of your web, mainly intent upon what you can catch in it? You have

these capacities slumbering in you. Have you ever set a light to that inert mass of enthusiasm that lies in you? Have you ever woke up the sleeper? II. THESE POSSIBILITIES OF LOVE AND SACRIFICE POINT PLAINLY TO GOD IN CHRIST AS THEIR TRUE OBJECT. III. THE TERRIBLE MISDIRECTION OF THESE CAPACITIES IS THE SIN AND THE MISERY OF THE WORLD. I will not say that such emotions, even when expended on creatures, are ever wasted. And I am not going to say that when men love each other passionately and deeply, and sacrifice themselves for one another, or for some cause or purpose affecting only temporal matters, the precious elixir of love is wasted. God forbid! But I do say that all these objects, sweet and gracious as some of them are, ennobling and elevating as some of them are, if they are taken apart from God, are insufficient to fill your hearts: and that if they are slipped in between you and God, as they often are, then they bring sin and sorrow. And so let me gather all that I have been saying into the one earnest beseeching of you that you would bring that power of uncalculating love and self-sacrificing affection which is in you, and would fasten it where it ought to fix—on Christ who died on the cross for you. Such a love will bring blessedness to you. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Loyal to the core*:—If Ittai, charmed with David's person and character, though a foreigner and a stranger, felt that he could enlist beneath his banner for life—yea, and declared that he would do so there and then—how much more may you and I, if we know what Christ has done for us, and who He is and what he deserves at our hands, at this good hour plight our troth to Him and vow, "As the Lord liveth, surely in whatsoever place my Lord and Saviour shall be, whether in death or life, even there also shall His servant be." I. IN WHAT FORM AND MANNER WAS THIS DECLARATION MADE? 1. It was made at a time when David's fortunes were at their lowest ebb, and consequently it was made unselfishly, without the slightest idea of gain from it. To take up with Christ when everybody cries up His name is what a hypocrite would do, but to take up with Christ when they are shouting, "Away with him! away with him!" is another matter. There are times in which the simple faith of Christ is at a great discount. It is such a season that we must stand out for God's. 2. Ittai gave himself up wholly to David when he was but newly come to him. David says, "Whereas thou camest but yesterday, should I this day make thee go up and down with us?" But Ittai does not care whether he came yesterday or twenty years ago, but he declares, "Surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be." It is best to begin the Christian life with thorough consecration. Have any of you professed to be Christians, and have you never given yourselves entirely to Christ? It is time that you began again. This should be one of the earliest forms of our worship of our Master—this total resignation of ourselves to him. 3. Ittai surrendered himself to David in the most voluntary manner. No one persuaded Ittai to do this; in fact, David seems to have persuaded him the other way. David tested and tried him, but he voluntarily, out of the fulness of his heart, said, "Where my lord, the king is, there also shall his servant be." If you believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is yours, give yourselves up to him by a distinct act and deed. Feel that one grand impulse without needing pressure or argument—"The love of Christ constraineth me." 4. Ittai did this very solemnly. He took an oath which we Christians may not do, and may not wish to do, but still we should make the surrender with quite as much solemnity. 5. And this Ittai did publicly. At any rate, he so acted that everybody saw him when David said, "Go over," and he marched in front—the first man to pass the brook. II. WHAT DID THIS DECLARATION INVOLVE? 1. He was henceforth to be David's servant. Of course, as his soldier, he was to fight for him, and to do his bidding. What sayest thou, man? Canst thou lift thy hand to Christ and say, "Henceforth I will live as thy servant, not doing my own will, but thy will. Thy command is henceforth my rule?" Canst thou say that? If not, do not mock him, but stand back. May the Holy Ghost give thee grace thus to begin, thus to persevere, and thus to end. 2. He was to do his utmost for David's cause, not to be his servant in name, but his soldier, ready for scars and wounds and death, if need be, on the king's behalf. That is what Ittai meant as, in rough soldier-tones, he took the solemn oath that it should be so. Now, if thou wouldst be Christ's disciple, determine henceforth by His grace that thou wilt defend His cause. 3. His promise declared that he would give a personal attendance upon the person of his master. That was, indeed, the pith of it. "In what place, my lord, the king, shall be, even there also will thy servant be." Breth-

ren, let us make the same resolve in our hearts, that wherever Christ is, there we will be. 4. He intended to share David's condition. If David was great, Ittai would rejoice. If David was exiled, Ittai would attend his wanderings. Our point must be to resolve in God's strength to keep to Christ in all weathers and in all companies, and that whether in life or death. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 23. And all the country wept with a loud voice.—*The way of the Cross.*—Notice the weeping people. (Luke xxiii. 27-31.) David's experience at this time contains many foreshadowings of the passion of our Lord, but also some contrasts, as the conduct of the priesthood. (Verse 24 compared with John xviii. 13, 24.) I. **THE ARK SENT BACK.** In this incident David's character rises to its height of moral grandeur. The ark was the symbol of God's presence. (1 Sam. iv. 1-11.) The Israelites in Eli's time had degenerated into trust of the symbol, instead of that which it symbolized. (Jer. vii. 1-4; Matt. iii. 9.) David understood the spiritual truth underlying, but not inseparable from, the outward sign. II. **HIS MOTIVES IN SENDING BACK THE ARK** seem to have been: 1. An expression of his unworthiness, as one who had deeply sinned, and was suffering the consequences of sin, to enjoy the consolation of religion. 2. Trust in Jehovah Himself apart from ordinances and symbols. "If I shall find favour, then I shall be restored to the sanctuary and its blessings; and if not, then what good will the ark do me? "Without God's favour it will only be a useless responsibility." This teaches us a deep spiritual lesson, needed in all ages, that mere outward forms of religion can never profit a heart not at peace with God. And in these expressions David manifested strong faith. (Numb. xiv. 8; Dan. iii. 17, 18; 1 John v. 4.) 3. He feared to injure others by the withdrawal of the symbol of God's presence, but would rather leave a witness in rebellious Jerusalem. (Ps. lxxix. 6, 36.) 4. Besides this, he doubtless feared to imperil the ark itself, remembering the awful lesson of Uzzah's death. III. **A PRAYER IMMEDIATELY ANSWERED.** (verse 31; xvi. 23; 1 Cor. iii. 18, 19; i. 18-25.) Ahithophel's treachery specially alluded to. (Psalm xli. 9; lv. 12-15.) (*R. E. Faulkner.*)

Vers. 25, 26. And the king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God unto the city.—*David's dependence:*—Taking David's conduct as an example to ourselves, we have brought before us the following truths:—I.—**TRUE GODLINESS ENGAGES THE SOUL'S SUPREME ATTENTION, EVEN IN TIME OF TRIAL.** 1. It draws the thoughts away from self. Dwelling on sorrow increases its bitterness. It grows with observation. We concentrate our mind upon a thing until it becomes far larger than it really is. 2. It fills the void in the heart with consolation. Of all subjects religion is the most powerful thing in the world to occupy the attention, and in its presence every temporal affair sinks into the meanest insignificance. II.—**TRUE GODLINESS PLACES GOD'S HONOUR EVER BEFORE SELFISH EASE.** When David left the city in flight, Zadok, the High Priest, brought the ark of God to follow the King. 1. David rejected mere outward symbols and signs. The symbolism of the temple had its proper place and use. It was to accomplish a great, and mighty, and mysterious purpose. But if religion has its public representation and form, it has also its private and individual functions as well. 2. God could help him just as well without the help of priest, or tabernacle, or service as He could with. Time and place are nothing to God. The tears of the prisoner are as precious to him as the orison of a pope. David was very well content to leave himself in the hands of God without any extraneous help. III. **TRUE RELIGION IDENTIFIES MAN'S INTERESTS WITH GOD'S PURPOSES.** We learn practically that the part for us to perform is, (1) Passive trust and resignation to the divine will, and (2) Constant faith in God's dealing. David did not for one moment doubt. His trust was unshaken amid all his trouble. "If I find favour in His eyes, He will bring me again, but if not, let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Him." I am content to leave it in His hands. (*David Howell, D.D.*) *David and the ark:*—I. **HIS SPIRITUAL MINDEDNESS.** He looked beyond the outward symbols to Him who had appointed the use of those symbols as a means of good. "Carry back," he says, "the ark of God into the city." He felt that it alone could do nothing for him in his banishment. Here was spirituality of mind, brought, it may be, into livelier exercise by trial, but evidently forming a part of David's character. And it would be well for us to inquire, How far are we of the same mind with the sweet psalmist of Israel? II. **THE SIMPLICITY OF DAVID'S FAITH.** "If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again

and show me both it and His habitation." Here was an unwavering confidence in the power of God to bring good out of evil; and a conviction that if the Lord saw fit He would do so. And here we may mark the peculiar and proper office of faith. It leads to effort: it encourages in duty while it prevents a departure from the way of God's commandments. We beseech you to cultivate more of this spirit, which appeared so conspicuously in the man after God's own heart; view every turn in your history as appointed by the Lord, and seek to have continually a lively apprehension of His overruling providence.

III. DAVID'S HUMBLE RESIGNATION TO THE DIVINE WILL. That Christian is much to be envied, who, happen what may, can exclaim with sincerity of heart, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good"; I desire to acquiesce in the Divine appointments, because "I know in whom I have believed"; I know, that though deep are the water-floods that roll over me, the wisdom of God is deeper than them all. Let us keep in mind, that the sources from whence we look for comfort may become the fruitful springs of bitter anguish. Let us not forget that the most secure of all our earthly comforts are in reality insecure. (*S. Bridge, M.A.*) *Acquiescence in the will of God.*

I. HIS ESTIMATION OF DIVINE MEANS AND ORDINANCES. The ark and the tabernacle were much more to him than his throne and his palace. And therefore he only mentions these. "Carry back," says he, "the ark of God—if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again"—he will bring me again, and—"show me both it and his habitation"—the ark and the tabernacle. Not that he undervalued the privilege of a safe return. Religion is not founded on the destruction of humanity. We are not required to contemn the good things of nature and providence.

II. HIS FAITH IN DIVINE PROVIDENCE. David views his defeat or his success, his exile or his return, as suspended entirely on the will of God. He does not balance probabilities. Not that he acted the part of an enthusiast, and despised the use of means. This appears obviously from the measures he devised, especially his employing the counsel of Hushai. David knew it was easy for him to take wisdom from the wise, and courage from the brave; and to confound all his devices. He knew also that it was equally easy for God to turn again his captivity.

III. He professes a FULL ACQUIESCENCE IN THE DISPOSAL OF THE ALMIGHTY. "But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee: behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good to him." Here are no imprecations of vengeance against seditious subjects, and a rebellious son; no bitter complaints of instruments; no "charging God foolishly"; no "teaching God knowledge." He falls down at his feet wishing to be raised up, but willing to remain. He mourns, but he does not murmur. What helped to produce this disposition in David? There were two things in himself.

(1) The one was—a sense of his own unworthiness. A consciousness of our desert is necessary to our submission under the afflictive dispensations of Providence.

(2) The other was—his ignorance. For while the former convinced him that he had no right to choose, this persuaded him that he had no ability. There were also two things in God which aided this acquiescence.

(1) First, his sovereignty. "Has he not a right to do what he will with his own?"

(2) Secondly, his goodness. The authority of God awes us. But it is something else that produces the cheerfulness of submission. It is the principle which actuates him—which is love; it is the end he has in view—which is our profit: it is a belief that, however things may be determined, with regard to our feelings—they "shall all work together for our good." Let us be followers of David in this holy resignation of ourselves to the pleasure of God.

1. It will be very advantageous to yourselves. Now this acquiescence in the will of God is the preparation of the Gospel of peace, with which you are to be shod. Thus prepared, you may travel on through the wilderness. To vary and enlarge the metaphor—impatience turns the rod into a scorpion. While the yoke presses the neck, patience lines it with down; and enables the man to say, It is good for me to bear it.

2. Nothing can be more honourable to religion. To surrender ourselves to the Divine disposal is the purest act of obedience: to subdue our unruly passions is the greatest instance of heroism. It ennobles the possessor. It renders him a striking character. (*W. Jay.*) *When God's will is ours:*—That is the perfection of a man's nature when his will fits on to God's like one of Euclid's triangles super-imposed upon another, and line for line coincides. When his will allows a free passage to the will of God, without resistance, as light travels through transparent glass; when his will responds to the touch of God's finger upon the keys, like the telegraphic needle to the operator's hand; then man has attained all that God and religion

can do for him, all that his nature is capable of. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The trial-bearing force of spiritual religion*:—In this chapter David and Absalom appear as the embodiments and representatives of two opposite principles of action:—love of power, and love of God. In Absalom you have the one, and in David the other. The love of power is an element in our spiritual constitution, implanted for benevolent purposes; and when properly directed, like all other native principles, subserves the most important ends. Like fire or water, as a servant it is a great blessing, but as a master, a great curse. When it grows into a passion, ascends the throne, and grasps the sceptre, it puts down conscience, and turns the man into a ruthless tyrant; ever ready to violate all the laws and trample on all the rights of his species. It has gained this power now in the breast of Absalom; and four evils of character are here developed as the consequence:—

1. Filial rebellion. Inspired by this ambitious impulse, Absalom now cast off the authority of David, not only as his sovereign, but as his parent.
2. Mean-spiritedness. In order to gain his ends see what mean manœuvres he adopts; he rises early in the morning, he goes "beside the way of the gate," where men resorted to have their social disputes settled by the judgment of the king; and here he clandestinely endeavours to undermine his father's authority with the people, and to insinuate himself into their affections. Oh! the weakness of the people to be thus cajoled. Yet it has ever been so. Let a prince shake the people by the hand, as Absalom did, and they will forget their own self-respect, their grievances, and even his tyrannies, and follow him. The people must have a higher moral education before they can obtain a better government.
3. Religious hypocrisy. Under the pretence of paying a vow which he had promised to render unto the Lord in Hebron. "I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow," &c. (verses 7-9.) Wicked men have often sought and won their wicked ends in the holy name of religion.
4. Underhanded cunning. "And Absalom sent spies throughout all tribes of Israel," &c. (verses 10-12.) In striking and glorious contrast with this, we have the principle of love of God, or spiritual religion, developed in the character of David, before us.

I. SPIRITUAL RELIGION ENGAGES THE SUPREME ATTENTION OF THE SOUL UNDER TRIAL. Two facts will illustrate this. 1. That whatever subject has the most power to draw away the mind from itself, will always be effective in supporting it under trials. The depressing influence of a trial depends greatly upon the amount of attention which the man gives to it. 2. Of all subjects, religion has the most power to draw away the mind from itself. David felt more interest in the ark now than he felt in the loss of his throne, the wreck of his kingdom, the peril of his life. And so the good man ever feels in his religion.

II. THAT SPIRITUAL RELIGION RECOGNIZES GOD'S SUPERINTENDENCE UNDER TRIAL. 1. He regarded it as personal. If "I shall find favour." 2. He regarded it as being sovereign. If "I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again." 3. He regarded it as being adequate. If it is agreeable to His mind, "He will bring me again." He has the power to do so. All that is required is His will.

III. THAT SPIRITUAL RELIGION IDENTIFIES MAN'S WILL WITH GOD'S, UNDER TRIAL. But if He thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seemeth Him good." A thorough surrender of our being and will to God is the first duty of all intelligences, and the necessary condition of all true progress in power and blessedness. (*Homilist.*)

Meek submission to Divine chastisement:—"Before corn can be ripened it needeth all kinds of weather. The husbandman is glad of showers as well as sunshine; rainy weather is troublesome, but sometimes the season requireth it." Even so the various conditions of man's life are needful to ripen him for the life to come. Sorrows and joys, depressions and exhilarations, have all their part to play in the completion of the Christian character. Were one grief of a believer's career omitted it may be he would never be prepared for heaven: the slightest change might mar the ultimate result. It is our wisdom to believe in the infallible prudence which arranges all the details of a believing life. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Faith in troublous times:—"Not when the sun shines, but when the tempest blows and the wind howls about his ears, a man gathers his cloak round him, and cleaves fast to his supporter. The midnight sea lies all black; but when it is cut into by the oar, or divided and churned by the paddle, it flashes up into phosphorescence. And so it is from the tumults and agitations of man's spirit that there is struck out the light of man's faith. There is the bit of flint and the steel that comes hammering against it; and it is the contact of these two that brings out the spark. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Ver. 31. **O Lord, I pray Thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.**—*Conspirators.*—Unfortunately for mankind the time of religious conspirators is not at an end. Under the fair robe of Christianity, there are men who are plotting to take away from us the liberty of conscience. There is steadily growing in number and power a party whose object is to play into the hands of that church which proclaims itself to be infallible. Let us mention that great conspirator whose name is temptation. Mr. Ruskin says that the human soul is not a machine, the wheels of which you can scrape and polish, and set it going at the rate of twenty or thirty miles an hour. The human soul is not a machine; it is a living thing which has to grow. Converts who begin to turn over a fresh leaf and to serve the Lord Jesus are often much distressed because they are still inclined to their old sins. Let all such young believers bear in mind that they are not a perfected machine, but are rather like a seed which has to grow, or a child that has to be trained. Like the conspirators who would hand our free country over to the chains of Rome, so the tempter in your heart is working very gradually. When I was a boy I tried to light a thick piece of wood with a match, but failed to do so. Had I taken some shavings and lit them, and then a few chips and placed them against the log it would soon have been in a blaze. So the inward conspirator works on, little by little. If we could see the devil in every temptation, no doubt we should act as old Dunstan is said to have done; but we have a tendency to sin, and when the inward conspirator makes our besetting sin very tempting, none of us can resist it without the grace of God. (*W. Birch, jun.*) *Prayer for the defeat of those who attempt to subvert good government:*—I. BRIEFLY DESCRIBE A GOOD GOVERNMENT. Some suppose that one form of government is as good as another, provided it be equally well administered. If this opinion could be admitted all observations upon this head would be entirely superseded. But there is no foundation to imagine that the goodness or badness of any government depends solely upon its administration. It must be allowed that the ultimate design of civil government is to restrain the corruptions of human nature. And since human nature is the same at all times and in all places, the same form of government which is best for one nation is best for all nations, if they would only agree to adopt it. Hence politicians may arrive at as great perfection in the art of government as in any other art which is founded on the principles of human nature. A civil constitution ought to resemble a good time-piece. A good clock, for instance, will constantly and regularly move of itself, if it be only wound up, from day to day, or from week to week. So a good constitution will support itself, without requiring anything more of the people than barely their setting it in motion, and choosing their own rulers, at a prescribed time, and in a prescribed manner. II. To INQUIRE WHO MAY BE SAID TO BE AIMING TO OVERTHROW A GOOD GOVERNMENT. There is such a great diversity in the natural abilities, acquired knowledge, local situations, and temporal interests of mankind, that it is not to be expected they should be perfectly agreed in their political sentiments. Individuals, therefore, may be good subjects of a good government, though they should really think that its constitution is not so perfect as it might be; or that those in administration do not in all cases conduct public affairs so well as they might conduct them. But we may justly consider those as aiming to subvert the government, who endeavour to alienate the affections of the people from it. This was the method which Absalom pursued, in order to take the kingdom out of his father's hands into his own. Accordingly, when we find any description of men insidiously endeavouring to alienate the affections of the people from their government, we have no room to doubt of their malevolent and traitorous designs. They are certainly seeking the power of bringing about a revolution of government; and should they attain that power, we may presume they will employ it for that purpose. III. THE PROPRIETY OF PRAYING THAT GOD WOULD DISCONCERT THE COUNSELS OF SUCH DESIGNING AND DANGEROUS MEN. And this will appear, if we consider, 1. That the subversion of a good government is one of the greatest calamities than can fall upon a people. A good government is the security of everything which they hold most dear and valuable in life. It protects their persons, their property, and all their civil and religious privileges. And if this foundation of their public safety and happiness should be taken away they would be completely ruined. Hence David demands, "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" 2. It is the prerogative of God to frustrate the most secret and destructive counsels of men. He knows their down-sittings and up-risings. He understands

their thoughts afar off. He looks on their hearts and ponders all their purposes. They cannot conceive an evil thought nor concert a malignant design which he cannot perfectly penetrate and comprehend. He is able therefore to discover and disconcert the most subtle and secret counsels against the peace and prosperity of any people. This the inspired writers firmly believed and abundantly taught. 8. That God has often defeated the most destructive and deep-laid designs of men, in answer to prayer. David entreated God to confound the designs of Ahithophel. "O Lord, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness." This prayer was graciously heard and answered. (N. Emmons, D.D.)

Vers. 32-37. **Hushai the Archite came to meet him.**—*Hushai, the king's friend* :—Contemplate the character of the king's friend. Like other models of friendship—John the Baptist, Jonathan, Ruth—he is conspicuous for sympathy and unselfishness. But there was a special feature in the story of Hushai which teaches us a great and important lesson. He was used as a counteracting influence among the king's enemies. I. **WHERE THEY MET.** The top of Olivet, where David was worshipping. The use David made of his first halt. When we moan and lament, and go about seeking sympathy in our sorrows, we seldom get it. But God sends comfort to the trusting, accepting heart. Worship is the right way to receive chastisement. (Job i. 20; 2 Sam. xii. 19, 20.) So angels came to Bethel and Mahanaim. (Gen. xxxi. 54; xxxii. 1, 2.) Horses and chariots of fire at Dothan (2 Kings vi. 13-18.) Jonathan at Ziph. (1 Sam. xxiii. 15; Acts ix. 17.) Angels in Gethsemane. When a soul in sorrow can worship there is no sting left. David might have been looking down on his forsaken capital now possessed by his enemies, but instead he looked up to his covenant God. What is the highest worship? Conformity to God's will, the worship of Jesus Himself. (Luke xxii. 42, 43.) II. **TRUE SYMPATHY FROM HUSHAI.** 1. It goes to meet sorrow and suffering that it may bless and comfort. Apply this in two cases. (1.) Our ordinary friends. Is not our love very often selfish? It does not go to meet, launch out, anticipate. A wholesome thing to ask ourselves, "Is anyone better or happier for me? Is Jesus more glorified . . . to-day?" (2.) In divine friendship. We too often shut our eyes to the sin and sorrow around us; afraid to look on it because we don't feel able to cope with it. Go to meet Jesus in it; He is the sorrow-bearer. Go reverently and sympathizingly, and ask what you can do to help Him. There was perfect understanding between David and his friend. Hushai didn't mind what seemed a repulse. We want to help our friends and Jesus, in our own way. Our sympathy becomes therefore importunate and misplaced. The tried friend perhaps does not want us, but wants our prayers or our influence. And with regard to our Lord, our hearts may cry out for His visible presence, "Let me be with Thee where thou art"; but if Jesus has work for us to do in a rebellious world, then must we stay there till He comes back. III. **A MARK OF TRUE FRIENDSHIP.** To live, and speak, and judge, and act for God in an ungodly world. It is a harder thing than dying, but it profits the cause. Some day we shall welcome back the King. Another feature of it. (Verses 35, 36.) Be the King's remembrancer. Report everything to Him. Use others in this work. Teach young disciples to "tell Jesus." (Matt. xiv. 12.) (8) Jesus notices such. Antipas. (Rev. ii. 13.) The unknown of Sardis. (iii. 4.) (R. E. Faulkner.) *Hushai, the Archite; or a fateful meeting* :—Hushai strongly wished to accompany David, to whom he was deeply attached. He was troubled greatly at the calamity which had overtaken the king, and the latter was equally troubled to think of the pain and inconvenience Hushai must suffer for his sake in following his changed fortunes. David knew also that Hushai could do better service for him by remaining in the city and counteracting by judicious counsel some of the evil intentions of Absalom. He has great difficulty in persuading Hushai to remain, and has to appear almost rude and even ungrateful in the effort to accomplish his desire. He could bear anything for himself, but he could not permit another to undergo such exhausting experiences for his sake. Hence he puts as his final argument this strong sentence, "If thou passest over with me thou wilt be a burden." David suggested that Hushai should assume the character of a friend of Absalom. I. **THE MEETING.** There is in the account of this meeting an illustration of how SOMETIMES WE MAY FIND UNEXPECTEDLY USEFUL GUIDANCE. Hushai might have been a useful guide, but Absalom is bent on evil, and Ahithophel helps him in his wickedness. Hushai only seeks to defeat the evil counsel of the latter. This he attempts for David's sake, as well as

Absalom's. Absalom could, if he had been true, have had a most valuable counsellor in Hushai, but, under the circumstances, all Hushai can do is to endeavour to help David, or to give him time to escape, by counselling delay on the part of Absalom. Life is like a many-tracked common or heath; so many paths run side by side or cross each other at different angles. We pass numberless wanderers like ourselves, but here and there we meet casually with some one who is most useful, because he chances to know the direction of the paths, and a word at a perplexing juncture is invaluable. For such guidance we are thankful. Absalom had in Hushai one who would have done his best to counsel him for good, but his heart was set on evil, so that Hushai's influence was unavailing. II. A WARNING also came to the rebellious son in that meeting. If David yesterday was followed, loved, and trusted, and is to-day forsaken and hunted, so might he be served when the flush of success has faded. Absalom needed the warning just then, for he was contemplating most dastardly crimes. Just as Hushai meets him unexpectedly, so retribution may meet him also, at the point where he seems to have reached the full extent of his expectation of success. There is indeed that which a French writer calls *force cachée*, or hidden power, checking us often at the very moment of success wrongly gained. It is not always noticed, but sometimes it comes, startling us with its suddenness. Ahab goes down to seize the vineyard of Naboth, and at the door Elijah meets him with the sentence, "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine." The courtiers who wrought against Daniel were themselves doomed to the death they designed for him. If in secular history we discover the operation of this *force cachée*, how much more in sacred. There the working of the law is laid down thus: "The wicked shall fall by his own naughtiness;" the ungodly falls into the net he spreads for his neighbour's feet. Absalom in meeting with Hushai comes in contact with one who will lead him into the pit he had dug for his father and king. There was a Divine hand in this, and in the after consultation, when the advice of Ahithophel failed, and that of Hushai was taken. God worked through words. (*F. Hastings.*) *Hushai's diplomacy*:—Hushai's conduct is certainly no model of Christian uprightness. It is therefore curiously instructive to see it made the warrant of a similarly questionable act in modern times. Sir Samuel Morland, Secretary of state to Cromwell, in describing his betrayal of his master to Charles II. says: "I called to remembrance Hushai's behaviour towards Absalom, which I found not at all blamed in holy writ, and yet his was a larger step than mine." (*Dean Stanley.*)

CHAPTER XVI.

Vers. 1—14. **And when David was a little past the top of the hill.**—*Impatience and submission*:—Mephibosheth, it will be recollected, was the only son of Jonathan. Now, when David was a little past the top of the hill where he had worshipped God, he met Ziba coming towards him with two asses, laden with cakes of raisins and summer fruits, a skin-bottle of wine, and two hundred loaves of bread. Probably, when David first saw Ziba, he thought that Mephibosheth had sent this timely contribution, and the first thing that annoyed him was to find that this present did not come from him at all. No doubt there was a good deal more conversation between David and Ziba than is recorded; the crafty man made it very plain that it was he who had been so thoughtful for the king's wants; thus he led David on to suspect Mephibosheth's loyalty; and when the king asked him plainly why his master was not with him, feigning probably great reluctance to speak against his employer, and pretending that only loyalty induced him to speak, he told the lie against Mephibosheth. David was very apt to judge hastily: he was a man of a very warm temperament, with strong affections, and passions that were easily excited. Here Ziba seemed faithful, and mindful of his sovereign, when Mephibosheth was said to be ungrateful; and thinking that he has found devotion where he expected nothing, and ingratitude where he looked for love, as it was in the case of Ittai and Ahithophel, and really forgetting in the moment of his flight, and when in danger of losing his own throne, that he has no power to enforce his sentence, he awards to the crafty Ziba all the lands of

Mephibosheth. How many times we are warned in Scripture against pronouncing hasty judgments; and which of us has not had to confess more than once that the bad opinion we have formed of some person was altogether erroneous? Again and again we have listened to unjust calumnies; we have thought there must be some truth in the accusation, some foundation for the slander, and we have acted very much like David here. David had gone but a few steps further before he encountered Shimei, another of the tribe of Benjamin. Bahurim is but a little distance from Bethany, on the other side of the Mount of Olives; but till they reached that spot, faint and weary, Shimei followed them with bitter curses. Now David had recovered himself; probably his conscience blamed him for his hasty ebullition of temper against Mephibosheth: and he may have felt that he had believed Ziba's story too easily. At least, when he spoke like that, he had forgotten his early friendship, and the beautiful and disinterested love of Jonathan. Now we are to see David in a better mood; grace has once more subdued nature. Now, Shimei was uttering unjust words: David of course knew that he did not deserve them, for no one could have been more forbearing to the house of Saul: and perhaps Shimei's words reminded him, as well as Abishai's impetuosity, of his own conduct to that family in times past; and hence his command of his temper at this moment. Perhaps, too, the unjust slanders of Shimei made him aware that Ziba might have been slandering his friend Mephibosheth; and just because he felt he did not deserve it, and his conscience did not prick him in the matter, perhaps he was the more able to forgive the man. This man Shimei evidently had long hated David. He had been hoping there would be some reverse in his fortunes, and he rejoiced in his enemy's downfall. But what does David do? He loses sight of Shimei altogether; he looks above the instrument to the Agent; he sees God's hand in the matter, and to be angry, therefore, would be to be discontented with the providence of God. Oh that we could learn to follow David in this! There are numberless annoyances that happen to us all: and since "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God," we must be prepared for trials that will peculiarly test our faith and patience. If you forget that "the Lord reigneth," if you do not connect the providence of God with all that happens, the very smallest daily trouble may completely upset you, and you will be continually losing your temper. And then there was another great advantage to David in this circumstance, and, indeed, in the whole rebellion: it just showed him the value of human affection, and made him feel how fickle the populace is. And the bitter words of Shimei, perhaps more than anything else, would humble his pride and self-conceit. We are all too apt to flatter each other. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend;" but faithful friends are very few. Partly because we want to stand well with our friends, partly because we do not like to hurt their feelings, we never tell them of their faults. We repeat the good, but not the evil, that we hear about them; and as we do this to each other, and are naturally indulgent to our own failings, we are all too apt to have a good opinion of ourselves. The fact is that self-righteousness clings to us to the very last. We are apt to feel as if there was really something commendable in us. We use expressions about our sinfulness which too often have little meaning in them; and strange as it may seem, we really forget our utter natural corruption. And lastly, observe that as, when David sent back the ark, he expressed a hope that God would bring him to see it again, so he is conscious of being in his Father's hands; he believes that this chastening is sent for good; and he looks forward to "a happy issue out of all his affliction." But let us never forget the end of it all: that if God begins, He will surely carry on the work of grace; that "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." And in the midst of all the trials that may come upon us, possibly even the desertion of friends—as David bore them meekly, a type of Him who prayed for His enemies—so let us ever keep the bright certainty of eternal glory before us; and we shall be meek and patient, as David was; and we, like the Master, "for the joy set before us," shall "endure the cross, despising the shame;" and as there will be heaven for us hereafter, so there will be peace even now. (*C. Bosanquet, M.A.*)

Vers. 5—19. **Shimei the son of Gera; he came forth, and cursed still as he came.**—*The forbearance of David towards Shimei*:—I. THE PROVOCATION DAVID RECEIVED. 1. The most irritating by which the patience of man was ever tried. The reason why God was pleased to allow this insult to be added to the

other trials of David, is obvious. He wished to teach him how low his iniquities had sunk him, and to show him that the cup of the Divine indignation against him was not even yet exhausted. It tells us that the servant of God must expect to meet with insults and provocations from his fellow-sinners. We are not dwelling among angels, but among men. We are living in a fallen world, in a world that has renounced the authority of the God of peace, and thrown itself under the dominion of the prince of discord. It would be madness, then, to think of passing through it, as though it were a world of love. 2. The conduct of Shimei was cruel also, as well as irritating. The condition of David at this period appeared calculated to disarm by its misery the most inveterate of his enemies. We are ready to suppose in the hour of affliction that every heart must feel for us, and that the malice of our bitterest enemies must now for a season be changed into pity. But experience proves that the most afflicted are generally the most persecuted. Their calamities leave their adversaries nothing to hope from their favour, and little perhaps to dread from their displeasure. 3. The provocation which David received was also undeserved. There was indeed blood which cried from the ground for vengeance on his head, but he had never injured Shimei; and as for his having been guilty of the death of Saul, and his family, no charge could be more unjust. But the ungodly are always selfish. They judge of others, not by the laws of impartial justice, but by the standard of self-interest. II. But let us turn from the cruel and irritating conduct of this disappointed Israelite, and consider **THE FORBEARANCE WHICH DAVID MANIFESTED.** 1. He received the provocation of Shimei with meek silence. He heard his accusations, and he knew them to be false; but he answered him not a word. There are indeed cases in which it becomes absolutely necessary to vindicate our characters at any risk from the calumnies of the ungodly; but these occasions do not often occur. When our enemies are much incensed against us, it will generally be found that to reply to their aspersions serves only to increase their violence, and perhaps to give them an advantage over us. Silence under provocation is safety. To govern our lips is, in most instances, to govern our hearts. 2. But there may be silence where there is no meekness. No angry word may proceed from the lips, while the deadliest revenge is cherished in the heart. It is necessary therefore that we should observe, further, that David forgave the provocation of Shimei. His friends around him were incensed to the utmost, and were eager to vindicate the honour of their insulted monarch with their swords. Would the conduct of David have been either unlawful or sinful, if he had commanded his attendants to take immediate vengeance on Shimei? It might not have been unlawful, for the laws of Judæa would undoubtedly have condemned the traitor, and the power of carrying them into execution was vested in David's hands; but laws were not designed by God to gratify vindictive passions. It is as sinful to seek revenge by the arm of the law as to seek it by the violence of our own arm. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." **CONCLUSION.** 1. A review of this history, as far as we have considered it, is calculated to leave impressed on us a conviction of the power of true religion; its power, not only to touch the fears and hopes of the soul, but the mighty power which it exercises over the dispositions, the temper, the heart. 2. This history reminds us also of the dignity which a meek and forgiving spirit imparts. The Bible tells us that "it is the glory of a man to pass over a transgression," and it gives us in this chapter a confirmation of the saying. Here, then, is a lesson for those who are striving to raise themselves to honour. You wish to be highly esteemed among men, and, in order to procure their respect, you imagine that no real or supposed insult must pass unnoticed, and that you must commence a struggle for superiority in rank and consequence. Is, then, the object of your wishes to be attained by such means as these? Impossible. Cease from the foolish attempt. Go and sit at the feet of David, and let him teach you that the readiest, the surest, the safest way to exalt yourselves is to lie low and be humble, to be "meek and lowly in heart," to triumph over the pride and folly which have hitherto been leading you captive. (C. Bradley, M.A.) *Meekness under provocation*:—"The fruit of the Spirit," said St. Paul, writing to the Galatians, "is long-suffering." Long-suffering patience is one of the rarest of virtues, because it is so easy to be impatient. There is a story told of the great Athenian Pericles, which gives us a good lesson in patience. Hardly anything ever put Pericles out of temper. There was a man who railed at him throughout a whole day in the market-place before all the people, and this although Pericles was a magistrate. Pericles, however, took no notice, but went

on hearing and dealing with the various cases brought before him until night fell. Then he set out for home, walking slowly. The man followed him all the way, uttering hard, untrue, and cruel words all the time. When Pericles arrived at his house it was quite dark, so, calling his servant, he ordered him to get a torch and light his defamer home.

Vers. 11, 12. **Let him alone, let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him.**—*The grounds of David's forbearance towards Shimei*:—David, in his adversity, receives from Shimei an undeserved, cruel, and most irritating provocation; he reviles him, and curses him, and casts stones at him; but the afflicted monarch bears all his insults with silent meekness; he forgives and protects his railing enemy; and here in the text he discloses to his wondering attendants the feelings which actuated his conduct towards him. His words evidently direct our attention to the grounds of his forbearance towards Shimei; and they convince us at once that this forbearance did not proceed from a want of feeling. Some men appear to bear provocations, as a stone may be said to bear them: they excite no resentment, for they give no pain. But this insensibility is not Christian meekness. We must feel before we can forgive; and that forgiveness is the most exalted in its nature, which is accompanied with the keenest sense of the injuries it pardons. Neither was this insensibility the meekness of David. His was one of the warmest hearts that ever beat in a human breast. Every act of kindness had power to move it, and he himself tells us that reproach could almost break it. I. His forbearance must be traced partly to **THE SOFTENING INFLUENCE OF AFFLICTION**. David here reminds his servants of the trials under which he was suffering; and intimates to them that the father, who had to bear with the cruelty of a beloved son, could find but little difficulty in pardoning the insults of a reviling enemy; that the greater affliction had prepared his mind for the less, and enabled him to be submissive under it. "Tribulation," says the apostle, "worketh patience." It calls the patience of the Christian into exercise, and consequently strengthens it. Who are the proud and revengeful among mankind? They who have known but little of the calamities of life, and been tossed by few of its storms. II. David was assisted in overcoming his resentment by **TRACING THE PERSECUTION HE RECEIVED TO GOD**. The ill-treatment of the ungodly, as well as the natural evils of life, must be ascribed, in some degree, to a chastising God. The malice and cruelty of the world are no less the instruments of working his will than the diseases which assail our bodies, or the storms which lay waste our dwellings. III. Hence the forbearance of David may be ascribed also to a **SENSE OF SIN**. He says nothing indeed of his sinfulness, but the abrupt language which he uses evidently implies that it was in his mind. And what provocation is there which a deep sense of guilt will not enable us to bear? Go to the man whom a heavenly instructor has made acquainted with the hidden depravity of his nature; who is day by day retiring to his closet to mourn over his sins, and who often waters his couch with tears by night as he thinks of his transgressions—try the patience of the stricken penitent by insults and revilings; and what is the result? Says the wounded Christian, "I am a sinner, and wrath must not lodge in a sinner's heart. I may be reviled, but what a miracle of mercy is it that I am not consumed! Men may reproach me, but how ought I to wonder that my God forbears to curse and destroy me!" IV. The forbearance of David proceeded from **AN HUMBLE EXPECTATION OF A RECOMPENSE FROM GOD**. Though he had sinned against him and was suffering under his righteous displeasure, he knew that the Lord had not utterly taken away his loving-kindness from him. What a powerful motive to forbearance and patience! When we are persecuted, the Lord looks on our afflictions. "He knows our reproach, and our shame, and our dishonour; our adversaries are all before him." In conclusion: 1. David was not of a revengeful disposition. A mind so softened by affliction, so fixed on God, so full of contrition and faith, could not be revengeful. 2. We may infer also from the text, the reason why so much importance is attached in the Scriptures to a forgiving spirit. (*C. Bradley, M.A.*) **No resentment**:—Sir Matthew Hale, the celebrated judge, had so completely gained the government of his passions that, though naturally of a quick temper, he was never seen in a passion, nor did he ever resent injuries. One day a person who had done him a great injury came to him for his advice in the settlement of his estate, which he very readily gave him, but would accept no fee for it. When he was asked how he could behave so kindly to a man who had wronged him so much, his answer was, "I thank God

I have learned to forgive and forget injuries." (*Quirer.*) *Tracing trouble to its fountain head*:—"As children will thank the tailor, and think they owe their new clothes to him rather than to their parent's bounty, so we look to the next hand, and set up that instead of God." Second causes must never be made to stand before the first cause. Friends and helpers are all very well as servants of our Father, but our Father must have all our praise. There is a like evil in the matter of trouble. We are apt to be angry with the instrument of our affliction, instead of seeing the hand of God over all, and meekly bowing before it. It was a great help to David in bearing with railing Shimei, when he saw that God had appointed this provocation as a chastisement. He would not suffer his hasty captains to take the scoffer's head, but meekly said, "Let him alone and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him." A dog when he is struck will bite the stick; if he were wise, he would observe that the stick only moves as the hand directs it. When we discern God in our tribulations we are helped to be quiet and endure with patience. Let us not act like silly children, but trace matters to their fountain-head, and act accordingly. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 15—23. And Absalom, and all the people of the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem.—*Absalom in council*:—When Absalom came to the city there was no trace of an enemy to oppose him. His supporters in Jerusalem would no doubt go out to meet him, and conduct him to the palace with great demonstrations of delight. Once within the palace, he would receive the adherence and congratulations of his friends. Among these, Hushai the Archite presents himself, having returned to Jerusalem, at David's request, and it is to Hushai's honour that Absalom was surprised to see him. The sight of Hushai impressed Absalom as the sight of an earnest Christian in a gambling saloon or on a racecourse would impress the greater part of worldly men. For even the world has a certain faith in godliness—to this extent, at least, that it ought to be consistent. There is a fitness of things to which the world is sometimes more alive than Christians themselves. But Hushai was not content with putting in a silent appearance for Absalom. When his consistency is challenged, he must repudiate the idea that he has any preference for David. But can we justify these professions of Hushai? It is plain enough he went on the principle of fighting Absalom with his own weapons. Absalom had dissembled so profoundly, he had made treachery, so to speak, so much the current coin of the kingdom, that Hushai determined to use it for his own purposes. Having established himself in the confidence of Absalom, Hushai gained a right to be consulted in the deliberations of the day. He enters the room where the new king's counsellors are met, but he finds it a godless assemblage. The first to propose a course is Ahithophel, and there is something so revolting in the first scheme which he proposed that we wonder much that such a man should ever have been a counsellor of David. Without hesitation Absalom complied with the advice. It is a proof how hard his heart had become, that he did not hesitate to mock his father by an act which was as disgusting as it was insulting. The next piece of Ahithophel's counsel was a masterpiece alike of sagacity and of wickedness. He proposed to take a select body of twelve thousand out of the troops that had already flocked to Absalom's standard, and follow the fugitive king. That very night he would set out; and in a few hours they would overtake the king and his handful of defenders; they would destroy no life but the king's only; and thus, by an almost bloodless revolution, they would place Absalom peacefully on the throne. It is with counsel as with many other things: what pleases best is thought best; solid merit gives way to superficial plausibility. The counsel of Hushai pleased better than that of Ahithophel, and so it was preferred. Satan had outwitted himself. He had nursed in Absalom an overweening vanity, intending by its means to overturn the throne of David; and now that very vanity becomes the means of defeating the scheme, and laying the foundation of Absalom's ruin. The turning-point in Absalom's mind seems to have been the magnificent spectacle of the whole of Israel mustered for battle, and Absalom at their head. He was fascinated by the brilliant imagination. The council is over; Hushai, unspeakably relieved, hastens to communicate with the priests, and through them send messengers to David; Absalom withdraws to delight himself with the thought of the great military muster that is to flock to his standard; while Ahithophel, in high dudgeon, retires to his house and commits suicide. 1. This council-chamber of Absalom is full of material for profitable reflection. The

manner in which he was turned aside from the way of wisdom and safety is a remarkable illustration of our Lord's principle—"If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." We are accustomed to view this principle chiefly in its relation to moral and spiritual life; but it is applicable likewise even to worldly affairs. Absalom's eye was not single. Success, no doubt, was the chief object at which he aimed, but another object was the gratification of his vanity. This inferior object was allowed to come in and disturb his judgment. For even in worldly things, singleness of eye is a great help towards a sound conclusion. "To the upright there ariseth light in the darkness." And if this rule hold true in the worldly sphere, much more in the moral and spiritual. It is when you have the profoundest desire to do what is right that you are in best way to know what is wise. 2. But again, from that council-chamber of Absalom and its results we learn how all projects founded on godlessness and selfishness carry in their bosom the elements of dissolution. They have no true principle of coherence, no firm, binding element, to secure them against disturbing influences arising from further manifestations of selfishness on the part of those engaged in them. 3. Men that are not overawed, as it were, by a supreme regard to the will of God; men to whom the consideration of that will is not strong enough at once to smite down every selfish feeling that may arise in their minds, will always be liable to desire some object of their own rather than the good of the whole. They will begin to complain if they are not sufficiently considered and honoured. They will allow jealousies and suspicions towards those who have most influence to arise in their hearts. They will get into caves to air their discontent with those like-minded. All this tends to weakness and dissolution. Selfishness is the serpent that comes crawling into many a hopeful garden, and brings with it division and desolation. In private life, it should be watched and thwarted as the grievous foe of all that is good and right. The same course should be taken with regard to it in all the associations of Christians. (W. G. Blaikie, D.D.) *The character of Absalom*:—The history of the person, whom the text introduces to your view, is among the finest pieces of the Old Testament. It abounds with incidents, which touch the tenderest feelings of nature, and occur in the dearest relations of life; and is full of useful and impressive instructions to every serious observer. All may contemplate with improvement this inspired story of the beautiful, accomplished, and brave, yet base and unhappy Absalom. He is first introduced to us by the sacred historian, as avenging his sister's wrongs, by the murder of his eldest brother. Resentment even of the greatest wrongs, to trample upon the sacred commands of God, in his anger to slay a man, yea with premeditated and deceptive malice to slay a brother, discovers thus early that inconsiderate, unprincipled spirit, which strengthened with his age, and was the cause of his ruin. It is seldom that a life, which is uncontrolled by religious fear, is marked with only one criminal act. There is an insatiable power in vice. One step beyond the line of virtue renders another less difficult. There is no trusting to self command, when the barriers of duty are down. Vice is rarely single in the human heart. The man, who can be hurried by anger to murder a brother, will easily be induced by ambition to dethrone a father. Amnon's blood on Absalom's robes was white in comparison with the spots which afterwards defiled them. Having fled because of his guilt to Geshur in Syria, he abode there three years, with the royal relations of his mother. Time had now soothed the wound in David's bosom; and, forgetting the dead, he longed to embrace his living, his favourite child. His servants, perceiving the tender anxiety which filled his heart, contrived by an ingenious stratagem to obtain permission to bring the beloved fugitive back to Jerusalem. One would suppose that henceforth we should see nothing but filial reverence and a virtuous life, in this hitherto careless character. Alas, how slender are our hopes of those in whom the religious principle has no place! How terrible is the progress of the wicked, who have once given the reins to their will, and follow the guidance of their evil imaginations! Restored to favour, this unprincipled young man uses the riches of paternal bounty in procuring the gratification of vain desires, and the attendants, force, and equipage, which may add strength to his subtlety when he shall need it. With mad ambition, he resolves to depose his fond and venerable parent from the throne. With worse than mad ambition, with the vilest, blackest treachery, he plots his father's disgrace and destruction. But how is it possible? Surely the people will cleave to the good king, to whom they owe such victories and prosperity? This vicious, inexperienced man will never be able to

drive the renowned David from his throne. When the passions are engaged in any evil pursuit, and the mind has given itself to its attainment, there is nothing at which it will stop. Truth or falsehood, affection or enmity, piety or depravity is assumed by it with equal ease. We may be surprised to think that in so short a time this daring youth should be emboldened to attempt his enterprise. But there are always weak men, to be the tools of such characters; and wicked men to be their abettors. There accompanied him many, who, the narrative says, "went in their simplicity, and knew not anything," and the subtle, famous Ahithophel came from his city to aid the unnatural conspiracy. By the aid of this evil man, new followers of Absalom were daily added, and he succeeded so far as to compel the king to flee with his adherents from Jerusalem. It is happy indeed for men, that there is a Deity, whose providence rules the events of life. By a wonderful interposition the counsel of Ahithophel, which would most probably have been successful, was rejected, and the advice of Hushai, a friend of David in disguise, was unanimously approved. And now the time approached when the Most High would bring upon this wicked, rebellious son the vengeance which his crimes deserved. The armies entered the field; and Absalom with his hosts were defeated. He took to flight. But as he rode in his haste through the wood, in which the battle was fought, "his head caught hold of the thick boughs of a great oak." Joab hastened to the place, and thrust him through with darts, and the adherents of the king took down his body, and cast it into an ignominious grave. From this interesting story we may derive many useful reflections. (1.) In the first place, it teaches us all, and especially the young, the solemn importance of acquiring a control over our passions and desires. These, if left to be their own directors, may make us base, will make us miserable. (2.) The story further teaches parents the solemn importance of implanting and cultivating in their offspring those principles which are the only sure preservatives from debasement and crime. (3.) We may learn from this history the barbarity and odiousness of filial disobedience. (4.) We may learn from our subject the folly and danger of priding ourselves in the possession of personal accomplishments and external charms. (*Bishop Dehon.*)

Ver. 17. Is this thy kindness to thy friend?—*The character of Christ as a friend, and the inquiry He often proposes to each of His disciples:*—Friendship is the state of minds united by mutual benevolence. It has always been deemed one of the essential articles of human life and comfort. Men have pursued it for their honour, as well as for their happiness; for it is considered as disgraceful as it is distressing, to be without a friend. And who are those who, after a while, lose social intercourse and kind regards, but those who deserve it?—as whisperers, tale-bearers, backbiters, despisers of them that are good, and lovers of themselves. For he that will have friends must show himself friendly, "and there is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother." General associations will not supply the place of a friend. Gossips and visitors and acquaintances are not friends, unless such as Cowper speaks of, "belonging to the lady who has her dear five hundred friends," whom she always found sycophants in her house, and every one of whom, before they reach their homes, are running her down. For while "the friendship of the world is enmity with God," it is hypocrisy with men; and no conditions or rank places a man above the attractions of friendship. Kings have laid aside their royalties to indulge in it. Alexander would have found a conquered world a void without an *Hephæstion*. The dearest relations in life cannot supersede friendship. To the beloved name of brother and sister, husband and wife, must be added that of a friend, in order to fill up the comforts of human life. Oh, friendship, thou benefactor and comforter of the human race! how necessary art thou in a vale of tears, and in a world full of "vanity and vexation of spirit!" Thou art the delight of sanguine youth, and the prop of trembling age. Thou art the sweetener of prosperity, and the solace of adversity. The burdened heart, at thy presence, is relieved, and afflictions by thy hand are deprived of their tears. But while we hail the individual who has found a real friend, we are constrained to observe that it is not very easy to find one. And, when you have laid down the infallible marks of a real friend, many who have worn the title will be found unworthy of the name, and "weighed in the balances," will be found wanting. I make no apology for applying the inquiry to Christian experience. Nor shall I enter into the circumstances of the history in which it is found. Suffice it to say, it is the language of Absalom, complaining

of the conduct of Hushai. I. WE HAVE TO SHOW THAT YOU HAVE A FRIEND. His adversaries called Him "the Friend of sinners," and their design was to charge Him with being a Friend to their sins. This was infinitely false; but He was a Friend to their souls. This was infinitely true. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. Now let us look at a few of the qualities of this friend. 1. The characteristic of Benevolence. What is benevolence? Benevolence among men is often little more than a commerce of selfishness, and the offspring of sordid gain. Friendship amongst men arises from the possession of some amiable quality in the object regarded, either real or imaginary. But His friendship arises from no excellency in its subject, but is all undeserved favour. 2. The second characteristic of this friendship is sincerity. He is a friend who loves, not in words—in tongue, but in deed and in truth. "He gives us all things richly to enjoy." 3. A third characteristic of this friendship is ability. Where the ear is heavy, that it cannot hear, the hand is often shortened, that it cannot save. Nothing is more painful to real affection than inability. To see a beloved object suffering beyond your reach,—to behold in him wants which you cannot relieve,—to witness in him pains which you cannot alleviate,—to hear the voice from parched lips, "Pity me, pity me, Oh ye, my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me," and to be able only to shed unavailing tears. (1.) Speak we of wisdom? "His understanding is infinite." (2.) Speak we of wealth? His riches are boundless. "The world is His, and the fulness thereof" in heaven and in earth. Speak we of strength? "Lo! He is strong" Nothing is too hard for Him. The Emperor Theodosius, having, on a signal occasion, opened all his prisons and released the prisoners, is reported to have said, "And now would to God I could open all the tombs and give life to the dead!" This was a noble saying, but in him it was an ineffectual one. However it is not so in regard to the Lord Jesus. (4.) Fidelity is the fourth characteristic of this friendship. It was wrong in David to say, "All men are liars." He owns himself that he said it in his haste, and he should not have said it at all. There were few who ever had more faithful adherents than he. (5.) The last characteristic of this friendship which we shall mention is perpetuity. Now this is distinguishable from the former article. That regards the stability of friendship, this regards the continuance of it. For, however true, however faithful, a friend may be, he is mortal. "His breath goeth forth, he returneth to the dust: in that very day his thoughts perish." Mortality is written on everything here. Yet have we "set our hearts upon that which is not." But what is the language of Jesus? "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." II. THAT YOU HAVE OFTEN BEHAVED VERY INCONSISTENTLY, AND IMPROPERLY TOWARDS HIM, so as to constrain Him to say, "Is this thy kindness to thy friend?" We premise here two things. 1. That it is not to be supposed that you can fully discharge the obligations you are under to this Friend, in this weak state of flesh and blood. But then you ought to be sensible of them, and show that you are willing to make suitable returns, though you cannot make adequate returns; and to be always asking, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Therefore, (2) we observe that God expects us to make suitable returns, and is disappointed if we do not. Oh, what instances of ingratitude and unkindness compel Him to say, "Is this thy kindness to thy friend?" He does expect gratitude and a sense of obligation in His beneficiaries. (1) It is reasonable and righteous for your friend to expect that you should obey him. "He that hateth My commandments and keepeth them," saith the Saviour, "he it is that loveth Me." And none of His commandments are "grievous." (2) It is reasonable and righteous in your friend to expect that you should own Him and honour him before men. (3) It is reasonable and righteous in your friend to expect that you should readily believe him and confide in him. (4.) It is reasonable and righteous in your friend to expect that you should be fair and open and unreserved with him. (5.) It is reasonable and righteous that your friend should expect that, if any of his friends and relations be near you, you should behave kindly towards them. David inquired on a particular occasion, "Is there any here of the house of Saul, that I may deal kindly towards them for Jonathan's sake?" The Saviour has brethren and sisters. (6.) It is reasonable and righteous in your friend to expect that if he left any emblem or memorial of his, you should highly prize it. Such a memorial you have with regard to Him in the Lord's supper. It is the only representation of Him He has left in His church. Conclusion: There are such who have not this Saviour

for their Friend: and is not this the case with some of you?—yea, with many of you. What! has He “no form, nor comeliness, nor any beauty, that you should desire Him?” who yet is “fairer than the children of men”; yea, who is “altogether lovely.” We speak this to your shame. Lord Brooks was a nobleman of our own country, but so charmed was he with that wise and accomplished person, Sir Philip Sidney, that, when he died, he would have no other inscription upon his tomb than this—“Here lies the friend of Sir Philip Sidney.” Oh, may my tomb but tell a tale that truly states here lies a friend of Jesus! (W. Jay, M.A.) *A test of friendship*:—Trusting a friend so long as there is no room for doubt or distrust, is very well so far as it goes. A decent man can hardly do any less than this. It is always easy to trust a friend as far as one sees. But the real test of fidelity in friendship is when others doubt or question, and when there is room or occasion for two opinions as to a friend's conduct and appearance. True friendship evidences itself when one has to walk by faith, and not by sight. If one rests his trust on the friend because of what others think of that friend, that is one thing—there is no special friendship in that. But real friendship does not depend on outside testimony or opinions.—(*Christian Weekly*.) *Friendship*:—Friendship is a vase, which, when it is flawed by heat, or violence, or accident, may as well be broken at once; it never can be trusted after. The more graceful and ornamental it was, the more clearly do we discern the hopelessness of restoring it to its former state. Coarse stones if they are fractured may be cemented again: precious ones never. (*Landor*.) *Kindness*:—The love of friends is an active passion, and delights in rendering services and bestowing benefits. So sensible of this were the ancients that, in discussing the duties of friendship, what they asked was, not how much one friend ought to do for another, but where the limit was at which he ought to stop. They took it for granted that he would do, suffer, and give, all he could for his friend's sake; and they only prescribed to him to restrain himself at the point where his zeal might clash with some still higher obligation to his family, his country, or his God. In accordance with this they represented friendship in art as a young man, bareheaded and rudely attired, to signify activity and aptness for service. Upon the fringe of his garment was written Death and Life, as signifying that in life and death friendship is the same. On his forehead was inscribed Summer and Winter, meaning that in prosperity or adversity friendship knows no change, except in the variety of its services. The left shoulder and the arm were naked down to the heart, to which the finger of the right hand pointed at the words Far and Near, which expressed that true friendship is not impaired by time or dissolved by distance. Of this feature in the friendship of Jesus it would be easy to give examples. (*J. Stalker, M.A.*) *Concerning kindness to our best friend*:—Mr. Payson, the American divine, was out one day with a brother minister who had to make a call at a lady's house, and Payson went in with him. The lady pressed them both to stay to tea. She was not a Christian woman, and Payson had other business, and therefore demurred; but as she pressed him very earnestly he sat down, and invoked the divine blessing, which he did in terms so sweet and full of holy unction that he impressed everybody. The lady waited upon him with great attention, and when he rose up to go he said to her, “Madam, I thank you much for your great kindness to us; but how do you treat my Master?” A work of grace was wrought in that lady by the question; she was brought to Jesus; she opened her house for preaching, and a revival followed.

CHAPTER XVII.

Vers. 7-23. And Hushai said unto Absalom.—*Hushai's advice preferred*:—The wisest man in the world is not wise at all times: though Achitophel commonly gives successful counsel, yet with his good leave, he hath missed the mark at this time, and in this case. 1. Hushai's grand design was first to INVALIDATE THE PERILOUS COUNSEL ACHITOPHEL HAD GIVEN, before he gave his own opinion he hereupon discovers the danger of Achitophel's advice from three topics. 1. The first is taken from the valour of David, which he amplifies by a similitude of a bear robbed of her whelps. 2. The second argument is taken from the policy

and prudence of David, as the first is from his courage and valour. 3. His third argument or topic is a periculoſo from the dangerous conſequences of this expedition of Achitophel's. (ver. 9, 10.) II. When Hushai had thus invalidated Achitophel's counsel, **THEN HE PRODUCETH AND INTRODUCETH HIS OWN** to Absalom, and partly contrary and partly congruous and consentaneous to that of Achitophel's. (vers. 11, 12, 13.) 1. Hushai's counsel was contrary to that of Achitophel's in three respects. (1.) In respect of time; not in the night as he hath advised, seeing night-works are not only hazardous, but also no way glorious works, we scorn to steal a victory in the dark, let us fight David in clear daylight that the sun may behold the valour and victory of our invincible army. (2.) The second respect is, Let not so small an handful as twelve thousand (according to his advice) be employed, but a mighty host made up of all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, &c. (3) And the third respect is, Thou thyself shalt go general of this numerous army, for thy presence will put life into thy soldiers, to fight lustily in the fight of their King, who hath power to punish or reward them according to their merit or demerit; beside the glory of the victory (which now Achitophel seeks to have to himself) shall be wholly thine by thy going in person to the battle. 2. Mark, it was congruous as to the effect, the same in the end with that Achitophel now had advised, to wit, the destruction of David, and of his despicable company, saying, David shall not be able to defend himself neither. (1.) In the open field, for we will fall upon him there, as the dew falleth upon the field, so largely, so suddenly, and so irresistibly upon all sides, as the drops of dew are innumerable: Nor (2.) Shall he be safe in a fortified city, for we will bring ropes to it and draw it (and David in it) into the river, &c., so drown him, and all his, &c. Hushai's whole oration was wholly accommodated to the ambitious humour of a vain-glorious prince, all along stuffed with the bombast of hyperbolical flourishes, both to fill up its own emptiness, and to puff up Absalom's proud mind with heading and leading a mighty army, &c. Hushai in his thrasonical expressions puts himself into the number of the actors of this tragedy, saying [So shall we come upon him, &c.] as if he had said [I will be one of the first of them,] that he might not seem to come short of Achitophel, who had offered Absalom his service both as a counsellor, and as a commander, and [We will not leave so much as one, &c.] This is opposed to Achitophel's promise (v. 2.) that in no point he might seem to fall behind him, so is he the sooner believed. Whatever Hushai with all his florid flatteries pretended, yet his main design intended was, that David might gain more time to increase his army, and to prepare for the battle, and that the present paroxism or heat of the people being cooled by such delays (as Absalom's raising so vast an army did necessarily require) many of David's subjects might at last bethink themselves of returning to their right allegiance, and thereby upon better consideration join to strengthen the Father's forces against his unnatural rebellious son. In all these harangues both of Achitophel and of Hushai, there is not one word of counselling Absalom to ask counsel of God, God was not in all their thoughts. (Psal. 10. 4.) Indeed Hushai purposely put Absalom upon trusting in an arm of flesh (a numberless number of soldiers) which he knew would bring a curse upon him (Jerem. 17, 5), and therefore he pusheth him forward to be present in the fight to fetch in his own fall, &c. This counsel of Hushai was better approved of by Absalom and his courtiers than that of Achitophel, because the Lord purposed it should be foiled and defeated (ver. 13, 14.) III. **HOW GREAT IS THE POWER OF FAITHFUL PRAYER;** David had prayed, Lord, turn Achitophel's counsel into folly. Achitophel's counsel is rejected as foolish counsel, David's prayer of faith and fervency was answered over and over again; for 1. Achitophel's counsel was folly itself (chap. 16. 21.) 2. 'Tis here refused as such; and 3. he died as a fool (ver. 29.) IV. **ACHITOPHEL'S COUNSEL WAS INFRINGED HERE BY A DOUBLE MEANS.** 1. by human help, namely, by Hushai's prudence and policy, humouring an ambitious bigot to his own destruction, well knowing that his insolent temper would best be flushed up with flourishing flatteries, and 2. by a Divine hand, God giving Absalom up to believe lies, and so hasten his own end. (C. Ness.) *The best counsellors*:—Alphonsus, King of Anagon, being asked who were the best counsellors, answered, "The dead (meaning books), which cannot flatter, but do without partiality, declare the truth." Now of all such dead counsellors, God's testimonies have the pre-eminence. A poor, godly man, even then when he is deserted of all, and hath nobody to plead for him, he hath his senate, and his Council of State about him,

the prophets and apostles, and "other holy men of God, that spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." A man so furnished is never less alone than when alone; for he hath counsellors about him that tell him what is to be believed or done; and they are such counsellors as cannot err, as will not flatter him, nor applaud him in any sin, nor discourage or dissuade him from that which is good, whatever hazard it expose him to. And, truly, if we be wise we should choose such counsellors as these: Thy testimonies are the men of my counsel." (T. Manton.)

Ver. 14. The counsel of Hushai the Archite.—*Hushai's Counsel*:—Hushai saw that it was essential to gain time, "in order," to quote the words of Tacitus, "to give the disaffected time to repent, and the loyal time to unite: crimes gain by hasty action, better counsels by delay." His scheme was cleverly devised to appeal to Absalom's vanity and love of display. It seemed safe and easy: it was a far more attractive idea for Absalom to march in person against David at the head of an immense army than for him to let Achithophel complete the revolution by a decisive action at once. His vanity proved his ruin. He forgot that a general levy would involve no slight delay: he forgot that the rising was by no means certain to be general, and that when the first surprise of the insurrection was over many would return their allegiance to David. But Absalom and his counsellors were blinded by a divinely-ordered infatuation.. (A. F. Kirkpatrick, M.A.)

Ver. 23. And when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed.—*God overthrows the evil wisdom of the worldly wise*:—As in Ahithophel's case, the most subtle counsels of evil men are often most unexpectedly overthrown. It was so with the men who plotted against Daniel, Jeremiah, and Mordecai. So the Armada was overthrown in the days of Queen Elizabeth, though it had been planned in the most deliberate and sagacious manner. So the invasion of England by Napoleon the First came to nought, though a most consummate tactician was directing it.

Vers. 27—29. When David was come to Mahanaim.—*Mahanaim, or hosts of angels* (with Gen. xxxii. 27, 29):—Let us go even unto Mahanaim and see these great sights. First, let us go with Jacob and see the two camps of angels, and then with David to observe his troops of friends. I. GOD HAS A MULTITUDE OF SERVANTS, AND ALL THESE ARE ON THE SIDE OF BELIEVERS. The great army of the Lord of hosts consists largely of unseen agents, of forces that are not discernible except in vision or by the eye of faith. Jacob saw two squadrons of these invisible forces, which are on the side of righteous men. 1. We know that a guard of angels always surrounds every believer. Ministering spirits are abroad, protecting the princes of the blood royal. They cannot be discerned by any of our senses, but they are perceptible by faith, and they have been made perceptible to holy men of old in vision. 2. 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." 3. All punctual to the Divine command. Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. 4. All engaged personally to attend upon Jacob. 5. Those forces, though in themselves invisible to the natural senses, are manifest to faith at certain times. 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. 6. Again, the reason why the angels met Jacob at that time was, doubtless, because he was surrounded with great cares. 7. 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. 8. 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. 9. There is no doubt whatever that they are sent for a purpose. 10. Mahanaim was granted to Jacob, not only to refresh his memory, but to lift him out of the ordinary low level of his life. 11. If such a special vision be granted to us let us keep it in memory. Jacob called the name—

of that place Mahanaim. II. This brings me to my second text; FOR ANGELS DID NOT MEET DAVID, BUT LIVING CREATURES OF ANOTHER NATURE MET HIM, who answered the purpose of David quite as well as angels would have done. 1. Who is your prominent friend? He speaks like a foreigner. He is an Ammonite. What is his name? Shobi, the son of Nahash, of Rabbah, of the children of Ammon. I have heard of those people: they were enemies, were they not—cruel enemies to Israel? That man Nahash, you recollect his name; this is one of his sons. Yes! God can turn enemies into friends when His servants require succour. Those that belong to a race that is opposed to Israel can, if God will it, turn to be their helpers. The Lord found an advocate for his Son Jesus in Pilate's house—the governor's wife suffered many things in a dream because of him. He can find a friend for his servants in their persecutor's own family, even as he raised up Obadiah to hide the prophets and feed them in a cave: the chamberlain to Ahab himself was the protector of the saints, and with meat from Ahab's table were they fed. 2. Here comes another person we have heard of before, Machir of Lodebar. That is the large farmer who took care of Mephibosheth. He seems to have been a truly loyal man, who stuck to royal families, even when their fortunes were adverse. As he had been faithful to the house of Saul so was he to David. 3. Here comes Barzillai, an old man of fourscore, and as the historian tells us, "a very great man." His enormous wealth was all at the disposal of David and his followers, and "he provided the king of sustenance while he lay at Mahanaim." This old nobleman was certainly as useful to David as the angels were to Jacob, and he and his coadjutors were truly a part of God's forces. The armies of God are varied: he has not one troop alone, but many. On this occasion Mahanaim well deserved its name, because the help that came to David from these different persons came in a most noble way, as though it came by angels. I infer from this that if at any time a servant of God is marching onward in his Master's work, and he needs assistance of any sort, he need not trouble about it, but rest in the Lord, for succour and help will surely come, if not from the angels above, yet from the church below. Conclusion: While I have shown you God's invisible agents, and God's visible agents, I want to call to your mind that in either case, and in both cases, the host is the host of God: that is to say, the true strength and safety of the believer is his God. The presence of God with believers is more certain and constant than the presence of angels or holy men. God hath said it—"Certainly I will be with thee." He hath said again, "I will not leave thee, nor forsake thee." When you are engaged in Christ's service you have a special promise to back you up—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." If, then, God is pleased to grant us help by secondary causes, as we know He does—for to many of us He sends many and many a friend to help in his good work—then we must take care to see God in these friends and helpers. When you have no helpers, see all helpers in God: when you have many helpers, then you must see God in all your helpers. Herein is wisdom. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The service of love*:—Robert Louis Stevenson had a remarkable power of attaching hearts to himself by the very magnetism of his personality, as well as by the kindness of his behaviour. A recent book of reminiscences of his life in Samoa tells that one day when the cook was away, Stevenson told another servant, Sosimo, just to bring him a little bread and cheese for lunch to his writing-room. But to his surprise he was served with an excellent meal—an omelette, a good salad, and perfect coffee. "Who cooked this?" asked Stevenson, in Samoan. "I did," said Sosimo. "Well, then, great is your wisdom." Sosimo bowed and humbly corrected him: "Great is my love!" It was love that gave skill and deftness to his hand, and added welcome to the repast. So with the provision which David's timely helpers supply.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Vers. 1—17. **And David numbered the people that were with him.**—*The fatal fight*:—This chapter is a narrative of that fatal fight wherein Absalom the son, fought with David his father for the kingdom of Israel. I. THE ANTE-

CEDENTS OF THE BATTLE. 1. David mustered all his forces, which Josephus reckons but four thousand, yet Comestor computes them to be seven thousand (ver. 1), but 'tis probable they were many more from these cogent reasons. (1.) David's army must needs be greatly augmented by the two tribes and half beyond Jordan, who, living far distant from Absalom's court at Jerusalem, had not been corrupted with that usurper's flatteries, nor alienated in their affections to David, whom they knew to be a good king, and made now miserable only by an unnatural rebellious son, therefore out of compassion, as well as out of loyalty, they could not but flock to him in great numbers. (2.) Had they been so small a number as Josephus saith, David needed not to have been so exact in setting captains over them by hundreds, and by thousands, and in dividing them into three battalions, and committing them to the conduct of three generals, as it is expressly recorded in ver. 12, though the number be not, etc. (3.) That expression, "Thou art worth ten thousand of us" (ver. 3) doth imply that this number was but the one-half of the army, beside a fourth part of it left behind to garrison Mahanaim. (4.) 'Tis certain they were such a considerable army as therewith David durst venture to take the field, and rationally commit his righteous cause to the trial of a pitched battle. (5.) David's prospect of his victory, whereof he was so confident, that he giveth charge to his army not to kill Absalom, but only to take him prisoner. Though victory doth not, indeed, depend upon the multitude of armies, yet David knew well he ought not to tempt the Lord, and to expect a conquest by a miracle (which God had not promised), but by the use of probable means. 2. David's offering himself to hazard his royal person with his army in the field-battle (ver. 2.) 3. The armies' refusal of his royal offer (ver. 3), which they did not out of any contempt of the king to cross his kingly power and pleasure, but out of the highest veneration to his royal person, which made them so careful and conscientious for his personal preservation, and they grounded their laudable refusal of his offer upon solid reasons: (1.) Thou art the main mark the rebels aim at, and should they know that thou art in the field they would bend all their forces against thee, as (1 Kings, xxii. 31) the Syrians did. (2.) The slaughter of thee (whom only the rebels resolve to ruin) would rejoice them more than the slaughter of ten thousand of us thy subjects, for then have they their end, to set up Absalom in thy throne (chap. xvii. 2.) (3.) The dignity of thy person exalts thee above ten thousand of us, and therefore thy ruin by the rebels would do ten thousand times more damage to the state of Israel. (4.) But if thou be kept alive, though the rebels rout us, yet mayst thou recruit a new and another army, and so disappoint them still from accomplishing their design. 4. David's prudence to the people, and his indulgence to his rebellious son (ver. 4, 5.) (1.) From his natural, affectionate disposition, always a fond father to his children, full of clemency, insomuch that he spared Saul his enemy when in his power once and again (1 Sam. xxiv. and xxvi.) No wonder, then, if he were for sparing his eldest son. (2.) He doth not call him my son, because that would have aggravated his crime, but Hebr. the boy, or young man, imputing his heinous rebellion to the heat of his youth, which makes men heady, high-minded, and inclinable to evil counsels and practices; but if he might be spared and live till he were older, age and experience would make him wiser. (3.) David was conscious to himself that he was the meritorious and procuring cause of this rebellion, and that Absalom was given up of God to punish David's sins (chap. xii. 11, 12), and therefore pitied him. (4.) This pious father would not have his impious son to die in his sin, without repentance, for then soul and body perish for ever. (5.) Peter Martyr makes David a type of Christ, who prayed for his crucifiers, as David did here, for a rebel son against his father. II. Now come we to THE CONCOMITANTS OF THIS FATAL FIGHT. 1. The place where the battle was fought, 'tis called the wood of Ephraim (ver. 6), though it was certainly beyond Jordan, so not in that tribe, but called so either because it was over against Ephraim, or because of forty thousand Ephraimites lost their lives there (Judges xii. 5, 6). 2. David's victory: (ver. 7) The battle was soon determined. Absalom's army (consisting of raw, inexperienced men in martial matters) stood not the first shock of David's old soldiers. 3. "The wood devoured more than the sword" (ver. 8.) Behold, here David's policy and Absalom's infatuation to fight in so fatal a place as the wood of Ephraim, which had been so fatal to Oreb and Zeeb in Gideon's time (Judges vii. 25 and viii. 8), and to the Ephraimites also (Judges xii. 5, 6.) The routed rabble, running from death, ran to it, while they ran into the wood to hide themselves; some fell upon stubs that did beat the

breath out of their bodies when they had spent the most of it by their hasty running away; some for haste plunged themselves into pits and ditches which were in the wood (ver. 17), and which either they saw not (being covered with the rubbish of the wood), and so their violent flight hurried them in at unawares. So dreadful a thing it is to provoke the Lord of Hosts, who can arm all things to destroy us, etc. 4. Absalom was hanged by the neck upon the forked bough of an oak in this same wood (ver. 9). (1.) Absalom met David's soldiers, and they, according to David's command, spared him, and gave him an opportunity to escape, but Divine vengeance would not spare him. (2.) The great God directed the branch of the oak, as he rode under it, to catch hold of his long hair that was loosely dishevelled upon his shoulders, and there hangs him up by the neck betwixt heaven and earth, as one rejected of both, and not fit to live in either of them. (3.) Some do wonder how Absalom came here among the thickets of the wood, where there was no way, especially for riders? Sanctius wittily observes that seeing it is said, "Absalom met David's servants by chance," it seems he rather peeped upon them (fighting in the battle) out of some safe and secret place than fought against them in the front of the fight; this was a chief leader and general likely to conquer. However, this is beyond doubt that when he saw his rabble were routed, a dreadful fright fell upon him, and fleeing, left the common road and rode among the thickets, till caught by his long locks (such as Samson had, Judges xvi. 13) in a crotch of the oak. (4.) He being held fast there by the hair of his head, "his mule that was under him went away," which might easily happen, because, being in flight, the mule passed along very swiftly. As this mule lurched, his master, so will worldly wealth lurch worldlings at their death, however: and so will false grounded hopes lurch hypocrites (Job viii. 13 and xi. 20), whereas a lively hope (1 Peter i. 3), a daughter of the faith of God's elect (Tit. i. 1) rightly grounded on God's promises will not lurch us, no, not at death (Prov. xiv. 32), but will do to us what Bucephalus, Alexander's great horse, did to him, which (as Aulus Gellius reporteth), though deeply wounded in both neck and sides in a battle, yet carried his master with great speed out of danger of the enemy, and when he had set his master down in safety then himself fell down and died: So true hope lands us in glory, then expectation dies into fruition, etc. This unnatural wretch was unworthy to be slain by the sword, but he must be hanged on a tree, and so die that cursed death (Deut. xxi. 23, Gal. iii. 13.) His haughty mind resolved to be on high, right or wrong, though he made his own too affectionate father's carcase a stepping-stone whereon to step up to the highest throne; and now is he hanged up on high, and his ambitious head is in its proper exaltation. He is hanged by that very head wherewith he had been plotting the worst sort of high treason, against so good a father. His hair, wherein he had so much prided himself, God made an halter to hang him with: The instrument of his vainglory became the instrument of his death and ignominy. So perilous it is to pride ourselves in any habiliments either of nature or of fortune, seeing the matter of our pride may be the means of our ruin. 5. The dialogue between General Joab and the soldier that first saw Absalom hanged in an oak (ver. 10, 11, 12, 13.) (1.) It seems Absalom did hang some time before he was seen, being in a by-path and blind place, this long and lasting dolour was far more intolerable than had he been hanged outright in a halter. (2.) This soldier that first saw him durst not dispatch him, though Absalom might desire him to do it, to put him out of his pain, as Saul had desired his armour-bearer on the like account (1 Sam. xxxi. 4.) (3.) Joab, when he told him what he had seen, chides him for not doing it, and if he would still go back and do it he would give him a rich reward (ver. 11). Though Joab was desirous that such a public pest were slain, yet would he rather have it to be done by another hand than by his own, for fear of David's displeasure. Politicians, like the ape, pull nuts out of the fire with the paw of a cat. (4.) The soldier answers (ver. 12) I dare not do it for a thousand shekels, for the king commanded to the contrary (ver. 5), it would be as much as my life is worth, which is of more value to me than all thy thousand shekels, and belts and badges of valour. What mad men are many, that for a few paltry shillings play away their precious souls, which this soldier durst not do. (5.) Should I have done it, saith he, I should have been false to myself (ver. 13) in betraying myself to David's revenge, or should I do it now, and then deny it to save my life by a lie, the king is so wise he would soon discover it, and then inflict a double punishment upon me, not only for my foul fact in doing it, but also for my falsehood in denying it. (6.) And thou thyself (saith he) wouldst

set thyself against me, that is, thou wouldst become my adversary, or satan, and wouldst be the first that would accuse me to the king's court, for doing that which thou now wouldst draw me to do against the king's command. Thus the devil deals with tempted souls, as Joab would have dealt with this soldier, first he tempts them to sin, and then he accuses them for sin, as he is the accuser of the brethren (Rev. xii. 10, Job i. 9.) 6. Joab's slaughter of Absalom (vers. 14, 15.) (1.) Daring Joab, saith, as his vale or farewell to the soldier. (2.) Behold here the just judgment of God upon this vilely vicious, ambitious Absalom: He will needs be a new king before his time, and now hath here this oak for his throne, his twisted hair about the bough for his crown, three darts in his heart for his sceptre, his proud heart is darted through, and Joab's ten armour-bearers for his royal guard, for defiling David's ten concubines. Thus God writ his sin upon his punishment, that little breath still left in him these ten did beat out of his body (ver. 15). So here's ten to ten in both cases. (3.) Joab's killing of Absalom contrary to the king's command some condemn, but others justify and commend it; Peter Martyr and Grotius do canvas this controversy pro and con, etc. (*C. Ness.*) *The battle and its issue*:—1. Before the battle. David does not bear prosperity well. He shines best in trial. He is greater when fleeing from Saul than when in the palace. His flight without his crown reveals his real kingliness. Surely David is in much communion with God. He is pressed with sorrow, but then his character like as myrrh is most fragrant. He is most restful. Fear has gone. He pillowed his head on the truth, that ever drives fear away. Such a calm restfulness would be sure to give indications of God's nearness, and we find many signs of Divine guidance. How discreet he is! How they are blundering at Jerusalem! How wise to make Mahanaim his headquarters, though most probably his choice was made all unconscious of its splendid adaptability to the necessities of the hour. He was led by a "Hand Divine." Did David pray for wisdom? Surely such quiet restfulness in God's guidance is ever accompanied by prayerful fellowship! The Father of light gives to those who ask: how far wiser should we be if we asked! Was it this hallowed experience at Mahanaim which evoked his impressive charge to Solomon? (1 Chron. xxii. 12; 1 Kings iii. 9.) So passed the week before the battle. 2. Concerning the battle itself, as to details of conflict, we know little. Probably Absalom has been three months king. According to the counsel of Hushai, he heads the army. The first sbock decided the fortunes of the day, as indeed is still common in Eastern warfare, and Absalom's army flees in confusion. David's army is victorious, and ere the evening came all Israel and Judah knew that David had conquered. 3. After the battle. David is sitting between the two gates (chap. xviii. 24) waiting for the news. The watchmen upon the wall are gazing anxiously, and yet more anxious is the expectation of the king. All is so graphically told. His hope when he hears the bearer is Ahimaaz, the parent-heart asking for his son amid the news of victory, the falsity of the messenger when face to face with the agitated king (ver. 29), the quickened hope so bluntly quenched by the less cautious Cushai, and then the wail, that has been echoed from so many hearts since: "O my son Absalom! . . . would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (1.) An entire absence of resignation to God's will. Strange, is it not, that which is so prominent in all his other times of trial is prominent by its absence here! He abandons himself uncontrolledly to his feelings. Unless those in public places of honour sink their private feelings in public duty, why are they there? David's heart is lacerated now. His own sins make his grief the heavier. We note too—(2.) His petulant wish and foolish complaint. Had he died in place of Absalom, what would have become of Israel with such a king, and where the promise of God to him? On public grounds David's utterance can find no justification, and Joab is right when he arouses him from his selfish grief. Better for David had he sought, in the early days of his son's life, by prayer and holy conduct, to have lived for his children than wished to die for them. We need to learn it is better to live for our children than will a wish to die over characters we have helped to form. Still, we can but admire him as a father! Does love first ruin and then pray? We can, however, understand the wail of David if he was thinking of the eternal interests. This was agony time might mitigate and soften, but never obliterate. Before the mysterious in the dealings of God with him, he bowed in an agony Joab could not understand. That surely is one of the sad penalties of declension from the ways of God. Grief was borne by him and not carried to God. Hence for a while

David's character is clouded again. (*H. E. Stone.*) *David and Absalom*:—1. The first thing that strikes us in chap. xviii. is the "reward of faithfulness" in the appointment of the three captains. (Luke xxii. 28—30.) 2. The charge concerning Absalom (v. 5; Rom. xii. 19; Gal. vi. 1)—a lesson for us in our treatment of others. The Lord is ever saying, "Deal gently with my rebels." "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." We are too like Joab, so indignant against the sinner that we forget our own weakness, and yet he followed Adonijah! And we too generally find when we are very indignant against some one else, we are pretty sure to go away and commit the same sin. 3. The fate of Absalom. Two things are said to have contributed to his fate—his ostentation in going into battle on a mule instead of on foot, as David and all warriors did, and his vanity in wearing his hair long (though it does not follow that this caused his death, as we are only told that he was caught by his head, probably his helmet). The heap of stones—disgrace. (Joshua vii. 26.) 4. The king's grief. (Luke xix. 41; Rom. v. 7.) A beautiful contrast between type and antitype—"Would God I had died." "I lay down my life for the sheep." (*R. E. Faulkner.*) *Absalom: a character study*:—I. The first suggested point in this Old Testament character study is, that of a ROYAL FATHER AND SON IN DEADLY ANTAGONISM. The ground of this antagonism was Absalom's attempt to usurp the throne. He sought by intrigue to dethrone his father, and to seize the kingdom and crown for himself. There is another antagonism of a more momentous character raging to-day between the Royal Father in heaven and the rebel Absaloms in our midst. An antagonism spiritual in its nature, gigantic in its proportions, fearful in its tendencies, tremendous in its issues. It is hostility between the creature and his Creator, the subject and his Sovereign, the recreant son and his loving, all-compassionate Father. Wonder, O heavens, and be astonished, O earth! Can the finite contend with the Infinite? Can the worm strive with his Maker? Can man fight with God? "Woe unto him," says the prophet, "that striveth with his Maker." "Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel but not of Me, and that cover with a covering but not of My spirit, that they may add sin to sin." "The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man. He shall stir up jealousy like a man of war. He shall cry, yea, roar. He shall prevail against His enemies." II. The second practical suggestion of this Old Testament character study is, THAT THE MEANS USED TO ESCAPE FROM THE KING'S SERVANTS BROUGHT DEFEAT AND DEATH. Absalom depended on the fleetness of his mule for safe and speedy flight, which, had it been on the unobstructed highway instead of the untrodden, perilous forest path, might in all human probability have been accomplished. As it was, the fleetest animal, the greater the danger of becoming entangled among the trees of the wood. So it is to-day with the modern Absaloms who have formed conspiracies against goodness, purity, justice, right; who are subtly or openly assailing the kingdom of truth, the throne of God, the kingdom of the Nazarene, doing their utmost to wrench the sceptre of authority from His grasp, and to dash the diadem of divinity from His kingly head, they are getting the worst of the contest. Absalom-like, they are trying to evade the King's army, to escape the King's pursuing servants, but ere long they will find the giant oak of Divine retribution in the way, which will grasp them between its mighty arms, while their fleet-footed "mules" will go suddenly from under them. 1. Some have mounted the "mule" of intellectual pride, and are posting off into the wood of scepticism, rationalism, deism, agnosticism, secularism, atheism. Much learning is generally conceit, and conceit is turning men intellectually and morally insane. "Advanced thought" is but the synonym for advanced alienation of the heart from the living God, and "advanced thought" is only the modern form of unbelief. Pseudo-philosophy is weaving a shroud for the burial of truth. Men to-day glory in what they do not rather than in what they do know. Ignorance seems bliss. Doubting is emphasised and glorified. Believing and knowing are childish. Thus the advocates of doubt, the apostles of unbelief, the boastful know-nothings, have exiled from their little world the Creator, and enthroned blind chance or arrogant reason. They have struck out from their sky the blazing sun of truth, and are groping their way amid the shadows and uncertainties of a scholarly scepticism or an ignorant know-nothingism! In a word, they have mounted the mule of intellectual vanity, imagining thereby to escape God, who pursues them on the line of their intuitions, moral instincts, inner consciousness, and crushed but not extinguished spiritual nature, not knowing that there is a mystic tree of judg-

ment, whose giant branches shall seize their haughty heads and swing their spirits back to the God who gave them. 2. Again, there are others who are trying to escape from their convictions of right, duty, and personal responsibility to humanity and God on the "mule" of alcohol. Such foolish Absaloms I have known. Some of them men of broad intellect, wide reading, and splendid parts, but weak on one side of their nature in more senses than one. For years there has been hostility to God, the will running counter to the Divine Will, the actions contrary to the Divine Commands, the heart opposite to the Divine Spirit. They have defied the Divine Almightiness, trampled in the dust the Divine Law, and flung insult and injury on the Divine Heart of Love. Thus have they tried to get away from conscience, remorse, God! But what folly. True, they may drown conviction for a time, but only for it to come back with tenfold force. I can conceive of no infatuation greater than that of a man resorting to drink in order to drown trouble, quell fear, or quiet conscience. As well attempt to extinguish debt by burning the creditor's bills, or to ease pain by plunging the hand into the fire, as to evade trouble, remorse, God, by fleeing to the gin palace or the beershop. In reality this method is only adding fuel to the fires of conscience, poignancy to the stings of remorse, terror to the recurring thought of God and eternity. It is heaping up wrath against the day of wrath. Absalom never intended riding into the jaws of death, but he got there. Once seized by the iron grip of the drink appetite, and it clutches a man most insidiously but surely; there is little or no chance of release from its fatal consequences. 3. Once more, others in society to-day are making the effort to escape from their convictions of right, duty, God, on the "mule" of absorbing worldliness. They have plunged into business, and are driving bargains and speculations furiously. They have invested all their capital, their energies, talents, attention, interests, being, with its wealth of possibilities, in pushing trade to a golden success. Principle has to do homage to policy, morality to bow to fraud or the ordinary so-called "tricks of trade" in order to pile up a pyramid of gold and to rank as merchant princes. It is business, nothing but business; bargains, nothing but bargains; the muck-rake of mammon and nothing else, until they become walking icebergs of materialism. But conscience lifts up its thunderous voice and pours forth a whole valley of warnings, threatenings, alarms. Its voice is unpleasant. Its constant speakings are distracting and offensive. To get beyond its condemnatory voice they spur on their "mule" into the denser wood, the more perilous forest of worldliness, oblivious of the Nemesis of retribution which will seize their sordid soul, and swing them into eternal poverty with a Dives and a rich fool. 4. Another, as the representative of a large class, has saddled the "mule" of worldly pleasure. He rides in search of carnal amusement, delight of the senses, spurning religion which holds the true secret of abiding happiness by fixing itself within the man. He hurries hither and thither, seeking joy from without, rootless joy, and all he gets proves false, precarious, brief. Like gathered flowers, though fair and fragrant for awhile, it speedily withers and becomes offensive. Whereas joy from within, rooted in God, is akin to drinking in aroma from the rose on the tree; it becomes more sweet and beautiful; it is enduring; it is immortal. To live in the realm of sense is to die in the realm of sorrow! Believe me, there is no pleasurer of this world without his Eve, no Eve without her serpent, and no serpent without its sting. "The wages of sin is death." "The sting of death is sin." I tell you, you cannot get away from all God's servants. If you escape pinching poverty, blasting pestilence, drivelling insanity, torturing affliction, painful bereavement, there is one servant that will overtake you, "the pale horse and his rider." That horse of untiring strength and unpausing celerity is fleet of foot than your "mule." (J. O. Keen, D.D.) *Bush warfare*:—This district appears to have resembled the bush of Australia and the jungle of India. It was not a dense forest, but consisted of rocky ground covered with prickly shrubs and tangled underwood, having stout oaks and other trees as well as precipitous glens to increase its terrors and perils. Such a place of thickets and thorns was called in Bible times "yaar," and now is known as "waar." It would give a certain advantage to a smaller force of experienced warriors like David's in resisting the onset of a larger but less disciplined array such as followed Absalom. Probably, too, many of the latter were more accustomed to the bare wadies (or valleys) and limestone rocks of Western Palestine, while the loyalists were not unfamiliar with bush warfare. British troops have often had to encounter difficulties and dangers similar to those which aided to

defeat Absalom on this occasion. During the war of 1755, several of King George's best regiments were nearly annihilated in a thick wood near Pittsburgh, in Pennsylvania. Embarrassed by the brushwood and irregular trees, they could not perceive their Indian foes, who, keeping out of sight, discharged their muskets, with horrible yells more disconcerting than the weapons. (*Sunday Companion.*)

Ver. 3. **Thou art worth ten thousand of us.—What are you worth?**—King David was loved doubtless as much for the amiability and manliness of his character as for the throne on which he sat. I. **TRUE WORTH SHOULD BE RECKONED BY CHARACTER AND NOT BY MONEY.** In the civilised world, money is an idol served by many people. If a man possess plenty of gold, he carries a key which unlocks doors that are closed against one that is poorer but more worthy. The world, of course, respects honour and genius, but it loves money. When you ask, "What is that man worth?" people do not say that he possesses an amiable yet manly character, or a vain and cowardly nature; they tell you he is worth so much a year, or that he is somebody's son. A man is valued from what he has, rather than for what he is. An Atheist one day said to me, "You talk of Christian people being true friends! Why, the best friend anybody can have is a five-pound note; and my aim is not to get religion, but to get money; for if a man can always have a few of these handy, he will find friends on whom he can rely in every time of need!" Money, in itself, is a gift of God; for it is not money that is the root of evil, but the love of it that harms men and ruins women. II. **DO NOT BE TOO ANXIOUS TO POSSESS THAT WEALTH WHICH IS NOT YOUR TRUE WORTH.** Our trade is suffering from the madness of people who, in their eagerness for money, have speculated recklessly, and brought themselves and others to ruin. Some people try to get money at all hazards. Have any of you obtained money in a wrong way? If so, I am sure your experience has been that such ill-gotten gains never blesses you. It is "easy come, easy go." An angler employs many kinds of bait and fishing tackle. The trout is a sharp, suspicious, and dainty fish, and to catch it the angler uses a very fine silk line which cannot be seen in the water, and chooses his sharpest hook, baiting it with the greatest care; and the trout, seeing the bait only, swallows it and the hidden hook. So, when you grab at money wrongfully, the devil is angling for you skilfully with the rod and line of covetousness, baited with "great wealth," "sudden riches," "worldly honour," and other tempting flies to catch gudgeons. III. **SEEK THE TRUE RICHES OF CONTENTMENT AND MANHOOD.** Do you say you are poor and in trouble? Well, you can exhibit the highest qualities in your poverty. When trees are planted they are often protected with a prop; but when each tree has grown a little, the prop is taken away, and it stands firmly amidst the storms. So God would have you who are trees of His planting to stand firmly in your simple manhood. Why do you need the prop of gold, or the fence of possessions? Stand firmly grounded in Gospel righteousness. Men and women, what are you worth? Be possessed of Jesus Christ and His Spirit; be possessed of pardon, holiness, and heaven. May God give us these true riches. Amen. (IV. Birch.)

Ver. 5. **Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom.—Grace for the graceless:**—Bishop Hall thus descants on this—What means this ill-placed love? This unjust mercy. Deal gently with a traitor. Of all traitors, with a son? Of all sons with an Absalom? that graceless darling of so good a father? And all this, for thy sake, whose crown, whose blood, he hunts after? For whose sake must he be pursued, if forborne for thine? Must the cause of the quarrel be the motive of the mercy? Even in the holiest parents nature may be guilty of an injurious tenderness, of a bloody indulgence. But was not this done in type of that immeasurable mercy of the true King and Redeemer of Israel, who prayed for his persecutors. "Father, forgive them. Deal gently with them for my sake." When God sends an affliction to correct his children it is with this charge, "Deal gently with them for my sake"; for He knows our frame.

Ver. 10. **I saw Absalom hanging in an oak.—Glory: Human and Divine:**—I. **A MAN'S GLORY IS HIS DOOM.** For although in a strict sense the custom does not fit with the fashion of the age, there are men to-day who, figuratively speaking, cannot cut their hair without weighing it. In plain language, there are men whose whole attention is directed to the contemplation of their endowments and

the worship of their powers. And, just as with Absalom, these very endowments may lead to their destruction; they may be "in at the death." 1. Now, in the first place, let the proposition be accepted that man must glory. By his very nature he attaches himself to something either external or personal to himself, in which he takes a lively interest and manifests a palpable pride. Every man is, more or less, what is vulgarly called a "Faddist." He takes hold of something, and makes it the centre of his existence, the object of his aims and desires. Or else that something lays hold of him, and keeps him a bondman to its service. It may be personal, or social, or municipal, or political, or religious, but there it is, embedded in the soul, or laying its grasp upon the mind. It comes out on any and every occasion. It is made manifest in the thought and in the life and in the work. And seldom indeed is its power found either to diminish or to die. Or, to vary the figure, each life has its Sun. And here, of course, the moral, the spiritual law, diverges from the natural, which knows of only one centre. Round this sun the life-planet circles, kept in place by its influence, nartaking of its light, and reflecting its radiancy with more or less brilliance, according to what may be called the atmospheric conditions which prevail. Without that sun, the life falls from its place and loses its power. The sun's light may have a greater or a less intensity, its attraction have a greater or a less force. It may range from the lowest to the highest extreme. It may glimmer as a fad, or it may shine brightly as an ideal: but still it is there, necessary to all existence, indispensable to all true life. For we are all of us in a sense mirrors; very often, God knows, scored and imperfect and dull, but in some measure reflecting a borrowed glory, catching rays from the unknown and the infinite, and throwing them at very different angles upon the world. In short, the rays of one life—of various colours as they must oftentimes be—when gathered together will generally be found to have one common source. That is its glory, that is its sun. II. **DEATH LIES IN HUMAN GLORY.** To reason from the particular to the general directly is not consistent with the canons of logic and the forms of thought. Because a thing happens in one case there are no grounds for declaring that it must happen in all. But if it can be shown by the evidence of illustration and instances that there are few, if any, exceptions, then we may, with some show of reason, claim recognition for the rule. What was said a little ago of the unit of humanity, man, applies with equal truth to men in the mass. A living organisation, an aggregate of thinking men, is also a reflection of a glory. Here is a country whose glory has a human source. Two thousand years ago, looking from her seven hills across the subjugated lands Rome stood, the proud and pompous mistress of the world. Along her ringing thoroughfares there rolled the chariot of war. By Tiber's bank the sentry trod his everlasting round. President of the council of her gods sat Jupiter, the king of heaven, to whom the war-shout of the conqueror and the sacrifice of the sword ascended as a sweet savour. Tribe by tribe the inhabitants of the known world passed beneath the yoke, and power became the one object in the national outlook. Raising it to the place of deity, they tendered it the honour and the praise. "Triumph! triumph!" was the cry that rent the Roman air. "Number the captives and measure their land! Ours is the brave heart, ours the mighty arm, and great indeed is our glory!" Ay! two thousand years ago. But the day of downfall was at hand. The oak caught Absalom by the hair. Into collision with the eternal oak of God's will and purpose came the blind and boastful glory of the Empire. "Thus far and no further" was the stern decree. And on swept the steed of History, leaving its Rome behind. 2. Here is a church whose glory, too, has a human source. Its Bible is the morality, the etiquette, the fashion of the age. Its teaching is laid on the basis of what is proper rather than what is right. Its creed runs thus—"I believe in well-cushioned pews, wealthy communicants, and a respectable record of missionary zeal, so long as that calls for no work of mine." Through the pillars and arches of its buildings there floats the breath of sweetest music, and the silver tones of "the snowy-banded, dilettante, delicate-handed priest." And from an æsthetic point all is sweet to hear and fair to see. But where is God in that church? Where is the "glory due unto His name?" Left out of account! It glories in its exclusiveness; in what it calls its culture, its high tone. But high tone and culture of that kind fall foul of the hard judgment of a stern world. The entanglement comes; and on goes religion heedless of its loss while enemies arrive with their darts of disestablishment and popular clamour to thrust into the useless body. In its glory there lies its death. 3. Here is an individual whose

glory too, has a human source. He believes in himself to the exclusion of all else. He takes some attribute or characteristic of his own, and says, "This is what I am by the grace of my own endeavours." He owes allegiance to human nature, to the tendencies of the age, until, like Wolsey, he is forced to the bitter cry, "Had I but served my God with half the zeal I served my king, He would not in mine age have left me naked to mine enemies!" And not infrequently I should say this: "Show me that in which a man prides himself, and I shall know one thing at least that he is not." Let me take you back to the survey of that image of the sun; and let me ask you to observe one such as I have mentioned, whose sun has nothing but an earthly effulgence and a human light; who circles, for example, about pride, or riches, or merely worldly wisdom; who is content to live in the light of these, and to take the glory of his life from them. And there you have the most terrible of all spectacles, the most ghastly of all weird pictures—a heart without God. A world without its sun! A heart without God! A heart with nothing but its own cherished glory! And that very pride, these very riches, that very worldly wisdom brings him at last under the power of God. On goes eternity, and the wretched man is left behind to realise the truth of these awful words, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." III. LIFE LIES IN DIVINE GLORY. It is a far cry from the Jewish prince to the Gentile preacher, but pass with me to St. Paul. A man "of like passions with you," he, too, must glory in something; nor, humanly speaking, had he far to seek for a cause. "If I must glory," he says, "if I must have my one life-support, if I must look somewhere for a spiritual dynamic—then God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Ah! there he finds the proper source, the real centre, the bright sun. From over Calvary's hill there steal the roseate rays of the Sun of Righteousness—and these he seeks to reflect. To glory in a cross—a cross! the badge of infamy—the stamp of shame! Now I see that St. Paul is in the right, that he knows whom he has believed. For in that cross I find the earnest of life eternal and undying love; through that cross I feel the power of God and the wisdom of God; from that cross I see a light that streams across the desert of life. Think of what it typifies and teaches; think of all which led up to it, and all to which it leads, and say, has it not glory sufficient for us to-day? It speaks of a self-renunciation; of a sacrifice solemn and significant, which, while it can never in itself be repeated, may still, thank God, be copied; and what though there be many a shortcoming and many a fault? Lay yourself down before it in heroic martyrdom: cast away the old, dull self: giving is getting with Jesus; and getting with Him is glory. Make it the centre of your spiritual existence; make your life a reflection of Him who gives it at once its value and its power: and you can say to the worldling, in full assurance of faith—"Death worketh in you; but life in us." (*R. Barclay, M.A.*) *The fallen prince*.—I. ABSALOM WAS THE BELOVED CHILD OF HIS PARENTS. Exactly why he was the favourite son cannot, perhaps, be decided. All David's children were beautiful in person, though Absalom seems to have excelled them all in personal grace. It has been suggested that his mother was a queen, and so he seemed more royal than the rest of the princes. II. ABSALOM WAS THE HOPE OF A PARTY IN THE NATION. The country, in his day, was unsettled. Judah had lost the supremacy it had gained during David's reign in Hebron, and was restless and jealous. David's neglects were telling on the country, producing discontent. And one great party was looking to Absalom, the affable and kingly son. By his blandishment he stole the hearts of the people, and, on the first favourable opportunity, the people bore him, with a sudden impulse, to the royal throne. III. ABSALOM BORE SOME OF THE PENALTY OF HIS FATHER'S SINS. For the Divine penalties on transgressions come in part by consequences, which are sure to reach beyond the transgressor, and he is punished and wounded in the sufferings of others, often of those nearest and dearest to him. Absalom bore some of the penalty of David's sin by his wrong-doing. IV. AND ABSALOM MET WITH A TRAGIC END. A hasty ride through the woods; an overhanging bough; three smittings of the darts; rude hackings of the young men's swords; and a grave in a pit. (*R. Tuck, B.A.*) *The circumstances of Absalom's death*.—As the ruined gambler for a crown rode recklessly on in his fear, he was swept out of the saddle by being caught by the low, spreading branches of a great terebinth tree, and the startled mule galloping away, was left hanging there, unable to lift his arms so as to haul himself up. It is from Josephus that we get the statement that Absalom was caught by his hair, which is probable enough, but the lesson does not de-

scribe how he was entangled. Perhaps his head was jammed between the forks of some great branch. At all events, there he dangled, half throttled, and utterly incapable of releasing himself. There is something of horror and ghastliness in so strange a fate, as if this criminal was too bad to die by a common death. But there is a deeper lesson in that figure swinging there, with his gay clothing all disordered. God has plenty of instruments to punish evil-doers. "Thousands at his bidding wait." There is no need for a miracle. He works through the natural operations of his creation. So all things are against the man who is against God, even as all work together for good to those who love Him, and, when He wills, the leafy beauty of the great tree shall be the gallows for the rebel Absalom. "The stars in their courses fought against Sisera." A frightened mule and an unconscious tree bring Absalom to his death. There are no accidents in the great scheme of things. God's foes have foes in every bush and every beast. (*A. MacLaren, D.D.*) *Caught in the maelstrom of vanity and pride*:—The "Road to Ruin," taken by Absalom, may be illustrated by what is known of the Maelstrom, a famous whirlpool off the coast of Norway. The immense body of water forming it extends, in a circle, about thirteen miles in circumference. A great rock stands in the midst thereof, against which the tide, when ebbing, beats with inconceivable fury, instantly swallowing up all things coming within the sphere of its violence. No dexterity of steering or strength of rowing on the mariner's part can accomplish his escape. The most experienced sailor at the helm finds his ship beginning to move in a direction opposite to his efforts and intentions; the motion at first is slow and nearly imperceptible, but becomes every moment more rapid; the vessel goes round in circles, narrowing each time, until, dashed against the central rock, it is lost with all on board. Thus was Absalom borne onward in the ever-narrowing circle of vanity, self-indulgence, and cruel treachery, until he perished in the Maelstrom of Divine Retribution.

Ver. 18. Now Absalom in his life-time had taken and reared up for himself a pillar.—*An infidel at the grave of Absalom*:—Dr. Eremete Pierrotti, a French scientist, architect, and engineer, when an infidel, journeyed through Palestine with the avowed intention of disproving the truth of the Bible. Visiting the heap of stones over Absalom's grave, an Arab woman came by with her little child, which she held by the hand. In passing, she threw a stone upon the heap marking the tomb of Absalom, and bade the child do the same. "What do you do that for?" "Because it was the grave of a wicked son who disobeyed his father." "And who was he?" "The son of David," she replied. The professor started as if a blow had struck him. Here was an Arab woman, a Mahomedan, who probably had never seen a copy of the Scriptures, and could not read a word of them; yet she held these ancient facts, and was teaching her child to fling a stone at the monument called by the name of a son who rebelled against his father. Dr. Pierrotti, Bible in hand, turned to the story of Absalom, and as he read it a new light shone on him. This was the first of many convictions which so wrought upon him that at length he embraced the faith he once attempted to destroy, and devoted his life to the proof and illustration of the sacred Scriptures. *Monuments*:—"The man who deserves a monument never needs one, and the man who needs one never deserves it."

Ver. 29. Is the young man Absalom safe?—*When a young man is insecure*:—Beginning from the outside circle, and finding our way to the centre, I am going to recount some of the dangers of young men. 1. "Is the young man safe?" No, certainly not; if he drinks. The cold, stingy, selfish being, it leaves untouched; but, if there is a youth more ardent, warm-hearted, high-spirited than the rest it marks him out for its prey. The young man, we shall suppose, has everything to recommend him. Good talents; pleasing address; excellent penmanship; comes from a good home; brings capital testimonials; but it is whispered, "he drinks!" That is enough. He is not "safe." All his other advantages will not secure him. 2. "Is the young man safe?" No; if he gambles. It was only lately that a well-known magistrate said: "I wish that the clerks in mercantile houses of London would come to this court, and see what I see, and hear what I hear. This is only one of a multitude of cases where prisoners in your position have confessed that their robberies are entirely due to betting. I regard it as a curse to the country; because I see how young men are lured until they fall into a state of misery and wretchedness." 3. "Is the young man safe?"

No; if he keeps bad company. Solomon wrote many true things, but he never wrote a truer than this: "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but the companion of fools shall be destroyed." I have seen it again and again. I have seen as fine a fellow as I would ever wish to grasp by the hand, by some evil chance thrown into acquaintanceship with a loose, unprincipled character; and, from the day the intimacy began, there has been a steady and sure degeneracy. 4 "Is the young man safe?" No! if he is idle. I am thankful to say, there are not many of you exposed to that danger. What a sight, to be sure, the great inlets to the city present any week-day morning about ten o'clock! What with the rattling of wheels on the causeway, the shuffling of feet on the pavement, and the humming of innumerable voices, the hive seems as busy as it can be. But, haven't you noticed, just once in a while, a man slouching along carelessly about, his hands in his pockets and, vacancy in his eyes? That's the man the devil thinks he will have an easy job with. 5. "Is the young man safe?" No; if there is anything in his business inconsistent with the strictest integrity. Don't talk of being "safe," if you have every day to make a compromise with conscience, and smooth things over the best way you can. I am grieved to say, the mercantile conscience at the present day is not very sensitive. Are there not many houses of business where some of the clerks or assistants might say, "I could tell some things if I would, but I won't. It's not all straight and above-board. Customers don't get all for their money they think they are getting." Are there not things you have to wink at, if you would keep your situation, and get a rise by-and-by? Well, let me assure you of this—that, in the six thousand years of past human history, there has never been so much as one occasion when it was either a man's duty, or his real interest to sin against God. It can never be right to do wrong. 6. "Is the young man safe?" No; if he does not make conscience of keeping the Sabbath-day. Apart from our spiritual or highest nature, man needs, his system demands, the rest of the Sabbath. He is not "safe" without it. A celebrated merchant declared, "I should have been a maniac long ago, but for the Sabbath. Really, you are not "safe" without it. The brain is not safe; the intellect is not safe; the nerves—the muscles—the bones—the moral nature—the immortal soul. 7. "Is the young man safe?" No; if he neglects his private devotions. What is that that Christ says? "Enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father, which is in secret." The man who knows nothing of the closed door, and the bended knee, and the earnest breathing up to heaven, is no Christian; put that down for certain. Ah! you may have a nice room, pleasant look-out, clean-curtained windows, cheerful picture or two on the walls; tidy bookshelf, with just a select dozen or two instructive volumes; photographic album, which you often look at, with the faces of those you love most on earth; soft and comfortable pillow to lay your head upon; but—if that is all—O, there is a terrible want there. Can you not point me to the Bible which you nightly study, to the chair at which you daily bend, as you pour out your heart to God? If you can't, let me tell you, you are not "safe." No man can fight life's battle successfully, and reach heaven in the end, who doesn't endeavour to spend a little while every day alone with God. Make conscience-work of it. Make a point (as McCheyne used to say) of seeing God's face the first in the morning and the last at night. (*Thain Davidson, D.D.*) *A young man's safety*:—I. THE QUESTION OF THE TEXT IS A MOST SUGGESTIVE ONE. 1. Is the young man safe physically. Is his health safe? 2. Is the young man safe intellectually? What is the state of his mind? Have his powers of thought been developed, or dwarfed and stunted? Is he well informed? Is he capable of coming to a correct conclusion concerning any ordinary matter which may be brought before him? Is his mind growing? without which there can be no mental life. 3. Is the young man safe socially? Is his position a good one? Is it likely to lead to a competency, or to sustain him respectably and supply his various wants. Is he safe as regards his knowledge of his trade. Is he a skilful, intelligent mechanic: or a judicious and successful man of business? These are inquiries which should not be despised. Then, are his companions well chosen? Are they likely to do him good? Are they on the Lord's side? What about that nearest of all relations, that dearest of all friends? Has he selected his future wife? If so, has he made a safe venture? Will she prove a true helpmeet to him? Will she sustain him in all his struggles, rejoice with him in his success, weep with him in his trials? Will she make his home, however humble or however splendid it may be, the dearest, sweetest spot in all the earth to him?

Will she help him in the path to heaven, or sink him down to hell? 4. Is the young man safe spiritually? In a word, is his soul safe? If he were now to sink in death, what would be his eternal destiny? Has he been accepted and forgiven through the Beloved One? Is his soul the temple of the Holy Spirit? Is life to him Christ? Is his daily experience meetening him for the brighter and better world? Has he determined to give up all things (if necessary) that he may live in Christ and be found in Him? Is he striving to live a divine life among sinful men? Is he endeavouring to put down sin in his body, and to make all his members the servants of righteousness? If not, he is not safe. II. THE QUESTION OF THE TEXT IS A VERY PRACTICAL ONE. 1. The first professes large things. He says he is fond of investigating truth, but he will not subscribe to any creed. He will not join any sect, lest his powers of thought should be weakened by contact with men of narrow minds. He will think for himself, and doubtless all will be well at last. Not that he is prepared to accept the dogmas (this is his favourite term) of revealed religion. These may do for the very aged and for children, but not for him. He must have something more reasonable, and more intellectual—something that will expand and exalt his soul. This poor young man may soon be dismissed. He is filled with pride, the condemnation of the devil. He has not yet learnt that before he can enter the kingdom of heaven he must become as a little child. He has no true conception of sin. The idea of the atonement never enters his brain. He either assumes that he is perfectly holy, or God is all merciful, and, therefore, will not bring his venial faults in the judgment against him. Ah, what a mistake is all this! 2. The second is a young man of a totally different order. He is the son of pious parents. He has not a word to say against the gospel, he admits the vast importance of personal religion. He has often been under the influence of the truth, but, alas, he makes no progress heavenward. He grants all you demand, but he does not act upon his concessions. And why? It is his fond hope that after his youthful days are past he will have a more favourable opportunity for doing so than he now possesses. He thinks that the claims of religion and of business would not, in his case, work harmoniously. He, therefore, waits, although persuaded. He postpones the great work of seeking the Lord, although convinced of its last importance. He hopes to die the death of the righteous, but he is not prepared to live his life. He trusts he will reach heaven, but he cannot as yet give up earth. Is this young man safe? Alas, no! He is turned aside by a deceived heart. The devil is leading him captive at his will. 3. The third young man resembles in some points both the second and the first. He is intelligent and studious. He has also been brought under the power of the world to come. He does not, however, satisfy his conscience by saying, "Go thy way for this time, and when I have a convenient season I will send for thee." On the other hand, he endeavours to obtain peace by a diligent observance of the precepts of the law. As far as outward deportment goes, he is moral, amiable, loving, and kind. His friends unite in pronouncing him a most unexceptionable personage. His praises frequently form the burden of their conversation. They cannot understand why one so very young should be so very scrupulous. He must be right. He must be safe. Let us, however, test him by the Word of God. Have you not read of a young man who came to Jesus saying, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? Here we have a type of the class, one of which I have brought before you. And can we pronounce him safe? Far from it. His morality will not bear the Divine scrutiny. His works, performed as they are in a self-righteous spirit, are an abomination before God. 4. The fourth young man stands before us. Is he safe? Listen. Three years ago he had a dangerous illness. For some time his life trembled in the balance. Brought face to face with death, he felt that he was not prepared for its stroke. Though very young the thought of eternity filled him with terror. The sins of his youth weighed him down. Should he die he would be lost for ever. At this juncture a pious and judicious friend visited him and spoke of the great truths of salvation. The young man listened with eagerness to his description of the death of Jesus. Not that what he now heard was wholly new to him. He had heard it from his mother, as in early childhood he sat upon her knee. He had heard it from his Sabbath school teacher, he had heard it also from his father, as he knelt by his dying bed, to receive his last benediction; but now, it came to him with new and peculiar power. Thoughts and feelings were awakened which had before found no place in his bosom. Was there mercy

for him? Would Jesus receive, forgive, and bless him? He would read the Gospel and see for himself. He did so, and before many days had gone by, he cried to Him who is able to save to the very uttermost, "Lord, save me, or I perish." His earnest supplication was not in vain. The Saviour was exceedingly gracious to him at the voice of his cry. The burden of his sin was taken away. The peace of God filled his soul. He felt that from henceforth he was the Lord's. Through the good providence of God his life was spared, and since his recovery he has carried out the resolutions which he made upon his sick bed. Resting upon Jesus himself, he has endeavoured to induce others to do the same, and not a few of his former companions can testify that his efforts have not been made in vain. Need I say that this young man is safe. No fears can be entertained on his account. He is safe because he is in Christ. III. THE QUESTION OF THE TEXT IS A VERY URGENT ONE. There are some inquiries which we may postpone for a season without loss. It is not essential to our well-being that we should answer them at once. The one before us is, however, of a very different character. "Is the young man safe?" This is the most important question to which your attention can be directed; it demands and deserves your instant consideration—let me therefore press it upon you—*young men, are you safe?* Are the Saviour's arms around and beneath you? Are you in the enjoyment of his love? 1. Your danger makes this question a very urgent one. 2. The greatness of the interest at stake makes this an urgent question. It may be that you have not realized your capacity. You do not know your value. Think what you may become even on earth. You may be a useful member of society—the delight, the joy, the blessing of your social circle. It is also in your power to do much for Jesus. You can so labour that many will rise up to call you blessed. 3. The necessities of the world make this an urgent question. Young men are wanted in every department of Christian agency. The cry is, everywhere, "Give us men; give us young men." They are wanted in the Sabbath school. They are wanted in the mission field abroad. Young men, you live in important times. You are wanted. The church wants you. Christ wants you. Bending from his throne he says, "Who will go for us?" Will you not reply, "Here am I, send me." Finally, whether we are old or young, let us gather around the cross; let us bow at the feet of Jesus. That is the most blessed spot in the universe. There is safety there! (*H. B. Ingram.*) *An anxious enquiry for a beloved son:*—How many there are at this present moment who have, no doubt, other very weighty businesses, but whose one only thought just now is, "Is the young man safe? Is my son safe? Is my father safe? Is my wife safe?" A vessel has gone down in the river with hundreds on board, and weeping friends are going hither and thither from place to place, hoping and yet fearing to identify the corpse of some beloved one; longing to find one who has not been heard of since the fatal hour, and trembling all the while lest they should find him or her among the bodies which have been drawn from the cold stream. The one thought uppermost with scores to-night is this one—"Is my beloved one safe?" Do you blame them? They are neglecting business, and forsaking their daily toil, but do you blame them? A hundred weighty things are forgotten in the one eager enquiry: do you, can you, blame them? Assuredly not. It is natural, and it is, therefore, I think, but right. I. THE QUESTION OF ANXIETY—"Is the young man Absalom safe?" 1. And the first remark is, it is a question asked by a father concerning his son. "Is he safe?" 2. This was a question asked about a son who had left his father's house. "Is the young man Absalom safe?" 3. It is the question of a father about his rebellious son. 4. The question of a parent concerning a son who, if he were not safe, but dead, was certainly in a very dreadful plight. "Is the young man Absalom safe?" 5. This was a question, alas! which was asked by a father about a son who was really dead at the time when the question was asked. It was late in the day to enquire for Absalom's safety; for it was all over with that rebellious son. II. You have had the question; we are now to speak upon some occasions when THAT QUESTION WOULD VERY NATURALLY BE USED. "Is the young man Absalom safe?" 1. The question would be used, of course, in times, like the present, in reference to this mortal life. When a fearful calamity has swept away hundreds at a stroke such an enquiry is on every lip. 2. Times of disease, also, raise such enquiries. Well do I recollect some four-and-twenty years ago, when first I came to London, it was my painful duty to go, not only by day, but by night, from house to house where the cholera was raging; and almost every time I met the beloved friends at Park Street it was my sorrow to

hear it said, "Mr. So-and-so is dead. Mistress A. or B. is gone," till I sickened myself from very grief. It was then most natural that each one should say concerning his relative at a little distance, "Is he still alive? Is he still safe?"

3. But sometimes we have to ask this question about friends and children, with regard to their eternal life. They are dead, and we are fearful that they did not die in Christ, and therefore we enquire, "Is the young man Absalom safe?"

4. "Is the young man Absalom safe?" is a more practical question when we put it about young people and old people, when they are still alive, and we are anxious about their spiritual condition. "Is the young man Absalom safe?" That is to say, is he really safe for the future—for this world and for the world to come? III. The third point is to be **THE ANSWERS WHICH WE HAVE TO GIVE TO THIS QUESTION**—"Is the young man Absalom safe?" This question has often been sent up by friends from the country about their lads who have come to London—"Is my boy Harry safe? Is my son John safe?" Answer, sometimes: "No, no. He is not safe. We are sorry to say that he is in great danger." I will tell you when we know he is not safe. 1. He is not safe if, like Absalom, he is at enmity with his father. Oh, no. 2. "Is the young man safe?" Well, no. We have seen him lately in bad company. He has associated with other young men who are of loose morals. 3. And he is not safe, because he has taken to indulge in expensive habits. "Absalom prepared him," it is said, "chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him." This extravagance was a sign of evil. A youth who lavishes money upon needless luxuries is not safe. 4. Another thing. The young man Absalom is not safe, as you may see, if you look at his personal appearance. We read, "But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty." Let young men and women dress according to their stations; we are not condemning them for that. I recollect Mr. Jay saying, "If you ladies will tell me your income to a penny, I will tell you how many ribbons you may wear to a yard;" and I think that I might venture to say the same. 5. And we are sure the young man Absalom is not safe, when he has begun to be vicious. You recollect what Absalom did. 6. "Is the young man Absalom safe?" No, David, he is not, for the last time we saw him he was in a battle, and the people were dying all around him, and therefore he is not safe. How can he be safe where others fall? Yes, and I saw the young man come out of a low place of amusement late one night, and I thought, "No, the young man Absalom is not safe there, for many perish there." I heard of his betting at the races, and I thought, "The young man Absalom is not safe, for multitudes are ruined there." I saw him in loose company one evening, and I said, "No, the young man Absalom is not safe: he is surrounded by those who hunt for the precious life." It is never safe for us to be where other people fall; because if they perish, why should not we? 7. Now, the young man is here to-night who will answer to the next description. He is a very nice young fellow. He is a great hearer and lover of the gospel word, but he is not decided. He has never taken his stand with God's people, confessing Christ as his Lord. Is the young man safe? Oh, no. He is very hopeful, God bless him! We will pray him into safety if we can; but he is not safe yet. Those people who were almost saved from the wreck of the Princess Alice were drowned; and those persons who are almost saved from sin are still lost. If you are almost alive you are dead. 8. A pleasant task remains, I will now answer that question with a happy "Yes." Yes, the young man Absalom is safe. Why? (1.) Well, first, because he is a believer in Christ. (2.) The young man is saved, for he loves the gospel. He will not go to hear anything but the gospel. (3.) I know he is safe, for he is very humble. He is not perfect yet: he does not say that he is, nor boast of his attainments. He does not want to be the forehorse of the team, he is willing to be placed anywhere so that he can be useful. Moreover, he is very diffident of himself. He is afraid sometimes to put one foot before another for fear he should take a wrong step. He is always going on his knees to ask for direction; he waits upon God for guidance, and does not dare to do anything without the direction of the word and the Spirit. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Absalom: Spiritual insecurity*:—Absalom, like every man in to-day's battle, was in danger. He was not merely running risk in battle, but he had other risks. Of the chances of battle only his father thought, but the young man was in danger from other things. His own vanity was a danger. See how proud he was of those locks of his. See how he yielded to the vanity of thinking himself fit to sway a sceptre; and yet he was more fitted to handle brazen mirrors.

See how to vanity was added another danger, ambition—the sin by which the angels fell. This formed the base of his character. Through this he even flattered those whom he wished to win to his purposes. If any were drunken he could quaff wine with them; if profane he could swear with them; if iustful he could match the worst in sensual suggestions. See further, how he took bad advice from evil associates. See, too, how a fancied inviolability endangered him. He had his greatest foes within. His danger was in proportion to the badness of his character—and we shall hardly find a worse in the whole Bible. And these risks are for all in the battle of life. It is a hand to hand struggle. We know not all the risks, for we cannot tell to what this life leads. We know not what consequences may follow on neglect or defeat, and what on triumph. We know we have to resist sin. It is sufficient for us to know that it must be conquered, or that it will ruin us. Sin will assume various forms, will assault now in solid phalanx, now single-handed and alone from behind some shelter. It does not use the same weapons with all. With one it tries vanity, with another ambition, with another indolence, or lying, or greed, and with another sensuality, or inebriety. Some it allures into vicious company, others it destroys by leading to the indulgence of a selfish isolation, a spirit that will let none know their plans, share their pleasures or possessions—a spirit that nourishes a self-complacency and self-righteousness—a spirit that perhaps laughs at spiritual struggles, and seeks to dissipate the most sacred and treasured truths by a bitter sneer. Sin is a treacherous foe. A man must beware of thinking that because he has no temptation to steal, to swear, to waste money, to rejoice in lewd company, to frequent places of bad repute, and to imbibe strong liquors with the revellers, that, therefore, he is free from danger. He may be in danger, from his thoughts when he sits alone, or when he wanders alone in the streets; for as a young man said, "There is no place of danger equal to the streets of a great city after dark." This witness is true. 2. The anxiety of David for that young man Absalom was as keen as his love was unquenchable. It is remarkable that the king did not cast off all care for one who was so unworthy. Though a king, he was a father. Absalom's guilt was deep, but his father's love was deeper. (1.) David loved Absalom because he was his son. The ties of blood are strong. (2.) The king not only loved but made every excuse possible for his erring son. He tried to believe that Absalom was only the tool of one more skilful and bitter, Abithophel. His son was a willing tool. Still it was like David to admit every possible exoneration of Absalom's guilt. And was he better than our Father? Does not God make every excuse for us? The cry of Jesus on the Cross, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do," is a revelation of the heart of God. (3.) David was anxious for his son because he knew something of the danger of being cut off in iniquity. The revelation to him was meagre, but enough. He knew that in the death of the sinner there was no hope. To the Cross, then. There the stain of ingratitude can be removed, there the look of Christ can melt the heart, there the peace of Christ can free the soul, there the power of Christ can sustain the soul, there can be given strength to resist in life's battle, there the mystery of life can be solved, and the fret of life broken. There we shall learn to avoid tampering with all sin. (*F. Hastings.*) *The four great passes*:—I propose to speak about the safety of young men. I. The first great pass in a young man's life when he needs Divine help is **WHEN HE CHOOSES HIS OCCUPATION OR PROFESSION**. It is a serious moment when a young man gets through with his schooling, and perhaps leaves his father's house, and says: "Now, what shall I be?" Mechanism opens before him a score of trades, and professional life opens before him seven or eight callings. He must choose between these, and must choose aright, for if he make a mistake here he is gone. I have a friend who started life in merchandise. Then he went into the medical profession. After awhile he crossed over into specific surgery. Then he entered the ministry. Then he became a soldier in the army. After that he entered the ministry again, and is now a surgeon. O! if he had only had God at the start to tell him what to do. II. The second great pass in life when a young man wants Divine direction is **WHEN HE ESTABLISHES HIS OWN HOUSEHOLD**. When a man builds his earthly home, he decides his eternity. I know that affiancing is usually looked upon as something to be merry over, instead of something to be prayed about; but what step is there fraught with such weal or woe? Is it not strange that an affair charged with such temporal and eternal import should depend on a whim or a glance? I do not think I put the case too strongly when I say that when

a young man marries he marries for heaven or hell! If he brings into his household the right kind of influences, the home will be elevated and upward in its impulses. If he bring the wrong kind of influences into his house he will go down—he must go down. A minister of the Gospel came into a home where there was great poverty and destitution, and it was generally supposed that the poverty came from the fact that these people had married too early; and after the minister had looked around upon the utter want and destitution, and had rehearsed the misfortunes that had come upon the household, he turned to the poor man and said: "Don't you now regret your early marriage? Don't you think it was your great mistake in life?" And the man halted for a moment, and his eyes filled up with tears, and he looked up at his poorly-clad wife and said: "No, sir; she has been the same to me all through!"

III. The third great pass in life in which a young man wants religion is **IN THE TIME OF HIS FIRST SUCCESS**. You say: "Here I have money now of my own. What shall I do with it? What investments shall I make? What house shall I buy? What wardrobe shall I create? What shall I get? What charities, what philanthropies, shall I favour?" That is the crisis where thousands of men upset. Some of them rush into dissipations. A man wants the grace of Christ at that crisis to keep him rightly balanced.

IV. The fourth great pass in a young man's life when he needs the grace of God is **WHEN HE COMES TO HIS FIRST SORROW**. It is preposterous for us to launch young men on life with the idea that they are going to have it smooth all the way. There will be storms. You want extra cordage. I know when our last war was over, some people came back without a scratch or a scar, but that is not so in the great battle of life: we get wounded in the hands, and wounded in the feet, and wounded in the head, and wounded in the heart. No man escapes. But now, what are you going to do with your first sorrow? The way you get through your first sorrow will decide whether you can endure the other sorrows of life. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *The death of Absalom*:—Let us gather up some of the lessons of this narrative:—I. **GOD'S RESTRAINING AND OVER-RULING HAND AMID THE PLANS OF WICKED MEN**. Absalom was free to act upon the sagacious (albeit cruelly unfilial) advice of Ahithophel; but he rejected it. He was free to reject the plausible advice of Hushai; but he chose to act upon it. "For the Lord had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom." But the Lord's appointment worked not counter to, but through, the free choice of Absalom. Human freedom is a fact of individual consciousness. We know we are free, and yet we also know, from the Scriptures of truth and the teachings of history, that, in spite of all opposition, "the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." Through the very folly and sin of men God is working out His own great, pure purpose, and yet man is none the less guilty.

II. **WOMEN'S WORK IN DAVID'S PRESERVATION**. A female servant—a woman can go unsuspected to En-rogel, the Fuller's well—"went and told them." She was a faithful messenger; quickly, silently went and returned, and kept to herself the matter. Presently the young men were seen, suspected, and pursued by Absalom's servants: tracked to the man's house in Bahurim, where in a dry well they were hiding, and where, but for the woman of the house, they had doubtless been detected. She "took and spread a covering over the well's mouth, and spread ground corn thereon; and the thing was not known." And with evasive answer she baffled and sent away the pursuers. Had it been otherwise in the conduct of these women, it had been doubtless greatly otherwise with David's safety. Women have played no unimportant part in the needed revolutions of nations; and, more valuable still, in the extension of Christ's kingdom. They ministered to the Lord of their substance during His life on earth. When men were faithless they were faithful to Him. In all time since they, loyal to His throne, have been hastening His kingdom. How many are doing it to-day! Women, of whom the world knows little if anything; mothers among their children; servants at their lowly toil; within the narrow walls of home, or but a little way beyond them, found faithful, and so by every pure true word, every kindly deed, speeding the universal answer to their daily prayer, "Thy Kingdom come!"

III. **THE END OF WOUNDED PRIDE**. That Ahithophel was a sagacious man is clear. That he was a proud man is equally clear. But when preference was given to Hushai's advice his pride was cut to the quick. So home went the angry, bitter man. He "put his household in order," and then, the first of recorded suicides, "hanged himself." Stupendous folly to think more of the "order" of his household—leaving all his affairs carefully arranged

—than of the safety of his soul. Unbidden, his sins upon him, he rushed into the presence of his Maker. "Pride goeth before destruction"—in his case self-destruction. It must be destroyed if the soul is to live. IV. **THE DOOM OF UNFILIAL INGRATITUDE AND REBELLION.** Sudden, irresistible, as bolt from clear skies, came his doom. Such a doom! What thoughts must have thronged him in his last awful moments! Alas for the young man Absalom! Let young men and women remember that punishment for disobedience to parents is inevitable. Many to-day are bearing it in silent, unutterable remorse. Would that they could recall the dead! Would that in some little way, by present love and tenderness, they could show repentance for the unfilial past! But the dead come no more! V. **HOW PARENTAL LOVE APPEARS IN PARENTAL ANXIETY AND SORROW!** The heart of David is made bare to us in this narrative. It is all tenderness towards Absalom. He sees him in the light of many a beautiful memory. The child Absalom! The youth! The faultless loveliness of form! The luxuriant and splendid locks that crowned him! The fond words when the young prince had nestled in his arms! It all lives to David. His one anxiety is for Absalom's safety. Victory will be blurred into defeat if he should perish. All day long waits the king for the battle-news; all the news shrunken to this, "What, what of Absalom?" And when the news is known, the king creeps out of sight of men, weeping, weeping as he goes, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" Oh! the sad, sad cry! Heard, alas! to-day, where homes mourn over the lost, and parents' hearts break.

There is no far nor near,
There is neither there nor here,
There is neither soon nor late,
In that Chamber over the Gate,
Nor any long ago
To that cry of human woe,
O Absalom, my son!

From the ages that are past
The voice comes like a blast,
Over seas that wreck and drown,
Over tumult of traffic and town;
And from ages yet to be
Come the echoes back to me,
O Absalom, my son!

Somewhere at every hour,
The watchman on the tower
Looks forth, and sees the fleet
Approach of the hurrying feet
Of messengers, that bear
The tidings of despair.
O Absalom, my son!

But David's voice dies into silence. We hear another—a greater—the greatest of all. "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." (*G. J. Coster.*) *Is the young man safe?*—There may be very much put together in a small space. We have in this Book a library in a volume; and we have in this one sentence a world of meaning. Let us endeavour to realise this. "Safe!" This is a very short word, soon spoken; but how much solemn meaning is there in that one word! When is the young man safe? 1. Not while he is in sin; not, while, like the unhappy Absalom, any sin has dominion over him; not while the corruption of nature is unsubdued and unconquered; not while religion is an appearance, and if not, as with Absalom, an actor's mask, yet only an empty name, and a dead formality. (1.) Do generous feelings make him safe? The lost Absalom had those feelings. (2.) Do ability and talent make the young man safe? Absalom clearly had these! He climbed to power by the exercise of the very same talents which have placed many in our own times and many in all times in the high places of the State; for the language of the aspirant to power is often Absalom's very words—"Oh! that I were made judge;" "see what I would do if I were in power." Do religious education and training make

the young man safe? David's son had doubtless these. He who himself so "loved the habitation of God's house and the place where His honour dwelt," would not fail to take his children there, and try to make them also love it. (4.) Do power, riches, high rank, make the young man safe? Absalom had all these; yet power only created the thirst for more power; the prince's coronet made him long for the king's crown; the rank he had raised him so near to what he wished to have, that he grasped at it, and fell off the stage into hopeless ruin. (4.) Do health, strength, or beauty make the young man safe? They were instruments to win admiration, to conciliate favour; but because their unhappy possessor was himself wrong, all these were only instruments of evil, and the beautiful mass of his curling ringlets only furnished a hangman's rope to execute their condemned possessor. 2. What does make the young man safe? Is it to be never tempted? If this be safety, then who is safe? We may flee from the gay and busy world, we may hide ourselves in the secluded cave, we may shut ourselves in the lonely cloister. Will there be no temptation there? Does memory cease there? Does busy fancy leave off painting her airy pictures there? Does the corrupt heart not go with us into that seclusion? "I have been dancing at Rome," said one of old, "when I was shut up in my cave in the wilderness." Do barred doors shut out the spirit that tempts man? or can man leave behind him that nature which the prince of this world, when he comes, finds as tinder to catch his sparks, as rotten wood for his fiery darts to lodge in? If that man only is "safe" who is out of the reach of temptation, then none is safe at all, for all are tempted. Is any one "safe," then? Yes. Look at this young man. He is young; life is bursting upon him; and who knows not the peculiar freshness of opening life? The bright flowers of the early spring, the warm fresh breeze loaded with the sweetness of the hawthorn, the fresh green grass, like a springing carpet under his elastic tread, the glorious sea of blue above, with its floating isles of cloud, give sensations of joy as intense, and pleasure as keen to him as to any others. But he sees more than some in these sights, and he hears more than others in these sounds. He sees the Maker in His works; he reads something of the skill that planned, the Power that executed, the perpetual Presence that works in all the things around. And he sees more. He sees a Father's love at every turn, strewing His children's path with love and blessing. Thus, then, we can answer the questions—What it is to be safe? and, when alone can we say that the young man is safe? The Scripture answers, by telling us that then and then only is the young or the old safe, when God has made the heart of man His own habitation by the Spirit, and when Satan, and the world, and the flesh have not to contend with poor weak, frail man, but with man aided, and assisted, and governed by the eternal God. (*W. W. Champneys, M.A.*)

To young man:—This is the question of the home. Like David, every parent should be on the watch-tower of solicitude, to see whether it is "well with the child." Parents ought to watch how their children fight life's battle, for they have many foes and a hard conflict. This question of parental love asked in due season will help and may save them: "Is the young man safe?" It is also the question of the Church. Upon her battlements must be the watchtower, from which words of warning should be uttered. The paths of youth are slippery. A young man safe at thirty is, as a rule, safe for ever. All young men need the grace of God and the wise counsel of their elders. Paul says, "Young men exhort to be soberminded." I. IS HE SAFE AS TO HIS TRAINING? A question for home and school. Parents are the world's rulers. Children are imitators, living phonographs. What they see and hear they reproduce. They will live the home life over again in the habits and characters formed there. As to character, in a life of eighty years, the first twenty form the bigger half. The first colours in the mind of a child are eternal. What means the proverb, "Once a man, twice a child?" Not the weakness of old age only, but that as the outward man perishes we return to the scenes of childhood. II. IS HE SAFE AS TO HIS CALLING? Is he suited to his calling? If not, he cannot be safe. He is where he ought not to be; and if so, what chance has he for happiness or success? What irreparable wrong is wrought when parents insist on their son following trades or professions wholly distasteful to them! Nature's providence gives most men a genius for doing certain things easily and well. We should follow those lines of least resistance. A gifted youth was tied to a trade he loathed. He had to follow life on these lines of greatest resistance, and with a sad result. That life was wrecked through harsh and unwise treatment at the outset. Assistants like young

Adam Clarke have been asked to become partakers of their masters' sins and to put their hands to evil. If all practised the golden rule, trade and commerce would soon pass out of the region of questionable methods. John Wesley used to tell his helpers, "Be ashamed of nothing but sin; no, not of cleaning your own shoes, when necessary." III. IS HE SAFE AS TO HIS COMPANIONS? Absalom was not. He mixed with a set of vain and worthless flatterers, who made him as bad as themselves. He listened to them until they fed his ambition and puffed him up. A youth is known by the company he keeps. Woe be to the unwary who are beguiled by evil companions! Their steps lead to the gates of hell. Dr. Stalker says there are two methods of meeting temptation: one the method of restraint, the other that of counter-attraction. And, like Ulysses, who was tied to the mast of his ship and saved himself from the sirens, so there is many a cord by which young men may secure themselves. Love of home, of church, of school, and of Christian work, is a silver cord to keep them safe in willing bonds, bound yet free. And as Orpheus destroyed the charm of the inferior music by his superior strains, so there are counter-attractions by seeking which young men may be safe. Instead of evil companions, seek good ones. IV. IS HE SAFE AS TO HIS PLEASURES? He must have them. The bow cannot be always strung. Hobbies and habits make life. It is true, as Mr. Gladstone says, that "change of labour is to a great extent the best form of recreation"; but it must not be always conscious labour. That duty must be lost in the joy. To be always on duty, to be ever hearing the wheels of life's machinery, is to make life a treadmill. Such a youth will lack imagination, enthusiasm, and faith. But do our pleasures recreate? Do they give muscle to body, and force to mind? Do they send us back to our task strong and glad? If so, they are true pleasures. V. IS HE SAFE IN HIS SUCCESS? Some men can endure sorrow, but cannot stand success. In its slippery paths they become giddy and fall. Sorrow and adversity brace them, and they are brave and patient, and play the man; but prosperity—wealth, popularity, influence—enervates, and their strength becomes weakness. When the world smiles, "pride compasseth them about," and soon they fall. Men sometimes fail at the strongest point; like Edinburgh Castle, which was once taken on the rocky side, supposed to be impregnable. VI. IS HE SAFE IN THE HOUR OF DEATH? Alas! Absalom was not. Here was the pathos of David's lament. "My son, would God I had died for thee!" The shafts of death strike young and old. He who can face the grim monster is a man every inch of him. We are only safe in the arms of Jesus. (*Joseph Johns.*) *The safety of the young*:—I. THAT THE YOUNG ARE EXPOSED TO SPECIAL DANGERS. 1. Youth is a time of special susceptibility. While the grown tree will sooner break than bend, the sapling may be trained any way. 2. It is a time of ingenuous trustfulness. Much of the folly of young people may be attributed to their ignorance of the world. They see the flower, and have no suspicion of the serpent that lies concealed under it. No guilt can be greater, no sin more diabolical, than that of him who trades upon the unsuspectingness of innocence. 3. It is a time of special impulsiveness. The young have fresh blood coursing in their veins; and the freshness of their physical being is but a type of that which characterises their whole moral and spiritual nature. 4. It is a time when new thoughts and opinions are most readily received. In a certain sense men naturally grow more conservative as they grow older. The very changableness of youth betokens the readiness with which their minds can be guided into fresh and ennobling trains of thought. The great want of youth is guidance: not restraint, but direction; not stern and repellant commands, so much as counsel. 5. It is the time when life habits are definitely formed. It is then the metal is poured into the mould, and the image stands forth through life with shape of unsightly deformity or graceful beauty. The wax is soft; but will soon harden under the impression of a Divine likeness or of one debased. II. THAT THE SAFETY OF THE YOUNG IS A QUESTION FOR SPECIAL INQUIRY. "Is the young man safe?" A question for—1. Parents. What is the character of the home-influence? Parents must take their choice. They must either make the life and lessons—the love and the pleasures—of home more attractive and winning than those of the street; or they must pass through bitter experiences in the midst of which they need not wonder at the ruin of their sons and daughters. 2. Employers. What is the example in trade life? What are the associations of the workshop and the warehouse? Are not assistants and apprentices too often left as isolated atoms on the surging sea of life? "What care they for the world that cares not for them?" 3. The Church. What is the

Church doing? Are not Young Men's Christian Associations in some sense so many testimonies against the Church on account of neglected duty. 4. Young men themselves. Humanly speaking, there is no help like self-help. Dare to be men—to stand alone. Yet not alone; since Christ waits to take you under His protection. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" (*F. Wagstaff.*) *The dangers of young men*:—When a youth has left his father's house, and gone to mingle with the world, to be exposed to its storms, its temptations, its deceitful fascinations, it is just thus that his anxious parents question every one who has come from the place of his abode, "Is the young man safe?" I. **THE DANGERS TO WHICH YOUNG MEN ARE EXPOSED.** There are, first, dangers incidental to their time of life. Every one knows that there are certain stages of life fraught with more importance, and consequently more perilous, than others. This is true physically; for medical men will tell you, that when the child passes into the boy, when the boy merges into the young man, when the young man bursts into the full bloom of manhood, and again when the man, at what is called his grand climacteric, crosses the boundary of old age—these are all critical times; and that diseases which at any other period would be thrown off with ease, become then dangerous, and often fatal. Now the same thing holds of the moral and spiritual development of a man; and there are stages of his soul-history which are just as critical and momentous for his eternal interests, as those which I have specified are for his physical. 1. There is great peril springing out of the inexperience by which a youth is characterised. Everything is new and strange to him; and when, for the first time, he embarks upon the troubled sea of commercial life, not Columbus himself, as in fear and trembling he pushed on and on over the wide waste of waters, and

"Was the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea,"

was more inexperienced in navigation than is he. He is out of sight of his old landmarks; he knows neither the dangers that encircle him, nor the currents in the midst of which his course is to be pursued. He has everything to learn, and everything to know. 2. But added to this inexperience, and, indeed, intensifying the danger that results from it, is that self-conceit, or self-confidence, by which every youth is pre-eminently distinguished. Though he knows so little, he imagines he knows everything; indeed, just because he knows so little, he fancies he is exceedingly intelligent; for the law is an invariable one, that the more a man knows the more he knows his ignorance; while, on the other hand, the greater a man's ignorance, the greater, too, is his ignorance of his ignorance. 3. But a third danger, incidental to the time of life at which a young man has arrived, rises out of that impatience of control which marks the time of transition between youth and manhood. Love of liberty is a good thing, but it is apt to become love of licence; and this is the danger of which we speak. Now, this ordinarily makes its appearance first in breaking through parental restraint. II. **A SECOND CLASS OF DANGERS TO YOUNG MEN SPRING FROM THE PLACE WHERE THEIR LIFE IS SPENT.** Every locality has its own peculiar moral atmosphere, which is laden with its own poisons to the soul. The rural life has its peculiar tendencies, which you may see any day fully developed in the agricultural labourers of England, many of whom are, in almost every respect, very little above the level of the brutes they drive. Quiet provincial towns have also their own perils; and many a man who would have done well, if only kept hard at work, under a pushing master in a city, is lost for this life, and frequently also lost for eternity, from the dawdling, idling, tippling habits which in such places have so powerful sway. The ruin of many men, in such half-dead localities, is that they have not nearly enough to do, and Satan finds abundance of employment for their leisure hours. III. **YOUNG MEN ARE EXPOSED TO DANGER ALSO FROM THE TENDENCIES OF THE AGE IN WHICH THEIR LOT IS CAST.** Whatever these tendencies may be, they are most powerfully felt by youth; because, from the position they occupy—being, in fact, the population of the future—they are all brought to bear upon them. I will simply mention two. 1. There is intellectualism. No one, who is at all conversant with the literature of the day, will deny that the tendency of the greater part of it is to place the intellect on the throne of the soul, and indeed also of the world. Religion is nothing; intellect is everything. The Bible is far behind the advanced

thinkers of the age. It is antiquated, obsolete, effete. Its day is gone; and now intellect, not faith, must rule supreme. Now, intellect is good, very excellent good, but yet it is not God; and its province is to sit meek and believing at the feet of Jesus. I want intellect. I want the young men of our times to be sturdy thinkers, men of mind; men who can take a subject and resolve it into its elements, and reason it out to its remotest consequences. But I want them also to know and understand that the Bible is the most intellectual book in the world. Was Paul not intellectual? Is not his little finger thicker than the loins even of the stoutest champions of intellect in modern times? And if you look at the history of the world, man for man, I will bring you a more intellectual Christian, over against your most powerful and profound infidels. There is the erudite Leibnitz over against the pantheistic Spinoza; against the flippant Voltaire, we have the thoughtful Pascal, in any of whose suggestive fragments there is more mind than in all Voltaire's books put together. Over against the sentimental Rousseau, we can put the mild, loving, John-like Fenelon. And where among the would-be pretentious intellectualists of to-day will you find the equal of Jonathan Edwards, John Foster, or Robert Hall? Be not blinded, my young friends, with the dust which these men would raise around you; depend upon it, the highest intellect will be found in meekest humility, sitting at Jesus' feet.

2. But another danger assailing young men, from the tendencies of the age, is Mammonism. Every one must see that, especially in commercial centres like this, the prevailing idolatry is the worship of the golden calf. The maxim of the day is that held up to scorn by the old Roman satirist, "Get riches, honestly if you can; but by all means, get riches;" and the prevailing heresy is, the determination at all hazards to be wealthy. Young man, ask thyself this, "What shall it profit me if I should gain the whole world and lose my own soul?" (W. M. Taylor, M.A.) *Safety for young men*:—The fact is that this life is full of peril. He who undertakes it without the grace of God and a proper understanding of the conflict into which he is going, must certainly be defeated. Just look off upon society to-day. Look at the shipwreck of men for whom fair things were promised, and who started life with every advantage. Look at those who have dropped from high social position, and from great fortune, disgraced for time, disgraced for eternity. All who sacrifice their integrity come to overthrow. Take a dishonest dollar and bury it in the centre of the earth, and keep all the rocks of the mountain on top of it; then cover these rocks with all the diamonds of Golconda, and all the silver of Nevada, and all the gold of California and Australia, and put on the top of these all banking and moneyed institutions, and they cannot keep down that one dishonest dollar. That one dishonest dollar in the centre of the earth will begin to heave and rock and upturn itself until it comes to the resurrection of damnation. I. THE FIRST SAFEGUARD OF WHICH I WANT TO SPEAK IS A LOVE OF HOME. II. ANOTHER SAFEGUARD FOR YOUNG MEN IS INDUSTRIOUS HABIT. Young man, you must have industry of head, or hand, or foot, or perish! Do not have the idea that you can get along in the world by genius. The curse of this country to-day is geniuses—men with large self-conceit and nothing else. III. ANOTHER SAFEGUARD THAT I WANT TO PRESENT TO YOUNG MEN IS A HIGH IDEAL OF LIFE. Sometimes soldiers going into battle shoot into the ground instead of into the hearts of their enemies. They are apt to take aim too low, and it is very often that the captain, going into conflict with his men, will cry out, "Now, men, aim high!" The fact is that in life a great many men take no aim at all. The artist plans out his entire thought before he puts it upon canvas, before he takes up the crayon or the chisel. An architect thinks out the entire building before the workmen begin. Although everything may seem to be unorganised, that architect has in his mind every Corinthian column, every Gothic arch, every Byzantine capital. A poet thinks out the entire plot of his poem before he begins to chime the cantos of tinkling rhymes. And yet there are a great many men who start the important structure of life without knowing whether it is going to be a rude Tartar's hut or a St. Mark's Cathedral, and begin to write out the intricate poem of their life without knowing whether it is to be a Homer's "Odyssey" or a rhymester's botch. Out of one thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine have no life-plot. Booted and spurred and caparisoned, they hasten along, and I run out and say: "Hallo, man! Whither away?" "Nowhere!" they say. IV. ANOTHER SAFEGUARD IS A RESPECT FOR THE SABBATH. Tell me how a young man spends his Sabbath, and I will tell you what are his prospects in business, and I will tell you what

are his prospects for the eternal world. God has thrust into our busy life a sacred day when we are to look after our souls. Is it exorbitant, after giving six days to the feeding and clothing of these perishable bodies, that God should demand one day for the feeding and clothing of the immortal soul? **V. THE GREAT SAFEGUARD FOR EVERY YOUNG MAN IS THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.** Nothing can take the place of it. You may have gracefulness enough to put to the blush Lord Chesterfield; you may have foreign languages dropping from your tongue; you may discuss laws and literature; you may have a pen of unequalled polish and power; you may have so much business tact that you can get the largest salary in a banking house; you may be as sharp as Herod and as strong as Samson, and with as long locks as those which hung Absalom, and yet you have no safety against temptation. Your great want is a new heart, and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I tell you so to-day, and the blessed Spirit presses through the solemnities of this hour to put the cup of life to your thirsty lips. Oh, thrust it not back! Mercy presents it—bleeding mercy, long-suffering mercy. Despite all other friendships, prove recreant to all other bargains, but despise God's love for your dying soul—do not do that. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Self-indulgence does not get the most out of life:*—One of the most frequent pleas for self-indulgence is that life was given us that we might get the most out of it. We were born with so many capacities of enjoyment; would it not be foolish, not to say ungrateful, to leave them unsatisfied? The general principle to which appeal is here made is absolutely sound. God means us to get the most out of every gift of His providence. The question turns entirely upon the comparative merits of different means of attempting this. We do not get the most out of a two-hundred-pound piano if we use it for strumming dance music. We do not get the most out of a surgical instrument of finely tempered steel if we cut the leaves of a new magazine with it. We do not get the most out of a rapid newspaper-printing press if we set it to print post cards. In the same way, we should not get the most out of Mr. Edison by engaging him to repair motor cars, or out of Principal Fairbairn by placing him in charge of a class in a kindergarten. The only way to utilise either an instrument or a man to the full is to occupy that instrument or that man in the highest and most difficult service—a service limited only by the extent of capacity. From a merely business point of view, it is stupid policy to allow a high-grade apparatus to do a low-grade work. Such is the waste and such the degradation whenever a being, created in the image of God, surrenders himself to the temptation of the senses. He appraises himself at the minimum rate, not at the maximum. It is getting the least, not the most, out of life, to acquire only those things that “perish with the using.” (*H. W. Horwill.*) **I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was.**—*Garbling the truth:*—The most delicate question in morals that people in general have to solve is, how far kindness justifies falsehood? How far may you veil or colour the truth in order to spare people's feelings? In the short run, taking the one case by itself, tenderness seems better than truth. It seems more right to save your friend from pain than to tell him how things really stand. But, in the long run, I fancy, pure truthfulness would give the most pleasure and save the most pain. Not, of course, that you need go about telling uncalled for truths; but all you do say should be unswervingly straightforward. What comfort there is in a man or woman in whom you know there is no guile, in whose words you can wholly trust, without having to take off an unknown quantity that may have been put on to please you. On the other hand, people like the Irish, who are so kindly that they will be always garbling the truth into an agreeable shape—how they vex your soul—how you long for rough, homely truthfulness, instead of such “making things pleasant.” (*Charles Buxton, M.P.*)

Ver. 32. The enemies of my lord the king . . . be as that young man is.—*Cushi's wish:*—A PROPHETICAL PRAYER. 1. Prayer is of two sorts: for or against. As (1) for good; so, (2) against the evil; both, things and persons. This is against a kind of prayer; indeed, an imprecation. Two things give forth themselves in the prayer. The parties are first the king's enemies; then those that rise up against him (that is) the king's rebels. Two diverse kinds: neither superfluous. For there be no tautologies in Scripture: no doubling the point there, but with some advantage, ever. The wish is that they may be as Absalom. And two things are in that wish: Be as he; that is, not perish only

(that is, not all), but perish, and so perish as he did. How was that? Hanging yet alive, thrust through with three darts. As he, in his end; as he, in the manner of his end. That the heads that contrive may hang as high as his: and the hearts that affect be thrust through as was his: thrice through, though once would serve. II. A PROPHECY. That so he wished: and that, as he wished, so he foretold: and as he foretold, so it came to pass. All that rose after, fell as fast as they rose. III. LAST OF ALL THAT THIS PRAYER OR PROPHECY IS NOT PENT OR SHUT UP IN DAVID'S DAYS: NOT TO END WITH HIM. It reacheth unto these of ours; hath his force and vigour still; hath and shall have, unto the world's end. God heard him praying, and inspired him prophesying. As it came to pass in Absalom, so did it in those that rode after him: that rose against David, that rose against many others since David, and namely against ours. So it hath been hitherto: and so ever may it be. Cushi, not only a priest, to pray that so they be; but a prophet, to foretell, that so they shall be. (*Bishop Lancelot Andrewes*.)

Ver. 33. **And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept.**—*The wail of a broken heart*:—1. The first picture shows a glimpse of the battlefield, and brings before us three men, each in different ways exhibiting how small a thing Absalom's death was to all but the heart-broken father, and each going his own road, heedless of what lay below the heap of stones. The world goes on all the same, though death is busy, and some heart-strings be cracked. The three men, Ahimaaz, Joab, and the Cushite (Ethiopian), are types of different kinds of self-engrossment, which is little touched by other's sorrows. The first, Ahimaaz, the young priest who had already done good service to David as a spy, is full of the joyous excitement of victory, and eager to run with what he thinks such good tidings. The word in verse 19, "bear tidings," always implies good news; and the youthful warrior-priest cannot conceive that the death of the head of the revolt can darken the joy of victory to the king. He is truly loyal, but, in his youthful impetuosity and excitement, cannot sympathise with the desolate father, who sits expectant at Mahanaim. Joab is a very different type of indifference. He is too much accustomed to battle to be much flushed with victory, and has killed too many men to care much at killing another. He is cool enough to measure the full effect of the news on David; and though he clearly discerns the sorrow, has not one grain of participation in it. The Cushite gets his orders; and he, too, is, in another fashion, careless of their contents and effect. Without a word, he bows himself to Joab, and runs, as unconcerned as the paper of a letter that may break a heart. Ahimaaz still pleads to go, and, gaining leave, takes the road across the Jordan valley, which was probably easier, though longer; while the other messenger went by the hills, which was a shorter and rougher road. 2. The scene shifts to Mahanaim, where David had found refuge. He can scarcely have failed to take an omen from the name, which commemorated how another anxious heart had camped there, and been comforted, when it saw the vision of the encamping angels above its own feeble, undefended tents, and Jacob "called the name of that place Mahanaim" (that is, "Two camps.") How chilling to Ahimaaz, all flushed with eagerness, and proud of victory, and panting with running, and hungry for some word of praise, it must have been, to get for sole answer the question about Absalom! He shrinks from telling the whole truth, which, indeed, the Cushite was officially despatched to tell; but his enigmatic story of a great tumult as he left the field, of which he did not know the meaning, was told to prepare for the bitter news. The Cushite with some tenderness veils the fate of Absalom in the wish that all the king's enemies may be "as that young man is." But the veil was thin, and the attempt to console by reminding of the fact that the dead man was an enemy as well as a son, was swept away like a straw before the father's torrent of grief. 3. The sobs of a broken heart cannot be analysed; and this wail of almost inarticulate grief, with its infinitely pathetic reiteration, is too sacred for many words. Grief, even if passionate, is not forbidden by religion; and David's sensitive poet-nature felt all emotions keenly. We are meant to weep; else wherefore is there calamity? But there were elements in David's agony which were not good. It blinded him to blessings and to duties. His son was dead; but his rebellion was dead with him, and that should have been more present to his mind. His soldiers had fought well, and his first task should have been to honour and to thank them. He had no right to sink the king in the father, and Joab's unfeeling remon-

strance, which followed, was wise and true in substance, though rough almost to brutality in tone. Sorrow which hides all the blue because of one cloud, however heavy and thunderous, is sinful. Sorrow which sits with folded hands, like the sisters of Lazarus, and lets duties drift, that it may indulge in the luxury of unrestrained tears, is sinful. There is no tone of "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good," in this pisonate plaint; and so there is no soothing for the grief. The one consolation lies in submission. Submissive tears wash the heart clean; rebellious ones blister it. David's grief was the bitter fruit of his own sin. He had weakly indulged Absalom, and had spared the rod, probably, in the boy's youth, as he certainly spared the sword when Absalom had murdered his brother. But there is another side to this grief. It witnesses to the depth and self-sacrificing energy of a father's love. The dead son's faults are all forgotten and obliterated by "death's effacing fingers." The headstrong, thankless rebel is, in David's mind, a child again, and the happy old days of his innocence and love are all that remain in memory. The prodigal is still a son. The father's love is immortal, and cannot be turned away by any faults. The father is willing to die for the disobedient child. Such purity and depth of affection lives in human hearts. So self-forgetting and incapable of being provoked is an earthly father's love. May we not read in this disclosure of David's paternal love, stripping it of its faults and excesses, some dim shadow of the greater love of God for his prodigals—a love which cannot be dammed back or turned away by any sin, and which has found a way to fulfil David's impossible wish, in that it has given Jesus Christ to die for his rebellious children, and so made them sharers of his own kingdom? (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Anguish of parents at the perverseness of children*:—1. I would call to this subject the attention of every sinner, who has a pious parent, or parents, still living. I wish to show such persons how much anguish they occasion their parents by neglecting to prepare for death. Every Christian parent in David's situation would feel, in some measure, as David felt. Every Christian parent feels a similar concern for the souls, the eternal interests of his children. (1.) In the first place, they are distressed by apprehensions that you may be led astray by vicious companions, or become the slaves of some vicious habit, or embrace false and destructive sentiments respecting religion. They have cause to entertain such apprehensions. They have often seen the children of even pious parents fall a prey to these evils. (2.) But, in the second place, they are much more distressed by fears that you will perish forever. They believe what God has said respecting the future state of those who die in their sins. They know the terrors of the Lord. They know that unless you repent you will perish. They know that unless you are born again you cannot see the kingdom of God. How must they feel when such reflections as these crowd into their minds: Perhaps this child, whom I have so often caressed and nourished, over whom I have so often wept, and for whom I have cared and laboured so much, will continue an enemy of the God who made him. In short, could you know all the sorrows which your parents have suffered since your birth you would find that a great part of them have been occasioned by anxiety for you, for your immortal interests; and that to the same cause is to be ascribed a great part of their daily sorrows. The distress which you thus occasion them is further aggravated by the reflection that if you perish your doom will be peculiarly terrible. You have enjoyed peculiar privileges. You have been dedicated to God, you were early taught to know His will, you have often been entreated, admonished, and warned, you have enjoyed the benefits of religious example, and have been preserved from many temptations to which the children of irreligious parents are exposed. (3.) In the third place, if you persist in neglecting religion, the distress which your parents now feel may be raised to the highest pitch, by seeing you die without hope. Then they will feel as David felt, and wish like him that they could have died for you. But to return to those whose parents are still living. You have heard a little, and words can tell but little, of the distress which you occasion your parents by neglecting religion. And now permit me to ask, will you continue to occasion them this distress? And O that the God at whose feet those prayers have been poured out may render these considerations efficacious to your salvation. 2. I proceed now to press the subject upon the attention of pious parents. (1.) In the first place, you may learn from it that no parents, whose children are not all pious can be certain that they will ever become so, or certain that he shall not be called to weep over some of them, wishing that he had died in their stead. (2.) From this subject, Christian parents

may learn, in the second place, the fatal consequences of neglecting their duty to their children. David, though a great man, was guilty of this neglect. It is said of Adonijah, another of his sons, that his father had not at any time displeased him, saying, why hast thou done so? and there seems to be abundant reason to believe that he indulged his other children in the same injudicious and sinful manner. (*E. Payson, D.D.*) *Absalom's death*:—A loud cry always arrests attention. All understand the language of sorrow in any age or race. The sobs of a little child, or of a strong man, affect mightily those that chance to hear. The roughest and most hardened can rarely resist the appeal of tears, and often turn to brush away their own. The Esaus and Rachels and Davids and Marys are kin to the multitudes, for whom—

“ Never morning wore
To evening, but some heart did break.”

Grief is a leveller, even as death is. It ignores distinctions, and makes great and small bold to ask of the other its cause, and proffer such aid as may be. So this pathetic lament from the chamber over the gate of Mahanaim impels us to inquire who the mourner is, and for whom or what does he weep. After the Ruler, the Father issues his orders. He would slay the treachery, but spare the traitor. While every retainer might be put to the sword or flight, and every weapon be struck from his hand, the king gives all the captains charge, to “deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom.” It were to him no victory if the dead body of his son be brought back in triumph; it were utter defeat. Such commission always hampers. A faint stroke, the world has seen, prolongs the struggle, and imperils the end sought. Rebellion must be stemmed out of hand and heart, or, like the hydra’s heads, its shoots forth again as often as cut off. “You say you are praying,” writes Abraham Lincoln, “for the war to end. So am I, but I want it to end right. God only knows how anxious I am to see these rivers of blood cease to flow; but they must flow until treason hides its head.” While the opposing forces have met in the woody, tangled mountain passes, the eager king and father takes his seat between the city gates to wait for tidings. The hours drag wearily away. His fortunes are perhaps already determined, or may be at the moment wavering in the balance. One word from him, one swing of his sword, one leap from the crag, might decide them, were he only at hand. How ready are we to say, “there was a great tumult, but I knew not what it was.” The blow must not fall in all its stunning power at once. Let the victim, at least, have time to kneel to receive it. And so as he stood aside, the blunt and careless Ethiopian comes up and confirms the first announcement, and exults over the slaughter of the foe and son alike. It is the one dreaded word, converting the brief joy into a volume of sorrow. Thus it ever is. What the friend is studying to soften, and by hints prepare the bereft to imagine, the telegraph, the paper, some stranger or little child declares, in its plain and overwhelming measure. There is no averting of facts nor any defence against their meaning. What we have loved and trusted, when taken away, can neither be made to appear as though it still is ours, nor the loss be breathed in modified degree. No generous nature can interpose to break the shock. When it comes, it is with full force, as the cyclone bursts upon the town. We may be given grace and patience, but not exemption from grief. To such trial every life is subject. From such distress none can always escape. Some day it must be told David, “Absalom is dead.” And who can bear to look upon that stricken father, or listen to his agonising cries, or hear that convulsive utterance, “O Absalom, my son, my son!” Around the wall, and near the gateway at Mahanaim, the people clustered, gazing up at the window whence the sounds of anguish came. With low voices they talked together of the singular conduct of the king. Would he rather have had his armies routed and at this moment be preparing for a siege? Would he have chosen that the infidel son should madly and successfully assault himself and blot out what remained of his realm? Was not the issue the very best possible for the nation? Ought they not all to sing psalms of thanksgiving unto the Most High, “whose right hand had found out all his enemies and swallowed them up in His wrath.” Yes! but there is a secret which these observers have not discovered, and it is buried deep in that father’s heart. Now and then he had almost disclosed it in these days of adversity. Zadok might have divined it, when he answered, “If He thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here I am, let Him do to me as seemeth good unto

Him." Aishai, burning with indignation at the imprecations upon his master, might have suspected it, when David replied: "Let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him." And these friends might have found that their ruler was under just condemnation of heaven. He was but paying, in some form, the heavy penalty for his sins. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *David's grief for Absalom*:—"Next to the calamity of losing a battle," a great general used to say, "is that of gaining a victory." The battle in the wood of Ephraim left twenty thousand of King David's subjects dead or dying on the field. It is remarkable how little is made of this dismal fact. Men's lives count for little in time of war, and death, even with its worst horrors, is just the common fate of warriors. Yet surely David and his friends could not think lightly of a calamity that cut down more of the sons of Israel than any battle since the fatal day of Mount Gilboa. Nor could they form a light estimate of the guilt of the man whose inordinate vanity and ambition had cost the nation such a fearful loss. But all thoughts of this kind were for the moment brushed aside by the crowning fact that Absalom himself was dead. The elements of David's intense agony, when he heard of Absalom's death, were mainly three. I. **THERE WAS THE LOSS OF HIS SON**, of whom he could say that, with all his faults, he loved him still. A dear object had been plucked from his heart, and left it sick, vacant, desolate. A face he had often gazed on with delight lay cold in death. An infinite pathos, in a father's experience, surrounds a young man's death. The regret, the longing, the conflict with the inevitable, seem to drain him of all energy, and leave him helpless in his sorrow. II. **ABSALOM HAD DIED IN REBELLION**, without expressing one word of regret, without one request for forgiveness, without one act or word that it would be pleasant to recall in time to come, as a foil to the bitterness caused by his unnatural rebellion. 3. In this rebellious condition he had passed to the judgment of God. What hope could there be for such a man, living and dying as he had done? 4. Two remarks. (1.) With reference to grief from bereavements in general, it is to be observed that they will prove either a blessing or an evil according to the use to which they are turned. All grief in itself is a weakening thing—weakening both to the body and the mind, and it were a great error to suppose that it must do good in the end. Not only does it depress the mourner himself, and unfit him for his duties to the living, but it depresses those that come in contact with him, and makes them think of him with a measure of impatience. It is not right to obtrude our grief overmuch on others, especially if we are in a public position. Let us take example in this respect from our blessed Lord. Was any sorrow like unto His sorrow? Yet how little did He obtrude it even on the notice of His disciples! And how many things are there to a Christian mind fitted to abate the first sharpness even of a great bereavement. Is it not the doing of a Father, infinitely kind? Is it not the doing of Him "who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all?" Hear Him saying, "What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." (2.) Grief that may arise to Christians in connection with the spiritual condition of departed children. When the parent is either in doubt as to the happiness of a beloved one, or has cause to apprehend that the portion of that child is with the unbelievers, the pang which he experiences is one of the most acute which the human heart can know. (*W. G. Blaikie, D.D.*) *A father's remorse and a father's forgiveness*:—The story of Absalom's rebellion is the most exciting drama in the Bible, and one of the guiltiest and saddest tragedies in human history. It is given to us in some of the most powerful word-pictures which have ever been painted. Clear, strong, and lifelike do the leading figures stand out. I. IN THIS CRY OF ANGUISH THERE WAS THE TORTURE OF SELF-ACCUSATION. The sting of death is sin. The sting of that death to David was Absalom's sin, and alas! his own sin too. We never know what the end of a sin may be. We never know how far the consequences will reach, or whom they will affect. We cannot whitewash the black pages by repenting of the deeds. David had repented in sackcloth and ashes. He had been forgiven. But there in his children were the deadly fruits, and he would rather have laid down his life than brought this evil upon them. There are things which God forgives us, but which we can never forgive ourselves. There is no misfortune that is crushing unless some memory of guilt is behind it. The poet says, "A sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things." Nothing of the kind. A sorrow's crown of sorrow is the feeling that we have brought it on ourselves. II. **WE MAY TAKE IT AS A TYPE OF THE DIVINE FATHERHOOD AND OF ITS UNLIMITED FORGIVENESS.** David is called the man after God's

own heart, and that word staggers us when we remember some of his doings. But the word does not come amiss here. We feel that it is true in such scenes as this. Kneeling in his chamber and uttering that impassioned cry of pity, burning love, and forgiveness, we can see indeed something of God's own heart. In this great tribulation he is as one washed and made white, and his face is like the tearful Christ's, Godlike. His love for this guilty, iron-hearted son was passing strange; it was almost more than human. It was a love which gave a kiss for every blow, turned a forgiving face to every insult and stripe, and prayed for the criminal who was crucifying it. All this is what we rightly call Divine. It is a broken light of God. It is the image of His Fatherhood. And through Jesus we preach to everyone a fatherly God, a tearful God, a cross-bearing God, a God whose pity is beyond all our measurement, whose forgiveness is greater than man's greatest sin. (*J. G. Greenough, M.A.*) *Absalom's funeral*.—I. THAT GOD'S DEAREST CHILDREN ARE EXERCISED WITH NEAR AND PIERCING CROSSES IN THIS LIFE. It may seem to be no good congruity to say that David wept, that King David mourned. For Christians to mourn being poor, or princes being wicked, it is no strange matter: but when a man hath God for his friend in heaven, and a kingdom on earth too, what should trouble him? Yet for such a one the Lord hath crosses, and those sharp, those near, those cutting. Here are griefs, in his familiars shall I say? nay, in his kinsfolks, his father, his wives, at Ziklag, his children, his Absalom. What might be the cause that God's best children are so sped? Is it their religion? Is it their profession? No, no, it is because they are set with corruption, and therefore must be purged: for God's best children will sometimes venture on noisome meats, and hurtful poisons, they will feed on the grosser sins, they will drink in every puddle, I mean iniquity, and when the child hath so done, what should the father do? If David will lie and commit adultery, and fall to murder innocents, what can God do less for David than scourge him thoroughly? Is it not better he should lose his sin than God his child? So, then, one cause why the Lord doth thus lay load on his children here is, because they defile themselves with gross sins, and therefore must have much washing. As God lays many crosses on us, so we may thank ourselves for many too, not only in that we do deserve them, but in that we work them out of our own bowels: for many we draw upon ourselves by riot, idleness, unthriftiness, rage, etc., and the most we make more heavy (that are heavy enough already) through our own folly, and that is whilst we rake into our wounds, looking no higher, and what with unbelief and impatience, do double the cross on ourselves. (1.) Is this so, that God's dearest children have and must have such great piercing crosses in this life? Then must all who would be known by that name make account of such, and prepare for them. Such is our folly when the sun shines, we never think of a dark night, and when the morning is fair we never fear a storm, and therefore are sometimes taken without our cloak, as it were. Such, also, is our conceit of ourselves, and confidence in worldly helps, that we hope they will not see us want, or if they fail, yet we think to shift better than others can, and to live by our wits. Hence it is that we are almost grown to Babel's conclusion. (2.) Is this so, that the dearest of God's children have great and near afflictions in this life? Then this must teach the wicked to leave judging abroad, and to look homeward: they are on horseback, they, when God's children are underfoot; it is their joy to see the faithful grieve, they cannot hold but roll it out; these be the fellows these preachers so much magnify, these the happy ones, these go away with all the comforts, they cannot do amiss, they; but, by your leave, such a judgment hath befallen one, such a plague another, and which of them escapes better? And this they get by running to sermons; and thus they triumph. But stay a while, and pause better on the matter: Are God's children thus wounded? What shall become of His enemies? Are the righteous thus paid? How much more the sinner? (3.) Is this the estate of the most godly and best beloved in this life? Then, as this must teach us to think never the worse of ourselves or others for outward crosses (which, like hail and snow, do light upon the best gardens, as well as on the wild waste; and like blustering winds will spare no more prince's children than the poorest beggar's) sith thus we cannot conclude unless we will either challenge God's love, or the best Christian's truth. II. THAT GOD'S BEST CHILDREN ARE APT TO GRIEVE TOO MUCH AND TO EXCEED IN PASSION FOR OUTWARD THINGS: as in mirth, when once we are in, we are apt to forget ourselves; so in sorrow, when once we yield unto it, we are in danger of surfeting upon it. 1. Now, this being so, that the best of us

all are subject to immoderate sorrow for outward things, we must not only learn to bear with one another in this our common frailty, but further, every one for himself must fence and mound his heart against these absurd passions and excessive griefs. 2. Do God's best children exceed sometimes in sorrow for outward things? Then must we not be altogether discouraged, though we find our worldly grief more than our spiritual sorrow; for this is a thing that may befall the best; they may be immoderate in the one, when they are too short in the other: the best have many tears to bestow upon some outward things, when they cannot without much travail weep for their many sins. III. THAT GOD'S CHILDREN, WHO BEAR SOME CROSSES WITH GREAT WISDOM AND MODERATION, ARE SOMETIMES FOILED IN OTHER SOME, AND FAIL IN HEALTH. Who could behave himself better than David in the matter of Shimei? Who worse, in the case of Nabal? How sweet his carriage in many passages between Saul and him? How admirable his behaviour in one child's death? How absurd in others? Nay, how diversely affected with the cause of one and the same Absalom? What gracious speeches did he once utter when he fled from Absalom? What a bead-roll have we here at his death? Who could more forget himself than here he doth, thus to take on at such a time, in such a place, on such an occasion? How far was this from policy? How far unlike his carriage in other places? 1. What might be the cause that these so worthy champions are thus sometimes foiled. First, it pleaseth God sometimes to set on a cross, and make it stick by a man, either because the same party would look besides former crosses, or kick them off too lightly; or else because he would let him see himself, and know what he is of himself. 2. Sometimes we have not denied ourselves in some particular lust, and then if a cross light there it soon enters and eats deep, because we ourselves do give a sting unto it. 1. Let us not suffer it to pass without some use, though we be briefer. Learn hence at least a double point of wisdom: the first respects our brethren; then we must too lightly censure for their weakness and tenderness in some crosses, though light; sith that cannot be light, which God will make heavy; such that may be light to one which is a mountain to another; sith those our brethren may manfully bear far sorer crosses than ourselves, though humbled in some particular. IV. WHAT THOUGH ABSALOM CAN FORGET DAVID, YET DAVID CANNOT FORGET HIM. What though he be a very ungracious imp? Yet he is my child. 1. Do kind and godly parents so love their children that you may sooner find too much carnal than too little natural affection in them? Then shall they never make it good to their own or other's souls, that there is any goodness in them who bear no affection to their own children. 2. Here is somewhat for children also. Is the affection of godly parents such that they cannot chide but love their children; and out of their love grieve at their unkindness, weep for their impiety, mourn for their sorrows, and take to heart their follies? 3. Here is a word of instruction and consolation for all sorts, both parents and children, high and low: Is the love of an earthly father (if godly) so great? Does he take so much to heart the unkindness of his children? Is he so sensible of their griefs? So wounded with their sorrows? What, then, is the affection of our heavenly Father towards us? How tenderly doth he take disobedience at our hands? and therefore how great should our mourning be for our great and many contempts? How ought we to pour forth ourselves in tears, and to lament with a great lamentation. (*R. Harris, D.D.*) *Mourning for Absalom*:—I. FOR EVEN A FOND PARENT, IT IS VERY WEAK TO GRIEVE MORE FOR A LOSS THAN FOR THE CRIME WHICH BROUGHT IT ON. This wild outcry of David is essentially mistaken in its sentiment. That he was patient was evident enough; but that he saw God's hand avenging wrongs done against God, and launching the retributions of the Divine law upon an offender who had defied God, nowhere appears. The utterance of grief he makes assumes only soreness and pain. Absalom was his favourite; this downfall had come suddenly; the catastrophe was remediless. His boy had died in the act of rebellion against his father and his king. But not even a word of sorrow or shame or humiliation passes his lips. Sometimes mourning reaches so supreme a height of personal grief as that it is mere egotism and tends towards sheer selfishness. II. IT IS BETTER TO LIVE HONESTLY FOR ONE'S CHILDREN THAN JUST TO WISH TO DIE FOR THEM WHEN THEIR RETRIBUTION COMES. The fact is, we miss the proper feelings of the occasion here in David's form of expression. His language is extravagant; it was very rough to tell those soldiers, who had imperilled their lives again and again that day to sustain his kingdom, that he wished a gracious providence had taken his life instead of that of the chief rebel they had fought. Think how

almost brutal it was to say that he would have died happy if only Absalom were alive again! With that creature for a king, what would have become of the kingdom? A mere sense of personal bereavement moved him. He became unmanly, unknighly, and inconsiderate. But our main trouble must be found with the absence of every sort and measure of self-examination in David; he sends not one glance of his eye backwards over those vast mistakes of the past which he had committed in rearing that child. He makes no allusion to an offended God, except to point his reckless asseveration with the mention of his name. One would think that the king must have had, even in these successes, some misgiving now and then; something like those thoughtful acknowledgments which history records in the dying utterance of William the Conqueror: "Although human ambition rejoices in such triumphs, I am nevertheless seized with an unquiet terror when I think that, in all these actions of mine, cruelty marched with boldness." We wish David had lived always for Absalom's instruction and mourned a little less for his defeat.

III. PUBLIC DUTIES SHOULD CHECK THE INDULGENCE OF NOISY PERSONAL GRIEFS. We all admit that the human feeling of the king in an instance so severe is pathetic and poetic. But at that time an awful field of blood was wild with cries of desperate pain from the dying and around the dead. Twenty thousand of Israel's loyal soldiers lay on the plain of battle; and all that David seemed to care about it was that his boy Absalom was killed likewise. Once we saw in the palace at Amsterdam a bas-relief representing the sternness of the ancient Brutus. Everybody recalls the classic story of the Roman ruler whose two sons, Titus and Tiberius, were among the conspirators that planned the overturning of the government. He sat in judgment upon the enemies that had threatened the realm; or did he hesitate to do the justice they deserved upon all alike. He caused those two sons "to be scourged with rods, in accordance with the law, and then beheaded by the lictors in the forum, and he neither turned aside his eyes nor shed any tears over them, for they had been false unto their country and had offended against the law." And then the well-known dictum of his was pronounced, which these patriotic Dutchmen have perpetuated in their king's judgment hall: "A man may have many more children, but never can have but one country, even that which gave him birth." David certainly had very little of that firm justice which made Lucius Junius Brutus historic.

IV. THE DEATH OF AN INFANT CHILD MAY QUITE POSSIBLY BECOME A GREATER COMFORT TO ITS PARENTS THAN THE REBELLIOUS LIFE OF ANOTHER CHILD WHO GROWS UP TO BE A PAIN AND A SHAME FOR EVER. The counsel was long ago given to bereaved Christians by one who understood what it was to be in mourning: "Do not ask that the enveloping cloud be ever entirely taken up from your home; it never will be; but it may become so luminously transparent that you can see bright stars through it." When David's little child in earlier times was stricken with death, he fell down heavily sorrowing over the affliction before the Lord; but he said, in wise and strong confidence of a submissive faith, "I shall go to him, but he will not return to me." But now he could only pour out hopeless wails of grief; for Absalom appeared to have no future in which he could expect or in which he wished to share. Many of us have seen in Westminster Abbey a beautiful alabaster cradle, with an infant's face just showing itself from beneath a coverlet wrought in delicate stone apparently spread over the figure. It is the tomb, as the inscription relates, of Sophia, daughter of James I., who died when only three days old, in 1607, and to that brief record is added this verse for an epitaph:

"When the archangel's trump shall blow, and souls to bodies join,
Millions will wish their lives below had been as short as thine."

V. THERE IS A SAD MEANING IN THE WORDS "TOO LATE." Most of us wish we could live parts of our lives over again, to make some corrections. Especially we think of the example we set or the words we speak or the deeds we do in the presence of our intimates, perhaps even of our children. David does not help the case much with any behaviour of his in this story. But we begin to feel, I am sure, that his wrong-doing had something to do in the formation of Absalom's character and in the fixing of Absalom's doom. For we carry in mind the truth of the old couplet:

"Who saws thro' a trunk, tho' he leaves the tree up in the forest.
When the wind casts it down, is not his the hand that smote it?"

But there comes a moment in which one feels that all regrets arrive too late for any good to come forth from them: no hope now! (C. S. Robinson, D.D.) *David's lament over Absalom*; or, *the tears of parental love*:—I. THE FORCE OF PARENTAL LOVE. Whatever could have induced David to have mourned the death of such a son as this? All might have expected, that day, that the news would have fallen like music on his ears. There are two circumstances which might have induced men to have expected this. 1. The corrupt character of Absalom. In the short, strange life of Absalom, we discover several most depraved and morally repulsive attributes of character. There is revenge (see chap. xiii. 28, 29); there is vanity (chap. xv. 1); there is ambition (chap. xv. 4); there is meanness (chap. xv. 5); hypocrisy (chap. xv. 7, 8). There is a tendency in such attributes as these to destroy all love for their possessor. Depravity in a wife is adapted to quench the love of a husband; depravity in a monarch is adapted to quench the love of his people; depravity in a son is adapted to destroy the love of the father. Yet David's love was too strong for this—it clung to the monster. 2. The filial rebellion of Absalom. He was not only corrupt in his character, but he was a malignant opponent to his father, the man whom he ought to have loved and obeyed. He had pledged himself to his father's ruin. His last purpose was a purpose to deprive his sire of his throne, his happiness, his life. David had no greater enemy in Israel than Absalom. This force of parental love indicates two things:—(1.) That there is still something Divine in man. Love is from God; and man, amidst all his depravities, still retains some small portion of this sacred thing. This strength of parental love indicates (2) the love of the Infinite Father towards sinners. II. THE BITTERNESS OF PARENTAL LOVE. What bitterness is in this cry, "O Absalom, my son!" etc. Two things would give bitterness to David's feelings now. 1. The memory of his own domestic sins. The carnality, the favouritism, the false tenderness, the want of thorough discipline, which he displayed in his own family, were in themselves heinous vices, and prolific sources of domestic misery. 2. His fear as to his future state. O! where is my son Absalom. Can it be that my son is added to the number of the accursed? From this subject we learn: (1.) That good men may have most wicked children. Goodness is not hereditary. (2.) These good may, nevertheless, be responsible for the wickedness of their children. Home may be neglected, etc. (3.) That good men who neglect their children will one day, most likely, have to repent their conduct, etc. (*Homilist*.) A remorseful lament:—It is a terrible cry that comes out of the chamber over the gate of Mahanaim that makes the name of Absalom so well known and so full of the most terrible lessons to us. "O, my son Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" Yes, that is love, no doubt. That is the love of a broken-hearted father, no doubt. But the pang of the cry, the innermost agony of the cry, the poisoned point of the dagger in that cry is remorse. I have slain my son! I have murdered my son with my own hands! I neglected my son Absalom from a child! With my own lusts I laid his very worst temptation right in his way. It had been better Absalom had never been born! If he rebelled, who shall blame him? I, David, drove Absalom to rebellion. It was his father's hand that stabbed Absalom through the heart. O, Absalom, my murdered son! Would God thy murderer had been in thy place this day. And the king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son! (*Alex. Whyte, D.D.*) A father's grief over rebellious son:—About 1189 Richard, son of the great Henry II., joined the French king, Philip II., against his father. Three other sons were also rebels against their father, and only his youngest son, John, remained at his court. Philip and Richard took his castles, while Henry remained in a condition of unusual supineness. He was now broken in spirit. . . . He yielded almost without a struggle to the demands that were made upon him. . . . Throughout these unnatural conflicts he had rested his hopes upon his beloved John, to whom he had required his seneschal to deliver his castles in the event of his death. . . . He asked for the names of those barons who had joined the French king. The first name he saw was John. He read no more. The world and all its troubles and hopes faded from his view. He turned his face to the wall, and exclaimed, "Let everything go as it will." . . . His great heart was broken. On the 6th of July, 1189, Henry II. was no more. (*Knight's Eng.*) David the afflicted man:—It is not uncommon to read in the preface to works which good men have left as legacies to the church, that their lives, passed amid quiet scenes and in the

routine of useful but common duties, furnished few materials for biography. Such tranquillity and monotony were not features of David's life. I. **DAVID'S AFFLICTIONS.** In the ills of poverty, the loss of children, the death of old friends, the numerous infirmities of age, troubles often gather around the prosperous in the decline of life, like clouds about a setting sun. Happy for them if these are sanctified. Alas for David! his home was the scene of his most painful trials. Who can fancy David's feelings when he looked on Tamar's tears, and listened, with grief and consternation on his countenance, to a story that filled the whole land with horror? But hardly has that earthquake-shock passed away when another follows. Tragedy on tragedy! The crime a father allowed to go unpunished her brother avenges. Biding his time, and when suspicion is lulled, drawing Amnon, the perpetrator of that monstrous wickedness, into his toils, Absalom gives the signal, and, smitten by his servants, his brother dies. He has to drink still deeper "of the wine of astonishment." Hardly has time, the great healer, closed that wound, when Absalom, his favourite son, whom he had forgiven, inflicts a deeper one; commits a crime of yet darker dye. In reading how the Pope's soldiers, to obtain speedy possession of their jewels, were wont to sever the fingers of Huguenot ladies from their bleeding hands, I have wondered at the savage cruelty; but what cruelty, or crime, to be compared with his who, to possess himself the sooner of his father's crown, sought to sweep off his father's head? We have seen many a sad sight; but none to be compared to this aged monarch, full of honours and of years, worthy of all filial love and public veneration, who had no subject but should have fought, nor child but should have died for him, flying with a few followers, under the cloud of night, to escape the sword of his own son. And when tidings came of Absalom's death, how terrible his grief! II. **THE CAUSE OF HIS AFFLICTIONS.** It may seem a great mystery to some how so good a man should have been so sorely tried. But it is no mystery. He reaped as he had sowed. This retribution was still more painfully, and not less plainly exemplified in the unnatural and monstrous rebellion of Absalom. It may be traced to his sin in the matter of Bathsheba. It appears from one genealogy that Bathsheba was the daughter of Eliam, and from another that her father Eliam was the son of Ahithophel, the Gilonite, David's counsellor. This near relationship between Bathsheba and Ahithophel throws a flood of light on Absalom's rebellion; for what more likely than that through means of that, Ahithophel sought vengeance for the wrongs which, in the double crime of adultery and murder, the king had committed against him and his house? Revenge is a strong passion in all, but especially in the bosom of eastern nations. If, like David, we are compelled to trace our sufferings to our sins, what a weight does that add to the load! Let us pray God that, while He forgives their iniquity for Christ's sake, and takes away their guilt through his blood, he would not visit us for our sins. If we are to suffer, may it not be for sins, but for righteousness' sake! A light load that—a fortune we should neither greatly dread nor deprecate. III. **THE USE AND PROFIT OF HIS AFFLICTIONS.** When Queen Mary, by her marriage, was about to plunge herself and the kingdom of Scotland into dark and bloody troubles, Knox publicly condemned the step. For this she summoned the bold Reformer to her presence, complained bitterly of his conduct, and saying, "I vow to God I shall be revenged," burst into a flood of tears. Waiting till she had composed herself, he proceeded calmly to make his defence. It was triumphant; but produced no other effect on Mary than to exasperate her passions. Again she began to sob, and weep with great bitterness. While Erskine, the friend of both, and a man of mild and gentle spirit, tried to mitigate her grief and resentment by praising her beauty and accomplishments, Knox continued silent—waiting with unaltered countenance till the queen had given vent to her feelings. Then explaining how he was constrained to sustain her tears rather than hurt his conscience, and by his silence betray the commonwealth, he protested that he never took delight in the distress of any creature; and that so far from rejoicing in her majesty's tears, it was with great difficulty he could see his own boys weep when he corrected them for their faults. In this beautiful expression we see the feelings of every father; and in these a faithful, though feeble, reflection of the kind heart of God. In no case does He afflict His people willingly; and always for their good. And how His gracious purpose was accomplished in the Psalmist's afflictions may be seen, for instance, in the sorrow, and even horror, with which he regarded his saddest fall. His bitterest enemies could not have exposed, nor his dearest friends lamented, it more than he did

himself. Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation!" The greatest of all afflictions is an unblessed affliction. On the other hand, let the Holy Spirit, in answer to prayer, turn them into the means of our sanctification, and there are no greater mercies. How many, when they became poor in this world, have grown rich toward God! How many have found life in the death of dear ones! How many, by being brought to weep over a broken cistern, have turned their trembling steps to the fountain of living water! and when God sent storms to wreck their earthly happiness, how many "on the broken pieces of the ship" have reached the shore in safety! (T. Guthrie, D.D.)

CHAPTER XIX.

Ver. 2. **And the victory of that day was turned into mourning unto all the people.**—*Victory turned into mourning:*—The victory spoken of is a victory that was longed for, and yet when it came it was as intolerable as the sting of an adder. How is it that we are always wanting things, and often when we get them they are bitterness itself? David wanted to be rid of his enemies—he was in this case challenged to vindicate his own throne. This was no fight of his own forcing—he was obliged to meet the insubordination and the revolt of his own son. David, mighty king—you wanted to be rid of your enemies: they are dead: how now? "Yes," said he, "I wanted to be rid of my enemies, but not in that way." There it is again—it is always in some other way that we want our desire granted. You want to get clear of that son of yours? You don't. And you have said how much you would give if he were only out of the way. But all the while you made a great fatherly reservation when you said so, and a great motherly emphasis unexpressed was in your heart when you talked about his being out of the way. You meant somewhere—more comfortable, more useful, more happy. You did not mean out of the way in any tragic sense. O strange man—wild, tumultuous life. We want, and we don't want; we pray, and we don't want the answer, at least, not so—but thus, a crooked answer to a straight request. We are all trying for victory. See if that be not true. Every man, even the poorest, is aiming at some kind of victory in life. Think if this be not so, father, mother, child, man of business, man of letters, boy challenging school-mate to a marble encounter—through and through life, every section of it, we are trying in some way to get the promised end. But we are taught here that there are occasions upon which the victory is not worth winning. Is that not so in most cases? What do men want? One says: Riches. He heapeth up riches and knoweth not who shall gather them—is the victory worth the winning? Another says: Well, I want to conquer that human heart, and make it mine—man's heart, woman's heart—saith the young. Is it worth doing? It may be, it may not be. I want that apple on the bough above—not that one, but the one higher. Is it worth fetching a ladder for? Try: you get it, but the worm had it first, and you spurn it with keen disappointment from your hand. It is well, therefore, for men, before they go out to battle, to answer the question—if I win, is it worth doing?—because there are victories that are defeats, there are triumphs that are stings, there are achievements that have nothing in them but graves and horrors and mockeries. Shall we say, without any desire to be too gloomy, that there is nothing upon earth out of God, out of Christ, that is worth doing, worth having? Are there any victories that cannot be turned into mourning? Blessed be God, there are victories that are followed by no compunction, no humiliation—blessings that have no sorrow in them. What is your complaint before God? What is the disease that is poisoning your blood, and burning in your marrow, and consuming your soul—your own peculiar diseases? Jealousy? Conquer it by the Spirit of God, pray about it, shut thyself up long months and have it out with heaven. It will be a victory for ever, unimpaired, complete, full of joyous self-content. What is thy disease, thou who dost say that jealousy is no element in thy constitution—what is thy plague? Self-indulgence, self-gratification, self-delight—self, self, self, morning, noon, and night. I alone, I am the world, think of me, comfort me, let me have my way, satisfy my want—is the

key of thy life so struck? Conquer thyself. "If any man would be my disciple," saith Christ, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, not periodically, not with occasional heroism, but with steady, constant self-crucifixion, and let him follow Me." You have gone out to the battle. Hast thou won that battle? There is no other battle to be won; fight yourself—beat yourself—set the standard of a new being upon the fortresses and citadels of your own obstinacy, and then you may beat your sword into a ploughshare, and make a pruning-hook of your spear, for in your case there is no more war to be done. How is all this to be accomplished? The answer is as complete as the question is earnest and emphatic. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." We sometimes celebrate a mourning that shall be turned into victory, even the mourning of Christ the crucified Man, who said, "My soul is troubled, even unto death. Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" These are the words of mourning. "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth—Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations." These are the words of victory. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." Unless we have known the bitterness of this mourning we never can know the joy of true victory. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Mourning in a revival*:—In the spiritual kingdom of God there are experiences akin to those recorded in the text; times when, amid victories that send a thrill of joy through heaven and may well excite hallelujahs in the Church below, the "sacramental host" feel like putting on sackcloth and sitting down to "weep between the porch and the altar." Such is the case often in times of revival, when God's spirit is poured out, and sinners are convicted and converted. Although it be an occasion for rejoicing and thanksgiving on the part of God's people, it is equally an occasion for humiliation and weeping. What are some of the reasons for mourning on the part of the Church in the midst of revival scenes? 1. That so few of God's professed friends enter actively into the work. The Spirit's presence in extraordinary power is a day of glorious opportunity, both for the Church and for sinners without. It is God's "set time to favour Zion." He then "waits to be gracious." It is "harvest time." Prayer has power to prevail. Souls are pressing into the kingdom. 2. That so many sinners are passed by and left in their sins, even in the day of special merciful visitation. We have witnessed and laboured in many revivals; seen a whole community shaken as by a "rushing mighty wind," and hundreds convicted and made to cry out, What must we do to be saved? And yet many were unmoved—only looked on and wondered or scoffed. And the Spirit passed by, and they were farther than ever before from salvation! 3. That so many are convicted who are not converted; wounded, but not healed. In times of revival, it is common for many sinners to be deeply interested, and even brought under conviction of sin, who never get farther. 4. That, in all probability, a large proportion of those who are not reached and rescued in a revival will finally perish in their sins! We dare not limit the power of God. But there is a world of fact to bear out the remark. The grace of God is at flood-tide in revival seasons: what hope when the ebb comes? (*Homiletic Review.*)

Vers. 8—80. **Then the king arose and sat in the gate.**—*The restoration of David*:—David, in his extreme and protracted sorrow for the death of Absalom, forgot to do justice to the attachment, sacrifices, and victorious valour of his friends. At news of this great and inopportune grief—no song of victory! no clear-shining eyes, no erect triumphant bearing!—"the people gat them by stealth that day into the city as people, being ashamed, steal away when they flee in battle." A perilous ingratitude this on the part of David. David's forces had been victorious; in the death of Absalom the head of the rebellion had died, and yet David was in no haste to return to Jerusalem. Though the anointed of the Lord, he had been the elect of the people to the throne of Israel. And now, after this great national upheaval, if he is to reascend the throne it must be at the earnest call of the nation. So he remained still at Mahanaim. "Now, therefore, why speak ye not a word of bringing the king back?" The king! Now there was but one. Let him, then, with all due honour be brought back to his own! So spake the people throughout the country. But the men of Judah, David's own tribe, were ominously silent—committed too strongly, it may have been, to the cause of Absalom to return quickly to their old allegiance. David

would quicken their lagging loyalty. The high priests, Zadok and Abiathar, were sent to the elders of Judah with the question which touched at the tribal love of pre-eminence "Why are ye the last to bring the king back to his house?" with the remainder that they were the king's "brethren, his bones and his flesh;" and with the promise that Amasa, their captain, should supersede Joab in the command of the king's forces. Thus the king "bowed the heart of all the men of Judah, even as the heart of one man." "They sent this word unto the king, Return thou, and all thy servants." That was enough for David, unwise David! Not waiting to be escorted by all the tribes, not even by all the tribes that had been staunchest in their attachment to him, and foremost in resolution for his restoration, David, accompanied by Judah alone, and only half of Israel, crossed the Jordan and came to the ancient camp at Gilgal. Little likely that the Ten Tribes—with such rivalry as prevailed between the tribes—would consent to be thus largely ignored. Much confusion and trouble to spring from this unwise conduct of the king; presently, another spurt of rebellion, and further off—but not wholly unconnected with the rankling memories of this—the division of the nation into two never-again-united kingdoms. I. SORROW, HOWEVER POIGNANT, SHOULD NOT HINDER US FROM DUTY, OR PREVENT THE EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE. Has this unhappy civil war brought only grief to him? Is his son the only one that has perished? Alas! the many mothers in Israel, never to look again on the brave soldier-son! Sorrow, with impartial, unwelcome step, enters palace and cottage. But, however keen and consuming, life's duties still remain to the living. We are not to be absorbed from recognition of these—gratitude among them, thankfulness for sympathy. It may speak in lowly tokens of remembrance, in courteous health-inquiries. Let it be recognised. II. THE EVIL RESULTANT FROM PARTIALITY IS WRITTEN HERE. To the folly of favouritism not only are liable those in high places. It must be watched against by all who exercise any influence over others. The head of any community, however small, owes a debt of justice to each member of it. In the home, where the father and mother are the uncrowned king and queen, this folly needs especially to be avoided. III. THE BEAUTY OF A CONTENTED SPIRIT APPEARS IN MEPHIBOSHETH. The crippled prince, not lame in soul as upon his feet—a true unselfish son of Jonathan through all—goes home with words of contentment, and glad, thankful loyalty upon his lips. Goes out of our sight and hearing; goes into the silence of a past which has no further word respecting him to speak to us. Went to the narrowed fortune and duties of his narrow life. Went, we doubt not, quiet and contented, and so on to the end. On with eye fixed on a principedom with no crippling hindrances to service, or to a lot in the eternal Canaan which should be his wholly and for ever. Then, son of Jonathan, "Go thou thy way till the end be; for thou shalt rest, and stand"—never to be removed—"in thy lot at the end of the days." Much might be said of the contentment of that man, as exemplary to us, when we are wronged. Well for us if, with our larger light, we have at all times a spirit as patient and thankful as his! I will be a star of glory, a rose of beauty, in the darkness and desert barrenness of life. IV. PIOUS FORECASTS, COMELY IN ALL AND ESPECIALLY IN THE AGED, IS SEEN IN BARZILLAI. Little do we know of him. But how much we seem to know, so vividly does he live to us in this ancient chronicle. Let Chimham go to the great city, take a place at Court, bear his part in the high places of the national life, this was not for Barzillai. His eyes were not so bright as once, nor his ears so alert. He would abide among his own people. He would die in his nest. He would be buried by the grave of his father and his mother. There, in the hallowed, familiar spot, he would have his dust to rest till the great awakening. V. In David, victorious over rebellion, and restored to his throne, we have suggestion of HIS GREATER SON COMING BACK TO HIS OWN. Over rebellious hearts, over a rebellious world, Christ is triumphing onward to His universal reign. Not by weapons of war, but by love, he is vanquishing men unto Himself. The rebellious world is His world. The rebels are His creatures. He is but coming back to His own. He has the right of Creation to us. He re-enforces it by the winning right of redeeming love. Back to His own! In a sense you are all His. In the full, willing sense—surrendered to Him, be wholly His. Be the usurper dethroned. Be the rightful King acclaimed—obeyed. (G. T. Coster.) *The peaceful return*:—We talk about submission to the will of God; we speak of the Christian's peace, that it should abide with him even in times of deep distress; but preaching and practice are two very different things. Our religion may satisfy us when all is going well, when not suffering under any

great misfortune; but when "the floods come," when "the rain descends, and the winds blow," though the house may not fall, it often totters. A complete and easy victory had been won. But how could the king think of this now? His son, who had stained his soul with grievous sins, had been suddenly cut off, and summoned to his account. Who cannot feel for David at this moment? Never, probably, did he feel so much as now the weight of public business: he would wish he were a private individual; then he might have indulged his grief, and mourned for many days. It certainly is very difficult sometimes to go through our ordinary duties; the wheels do sometimes go very heavily; still David would soon find the advantage of having much to occupy him; and there can be no doubt that, hard as it is to work when we are sad, yet sorrows are much harder to bear when we are at leisure. David would never forget his unhappy son! And now that Absalom was dead, there was nothing to prevent the king's triumphant entry into Jerusalem: but there was much wisdom, as well as moderation and clemency, in his conduct at this time. The breach between the king and the people had been of their causing, and therefore it was right that they should acknowledge their fault: they had driven him from the capital, and therefore it was right that they should acknowledge their fault: they had driven him from the capital, and therefore they ought now to invite his return: coming back at their request, they would, in fact, choose him a second time for their king. The message sent to Amasa, and the promise that he should be commander-in-chief, would be the clearest proof of the sincerity of the general amnesty now proclaimed. David once more takes the reins of government; and we shall see in his conduct that singular mixture of weakness and decision, of kindness and want of judgment, which we have so often observed before. One of the first persons that he encounters on the banks of the Jordan is Shimei the son of Gera. According to the law, this man deserved to die. But it would not do to begin by putting any man to death now; such an execution would shake men's confidence as to the former promise of pardon. Accordingly, Shimei is pardoned, although his crime, as we see afterwards, was not forgotten. If Shimei's confession was sincere, it should have been completely pardoned; if he was a hypocrite, he should have been punished. Perhaps some excuse for David's conduct may be found in the fact that he could not know for certain what was in his heart. But Jesus knows whether we are sincere or not, and when He grants us pardon, it is complete and full; He never qualifies it, He never recalls it; but our sins are "cast into the depths of the sea." The next person whose case is mentioned is Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan. Having given him the place of one of his children, David expected that he would have accompanied his household into exile. Annoyed at his absence, gratified by the contributions of Ziba, and too easily believing the story of the servant. But now Mephibosheth tells his own tale. The same motives of policy that induced David to pardon Shimei make him now pass over the offence of Ziba; besides, he cannot forget, perhaps, how opportunely the provisions had been brought to him. Certainly, so far, there is little to admire in David's conduct; there may be great worldly wisdom, but there is not much grace; he acts as a politic, rather than a religious, man. What we want is that depth of Christian principle which shall influence all our conduct, so that in all the relations of life it shall be plain that we are spiritual men. And now we gladly turn to the most interesting picture in this part of David's history, the last interview between him and Barzillai. Whatever David's failings may have been, he can never be said to be wanting in gratitude. What had David learned by all the events that had recently taken place? I think just this, that it is utter folly to seek for satisfaction here, or to set our affections upon earthly things. And this is the end God has in view in all the various trials of life. Every public position requires grace in him who holds it; and certainly one of Satan's devices to keep men from a life of contemplation, from constant prayer, and from a close walk with God, is to give them many secular occupations. Barzillai says wisely, "If there is a time to undertake these things, there is a time also when it is well to lay them aside; and the aged should be content with obscurity." (*C. Bosanquet, M.A.*) *David's policy on his return to Jerusalem*:—1. David's return to Jerusalem. In his account of what followed, as of what preceded the crisis of the rebellion (chaps. xv., xvi.), the historian has cast the bulk of his narrative into the form of personal interviews with the king. 2. David's secret overtures to the tribe of Judah. Himself a member of the tribe whose ancient sanctuary had been the focus of the rebellion, David, with his statesman's eye, saw in the new

situation a favourable opportunity of binding the southern clans anew to his person. Accordingly, he opens negotiations with Zadok and Abiathar. In thus playing off the South against the North, David was doubtless aware of the risk he ran of increasing the jealousy, already of long standing, between them, but in the circumstances David can scarcely be blamed for seeing in his southern kinsfolk, in the men who, as he says, were his bone and his flesh (ver. 12), the natural support of his dynasty. (*The Century Bible*.)

Ver. 10. **Now therefore why speak ye not a word of bringing the king back?**—*Bringing the king back:*—I. MANY HAVE LOST THE COMFORTABLE PRESENCE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. Some have long dwelt in the cold shade of suspended fellowship, and must be anxiously pining after its restoration. Now to such as these, who see no longer the bright and morning star, we say, "Why speak ye not a word of bringing the king back?" If your soul has been nipped with the frosts of a long and dreary winter, if the Sun of Righteousness do but cross the line and manifest his meridian splendour, your summer will return at once. Let the king come, and all his court will follow—all the graces display themselves where the Lord of grace is revealed. Always beware of any instruction or direction which would withdraw you from the cross as the sole and simple ground of your comfort. While your bark is tossed about at sea, it is very likely that she wants a new copper bottom, or the deck requires holy-stoning, or the rigging is out of repair, or the sails want overhauling, or fifty other things may be necessary; but if the wind is blowing great guns, and the vessel is drifting towards those white-crested breakers, the first business of the mariner is to make for the haven at once, to avoid the hurricane. When he is all snug in port, he can attend to hull and rigging, and all the odds and ends besides. So with you, child of God, one thing you must do, and I beseech you do it. Do not be looking to this, or to that, or to the other out of a thousand things that may be amiss, but steer straight for the cross of Christ, which is the haven for distressed spirits. "Why speak ye not a word of bringing the king back?" 1. Perhaps, you reply, "We speak not a word of this because we are afraid that the king may have forgotten us." Oh, cruel thought concerning so kind a friend! Hear ye his own words, "I am God; I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." 2. But you say, "How shall I return to him? I feel ashamed to come to him yet again." Recollect that, bad as you are, you are not now worse than when you first came to him. "Why speak ye not a word of bringing the King back?" 3. I hope the answer to that question is not that you have forgotten Him. Forgotten the man of Gethsemane, crimsoned with his own blood for you? Forgotten Him whose hands were pierced for you, who bore the crown of thorns, and bowed his head, and gave up the ghost for you? Forgotten that faithful lover who ever since he ascended above the stars has never ceased to intercede for you, and such as you? Oh, shame indeed! II. MANY PROFESSORS DO VERY LITTLE TO BRING CHRIST BACK TO HIS KINGDOM IN THE WORLD. III. A LARGE CLASS ARE REBELLIOUS SUBJECTS OF THIS KING. "The ox knoweth its owner, and the ass its master's crib," but you do not know, and you have lived all these years without considering. Is it not unjust? Does not conscience tell you that you do wrong to rebel against the God that made you? Christ is your lawful King, and you are a rebel against Him. (*C. H. Spurgeon*.) *David, a king and saviour in Israel:*—Joab's timely advice, followed by the suffering father. (Prov. xiv. 28; xvi. 15.) I. WHY DID HE NOT IMMEDIATELY GO BACK? 1. Restoration of the king's presence must be sought by rebel subjects. 2. Because he would be king of their hearts, not of the land and city merely. So Christ's sovereignty now must be voluntary. One day it will be obligatory, as was Solomon's. (Phil. ii. 10; Rev. ii. 27.) Christ will only rule over willing hearts in His kingdom of grace. Many Christians have their own way. Christ does not coerce; but they are slaves to self instead of being Christ's freedmen. Observe the nature of Christ's kingdom in the heart. (Rom. xiv. 17; 1 John iii. 9, with Gal. iii. 16; iv. 19; Col. i. 27 (Matt. ii. 3—born king); 1 Cor. xv. 45—50; xv. 24.) Christ waits to be invited as David did. He will not reign at Mahanaim, only at Jerusalem; but He sends messages. David's message to rebellious Judah is really a pardon, and as such moved the hearts of the people. (Ver. 14.) II. PARDON OF SHIMEI. Abishai was legally right (Exod. xxii. 28; 1 Sam. xxvi. 9), but was reminding David of that incident in his past life, and thus helping him to remain true to his own generous instincts. (1 Sam. xxiv. 5.) The grand answer. I am King, because I can be a

Saviour. (1 Sam. xi. 12, 18.) Christ might have been King in right of His election (Ps. ii. 6—8), and will be some day; but He willed to reign by right of His cross. (Ps. lxxii. 1, 2, 14.) III. **MEPHIBOSHETH, TYPE OF THE TRUE CHILDREN OF THE BRIDE-CHAMBER.** (Mark ii. 19, 20; John xvi. 20—22.) IV. **BARZILLAI, TYPE OF THE TRULY WEANED SOUL**, content to do without temporal blessings and sensible comforts; satisfied with the certainty of the king's favour. Fruitful also, leaving those whom he has led to Christ to carry on his service. Chimbam apparently received David's own inheritance. (Jer. xli. 17; John xvii. 24; Rev. iii. 21; xxii. 16; ii. 28. (*R. E. Faulkner.*)

Ver. 18. There went over a ferry boat to carry over the king's household.—*The ferry-boat of the Jordan*:—This river Jordan, in all ages and among all Christian people, has been the symbol of the boundary line between earth and heaven. I want to show you to-day that there is a way over Jordan as well as through it. My text says: "And there went over a ferry boat to carry over the king's household." I. My subject, in the first place, impresses me with the fact that when we cross over from this world to the next, **THE BOAT WILL HAVE TO COME FROM THE OTHER SIDE.** The tribe of Judah, we are informed, sent this ferry boat across to bring David and his household. Blessed be God, there is a boat coming from the other side. Transportation at last for our souls from the other shore. Everything about this Gospel of Mercy from the other shore. Pardon from the other shore. Mercy from the other shore. Pity from the other shore. Ministry of angels from the other shore. Power to work miracles from the other shore. Jesus Christ from the other shore. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." I bless God that as the boat came from the other shore to take David and his men across, so, when we come to die, the boat of salvation will come from the same direction. God forbid that I should ever trust to anything that starts from this side. II. When we cross over at the last, **THE KING WILL BE ON BOARD THE BOAT.** The king was on board the boat, and those women and children, and all the household of the king, knew that every care was taken to have that king pass in safety. When a soul goes to heaven, it does not go alone. The King is on board the boat. Was Paul alone in the last exigency? Hear the shout of the scarred missionary, as he cries out, "I am now ready to be offered up, and the time of my departure is at hand." Was John Wesley alone in the last exigency? No. Hear him say: "Best of all, God is with us." Here is the promise: "When thou passeth through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee." Christ at the sick pillow to take the soul out of the body; Christ to help the soul down the bank into the boat; Christ 'mid stream; Christ on the other side to help the soul up the beach. Be comforted about your departed friends. Be comforted about your own demise when the time shall come. Tell it to all the people under the sun that no Christian ever dies alone. The King is in the boat. III. My text suggests that leaving this world for heaven is **ONLY CROSSING A FERRY.** Doctor Shaw estimates the average width of the Jordan to be about thirty yards. What, so narrow! Yes. "There went over a ferry-boat to carry over the king's household." Yes, going to heaven is only a short trip. Only a ferry. That accounts for something you have never been able to understand. You never could have supposed that very nervous and timid Christian people could be so perfectly unexcited and placid in the last hour. The fact is, they were clear down on the bank, and they saw there was nothing to be frightened about. Such a short distance—only a ferry! With one ear they heard the funeral psalm in their memory, and with the other they heard the song of heavenly salutation. The willows on this side the Jordan, and the Lebanon cedars on the other, almost interlocked their branches. Only a ferry! IV. My subject also suggests the fact that when we cross over at the last, **WE SHALL FIND A SOLID LANDING.** The ferry-boat, as spoken of in my text, means a place to start from, and a place to land. David and his people did not find the eastern shore of the Jordan any more solid than the western shore where he landed, and yet, to a great many, heaven is not a real place. I never heard of any heaven I want to go to except St. John's heaven. I believe I shall hear Mr. Toplady sing yet, and Isaac Watts recite hymns, and Mozart play. "O," you say, "where would you get the organ?" The Lord will provide the organ. I believe I shall yet see David with a harp, and I will ask him to sing one of the Songs of Zion. My heaven is not a fog-bank. My eyes

are unto the hills—the everlasting hills. The King's ferry-boat starting from a wharf on this side will go to a solid landing-place on the other side. V. My subject teaches that when we cross over at the last, **WE WILL BE MET AT THE LANDING.** When David and his family went over in the ferry-boat spoken of in the text, they landed amid a nation that had come out to greet them. As they stepped from the deck of the boat to the shore, there were thousands of people who gathered around them trying to express a satisfaction that was beyond description. And so you and I will be met at the landing. Our arrival will not be like stepping ashore at Antwerp or Constantinople among a crowd of strangers; it will be among friends—good friends, warm-hearted friends, and all their friends. The poet Southey said he thought he should know Bishop Heber in heaven by the portraits he had seen of him in London; and Dr. Randolph said he thought he should know William Cowper, the poet, in heaven from the pictures he had seen of him in England; but we shall know our departed kindred by the portraits hung in the throne-room of our hearts. On starlight nights you look up—and I suppose it is so with any one who has friends in heaven—and you cannot help but think of those who have gone; and I suppose they look down and cannot but think of us. But they have the advantage of us. We know not just where their world of joy is. They know where we are. O, what a consolation this ought to be to those whose friends have gone away—how it ought to take off the sharp edge of their melancholy. The partings of earth solaced by the reunions of heaven! (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *The king's ferry boats:*—There have been few scenes on the Jordan more interesting than that in which this ferry boat plays a part. I. **THE KING'S FERRY BOAT CARRIES US ACROSS THE JORDAN OF OUR CONDEMNATION, AND BRINGS US TO THE LAND OF FORGIVENESS.** Shimei made his peace with David that day. He had been, in the time of David's great emergency, when he needed soldiers, a base and wicked traitor. So I bring to any poor sinner here the King's ferry boat, on which you may safely ride across the Jordan of your sins to the blessed shore of forgiveness; it is surrender to God and unconditional acceptance of Christ Jesus as your Saviour. II. **GOD CARRIES HIS PEOPLE ACROSS THE RIVER OF THEIR NEEDS.** God's Word assures us that the Lord is not unmindful of the necessities of our human lives. Christ says: "Your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." The man who trusts God is a great deal better taken care of than he who proposes to neglect God and look out for number one. We shall never reach the limit of God's infinite grace and mercy by our most exaggerated dreams of good. Does not Paul assure us that God will supply all our need "according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus?" The one ferry boat that is sure to float you across the river of life's need is a genuine, whole-hearted Christianity. III. **THE KING'S FERRY BOAT ACROSS THE RIVER OF TROUBLE AND SORROW.** How abundant are the promises of God that those who join His household shall be ferried safely across all the sorrows and troubles of life! IV. We may see also in this figure our **KING'S FERRY BOAT ACROSS THE RIVER OF DEATH.** God does not leave his saints to die alone. Two days before Mr. Moody's death there was placed in his room, unknown to him, a stenographer, who took every word that fell from the good man's lips. And in the last moments he said: "Earth recedes. Heaven opens before me. You say this is death. There is nothing awful here; it is sweet, this place. Do not call me back. God is calling me, I must go. There is no valley here, it is all beautiful, beautiful." So Moody found, as millions of God's people have found before, that the King's ferry boat is roomy and splendid, and safe in carrying the King's household across the Jordan of death to the shores of that beautiful country "which eager hearts expect." The ferry boat will not be lonely in crossing any of these streams, for Christ is Captain, and there are no rules that keep us from speaking to him while he is on duty. We may hold sweet communion with him all the way. On the ferry boats which ply between Liverpool and the Cheshire side of the Mersey is the notice: "Passengers are requested not to speak to the captain or steersman while crossing the river." (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*)

Vers. 18—23. **And Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king.**—*Characteristic forgiveness:*—One man will forgive a grievous wrong while another will not overlook a wry word. King John had most villainously treated his brother Richard in his absence. Was it likely that when he of the lion's heart came home he would pass over his brother's offence? If you look at John, villain that he was, it was most unlikely that he should be forgiven; but then, if you

consider the brave, high-souled Richard, the very flower of chivalry, you expect a generous deed. Base as John was, he was likely to be forgiven, because Richard was so free of heart, and accordingly pardon was right royally given by the great hearted monarch. Had John only been half as guilty, if his brother Richard had been like himself, he would have made him lay his neck on the block. If John had been Richard and Richard had been John, no matter how small the offence, there would have been no likelihood of pardon at all. So it is in all matters of transgression and pardon. You must take the offence somewhat into account, it is true, but not one-half so much as the character of the person who has been offended. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *A wise king*:—Alphonsus, King of Naples and Sicily, justly celebrated in history for his leniency and mercy, was once asked why he was so lenient to all, even the most wicked men. "Because," said he, "good men are won by justice, the bad by mercy." On another occasion some complained that he was too kind, even for a prince. "What, then?" cried the king; "would you have lions and tigers to reign over you? Do you not know that cruelty is the property of wild beasts, mercy that of man?"

Ver. 22. **For do not I know that I am this day king over Israel.**—*Conscious kingship*:—What wonderful applications this doctrine admits of! It touches life at every point; it is full of lessons to men in all stages of life and in all degrees of influence. I. **KNOW THE GREAT MAN BY HIS GOODNESS.** Know real power, not by its tyranny, but by its kindness. David was given to this kind of expression of his greatness. Once he cut off Saul's skirt and spared the fool; he could have cut off Saul's head. It is better not to use all your power. Always have a great reserve of strength. Never deal your deadliest blow until you are wholly driven to it. You will win more victories by forgiveness than by vengeance, by retaliation, by so-called self-defence. II. Apply this to the matter of **PERSONAL CHARACTER** and the defence of personal reputation. Some men are always defending themselves. They had better let it alone. Some little natures are always taking revenge. They will say, "Mark: he shall account for this; I have made a note before his name in my diary; he shall hear of this some other day." Oh, shame! That is not the spirit of Christ, the spirit of kingship, the spirit of divinely royalty; that is littleness, yea the veriest meanness. III. Apply this to **PRETENDED RULERS.** In proportion as a man is only a pretended ruler in anything, in business, in the Church, in Parliament, anywhere—in proportion as he is only a pretence he will be full of vengeance. Cut off their heads! is his policy: make short work of them: we must have a spirited policy; there must be no dillydallying here. Foolish talk; foolish heart! We are not to judge things by stones that are thrown, by dust that is poured upon the wind, by the shouting and crying of poor natures: we must remember that God's eternity moves slowly but surely, and all his mills grind exceedingly small. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves": do not take yourselves into your own keeping, "but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written"—written in nature, written in every star, written in history, written in life—"Vengeance is mine." Vengeance can only belong to one court. All other vengeance is minor, trivial, partial, unjust. II. Apply this to **THE CHRISTIAN ARGUMENT.** How slow it is sometimes to human seeming; how indifferent almost to its own issue! It looks calmly upon all the little fray of words, and says, For do not I know that I can save men, bless men, help men, as no other power or force upon earth can do? Why should I follow all these people that are trying to pull my letters to pieces? Why should I take vengeance upon them? The Christian argument often takes no notice of the metaphysical strife, the angry contest, the loud dispute; it does not come down to avenge itself; it says, I am the most beneficent power in human thought, I can therefore afford to wait, and be quiet, and be calm, and not a single life will I take if I can possibly help it. V. See how wondrously all this **FITS THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST.** In Christ there is nothing vindictive, nothing clamorous, nothing precipitant. When the people would take him by force and make him king he vanished out of their sight. This was the difficulty he had to contend with in his life—refusing so long to declare himself. This might do for a refrain to the music of Christ's words—Do not I know that I am the Saviour of the world? Do not I know that I am this day King? Haste thee, smite thine enemies, crush all opposition, shine out of the heavens, out-dazzle the glory of summer noonday, and by that ineffable blaze declare thyself to be King! He says, No; that is not the way; that would be foolish, precipitant, impetuous,

irrational: we must move with the currents of life: I have not come to institute a reformation, but to work out a regeneration. Why do the heathen rage? Because they are "the heathen." Why do the people imagine a vain thing? Because they are "the people," without regulation, discipline, lofty control, spiritual inspiration. Why is the Lord quiet upon His throne? Because He is upon it, and it is His. In one of two ways Jesus Christ is to be King over us all: He is to be King either with our consent, or against it. Choose ye this day. Or you must know that He is the King of kings and Lord of lords; and if you will not accept the sovereignty of His love you must accept the sovereignty of His fear. Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. (J. Parker, D.D.)

Vers. 24—30. **Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king.**—*Mephibosheth an enigma of motive*:—And Mephibosheth, also, the son of Saul, came down to meet the king. Our too otiose English is unjust to Mephibosheth; or else it has taken Mephibosheth's infirmity in his feet much too seriously. Mephibosheth was not so crippled in his intellect, at any rate, as to stay in Jerusalem till the king came home. He was too eager for that to congratulate the king on his victory. We all know how the mind overmasters the body, and makes us forget all about its lameness on occasions. And Mephibosheth was at the Jordan all the way from Jerusalem almost as soon as Shimei himself. Four hundred years before, just at the same place, when the inhabitants of Gideon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, they did work wilily, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors, and took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles old and rent and bound up, and old shoes and clouted upon their feet, and old garments upon them, and all the bread of their provisions was dry and mouldy. And Joshua said, Who are ye, and whence come ye? And they said, From a very far country thy servants are come, because of the name of the Lord thy God. And Joshua made a league with them, to let them live; and the princes of the congregation sware unto them. And all that about Joshua and the Gibeonites came back to David's mind when he saw Mephibosheth lifted down off his ass. For Mephibosheth had not dressed his wooden feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes for grief, so he said, from the day that the king departed. Nor had he taken time to-day to make himself decent for such a journey, such was his joy that the king was coming back again to Jerusalem. Yes, but what came of thee that morning, Mephibosheth? asked David. I looked for thee. I was afraid that in the overthrow some evil had befallen thee. Thou art not able to bear arms for me; but thy father so strengthened my hands in God that to have seen the face of his son that morning, and to have heard thy voice would have done for me and for my cause what thy father did. My lord, said Mephibosheth—but "the tale was as lame as the tale-bearer." Ziba had stolen his ass just as he was mounting him to come with the king—and so on. David did not stoop to ask whose ass this was that Mephibosheth had got saddled so soon this morning. Say no more, Mephibosheth, said David, as he saw Jonathan's son crawling so abjectly before him. Dr. Kitto complains of David's "tart answer" to Mephibosheth. But if David was too tart, then with what extraordinary and saintly sweetness Mephibosheth received the over-tartness of the king. "Let Ziba take all my estates to-day forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace to his own house." No, there was nothing cripple in Mephibosheth's intellects. "Mephibosheth was a philosopher," says Dr. Parker. "I find no defect of his wits in Mephibosheth," says honest Joseph Hall. And the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, because of the Lord's oath that was between them, between David and Jonathan, the son of Saul. (A. Whyte, D.D.) *Self-interest the parent of ingratitude*:—In poor Mephibosheth's case, it would seem as if his early and lifelong infirmity, taken along with the hopeless loss of his brilliant prospects, had all eaten into his heart till he became the false, scheming creature that David found him out to be. Hephæstion loved Alexander, while Craterus loved the king. And Jonathan was like Hephæstion in this, that he loved David at all times, whereas his son Mephibosheth resembled Craterus in this, that he preferred David on the throne to David off the throne. Jonathan strengthened David's hand in God in the wood of Ziph; but Mephibosheth, like another classical character, fled the empty cask. How Mephibosheth's heart had overflowed with gratitude to David when the royal command came that he was to leave Machir's house in Lo-debar, and was henceforth to take up his quarters in the king's house in

Jerusalem! All Mephibosheth's morosity and misanthropy melted off his heart that day. But such was Mephibosheth at the bottom of his heart that, as he continued to eat at David's table, Satan entered into Mephibosheth and said to him in his heart that all this was by original and Divine right his own. All this wealth, and power, and honour, and glory. But for the bad fortune of his father's royal house on Mount Gilboa, all this would to-day have been his own. "Ingratitude," says Mozley, "is not only a species of injustice, it is the highest species of injustice." And the ingratitude of Mephibosheth grew at David's table to this high injustice, that he waited for both David and Absalom to be chased out of Jerusalem, that he might take their place. There is no baser heart than an ungrateful heart. And it was Mephibosheth's ungrateful heart that prepared him for the baseness that he was found out in both at the flight of David and at his victorious return.

"The virtues were invited once

To banquet with the Lord of All:

They came—the great ones rather grim,

And not so pleasant as the small.

They talked and chatted o'er the meal,

They even laughed with temp'rate glee;

And each one knew the other well,

And all were good as good could be.

Benevolence and Gratitude

Alone of all seemed strangers yet;

They stared when they were introduced—

On earth they never once had met."

Dean Milman says that the writings both of Tacitus and Dante are full of remorse. And it is, as I believe, in our own remorse that we shall find the true key to Mephibosheth's heart. When a government goes out of power, when a church is under a cloud, when religion has lost her silver slippers, and when she walks in the shadow of the street, and when any friend has lost his silver slippers—then we discover Mephibosheth in ourselves, and hate both him and ourselves like hell. And commentators have taken sides over the case of Mephibosheth very much as they have found that contemptible creature skulking in themselves, and have had bitter remorse on account of him. "I am full of self-love, fear to confess Thee, or to hazard myself, or my estate, or my peace. . . . My perplexity continues as to whether I shall move now or not, stay or return, hold by Lauderdale, or make use of the Bishop. I went to Sir George Musket's funeral, where I was looked at, as I thought, like a speckled bird. . . . *Die Dom.*—I find great averseness in myself to suffering. I am afraid to lose life or estate. Shall I forbear to hear that honest minister, James Urquhart, for a time, seeing the stone is like to fall on me if I do so?" And then our modern Mephibosheth has the grace to add in his diary, like the book of judgment: "A grain of sound faith would easily answer all these questions:—I have before me Mr. Rutherford's letter desiring me to deny myself." And though you will not easily believe it, the author of that letter himself has enough of Jonathan's crippled and disinherited son still in himself to give a tang, and more than a tang, of remorse to some of his best letters. "Oh, if I were free of myself! Myself is another devil, and as evil as the prince of devils. Myself! Myself! Every man blames the devil for his sins, but the house and heart devil of every man is himself. I think I shall die still but minting and aiming to be a Christian man!" This, then, is the prize for finding out that enigma of motive, Mephibosheth's hidden heart. This is the first prize, to receive of God the inward eye to discover Mephibosheth in our ourselves. (*Ibid.*) **Mephibosheth . . . had neither dressed his feet nor trimmed his beard.**—*Regard for personal appearance:*—There is a very suggestive story told of Napoleon when his army was in dire need, retreating from Moscow in 1818. The soldiers were ragged, dirty, starved, and unkempt, and it seemed to be impossible to present the smart and orderly appearance which usually characterises troops on the march. But in the very heart of their necessity one of the generals came before Napoleon one morning as neatly attired as if for parade. The Emperor's commendation was instant: "My General," he said, "you are a brave man!" Napoleon was a man of the keenest

and clearest insight, and he could read a character through a trifle. He knew perfectly well that a man who put care and energy and precision into a courtesy would not be lacking upon the field. Is not the story suggestive of the finer characteristics of the Christian life? Real Christian heroism manifests itself in trifles. How do we finish our speech? Into what kind of dress do we put our courtesies? In what form and manner does our service express itself? Are we as scrupulous and painstaking when little demand is made upon us, as we are amid the crises and heavier battles of life? Christian heroism is not only an affair of great conflicts, it also manifests itself on those smaller occasions when so many people relax both effort and desire. (*Hartley Aspen.*)

Vers. 31—41. And Barzillai the Gileadite came down from Rogelim, and went over Jordan with the king.—Barzillai the great man in society:

—1. One feature in the Bible is that it represents members of every class of society, as not only belonging to, but actually working in God's Church. The great gathering of the people of God, which the Bible brings to notice, numbers kings, counsellors, captains, and honourable men, without distinction, as forming a part in God's great Church on earth. The jewels of God, when made up to form His crown, are of every hue and colour; not only the diamond reflecting the varied lustre of the saintly character, which dwelling apart from the world, realises itself as a denizen of heaven; but there also is the purple amethyst of earthly royalty; the pale sapphire of female loveliness; and the emerald, which borrows from the earth its hues, reminding us of the works of the creation of God. 2. Barzillai of Rogelim is one of a class of which many are mentioned in the Bible—great and rich men who served the Lord. Boaz, Gaius, Joseph of Arimathea, and Barnabas are his companions. Boundless wealth and magnificence, mark at once his circumstance; unlimited hospitality is the leading feature of his conduct; loyalty, whose keen edge is only whetted by the adversity of the king whom he serves, marks his principles. He was one who had been used to feast under the song "of the singing men and singing women;" ease, courtesy, and independence marked his manner; and the marble which contained the dust of his fathers marked at the same time the last earthly aim of Barzillai. There are some to whom the aristocracy of the tomb has a nobler lustre than the aristocracy of life; there are some who count it a higher honour that their dust should slumber with the dust of their ancestors than that they in life should repose in the palace of kings. It is among the leading features of those who are truly great in this world. Now these are the features of a great man, and suggest many lessons to the great among ourselves: (1.) His exceeding great position is established; (2.) His boundless hospitality. (3.) His unswerving loyalty, and that shown especially in the king's adversity. (4.) His uncompromising independence. (5.) His carelessness about a court, or the luxuries of life. (6.) His suggesting a representative of himself to attend the king; and lastly, his feeling about his burial. 3. One duty of the great, rich man which we learn from the case of Barzillai is that of wide, enlarged hospitality. Means are a talent given to improve. But men frequently mistake the tenure of their wealth. The most minute description of the last day in the Bible is based on the claims of hospitality. It is a duty, and in exercising it a man fulfils one great rule and law of Christianity, exercises a distinct talent which God has given him, and fulfils one of those modes of employing his talents which God has left him. 4. Barzillai suggests another lesson: He entertained a king—in adversity. A persecuted out-cast king went by, and he threw his gates open to receive him. Those who are great in wealth and power too often seek the credit of those whose worldly position will cast honour on themselves by having them under their roof. The Christian and religious man of wealth and power is he who rather receives those whom the world frowns upon under his roof; and loves to lend his wealth to buy a share in the return of those on whom God's chastening hand is laid, than refuse the shelter which may bring discredit in the eyes of the world. Barzillai seems to have acted as he did without a conscious desire of worldly honour or human praise. It is not this office or that which makes a man great, it is the way in which a man occupies any office. 5. Barzillai desired burial with his father and mother. The punishment of kings of Israel was that they should not be buried by their fathers, and the first aim of Abraham was not the purchase of a dwelling-place but "the purchase of a burial place." The burial of our Blessed Lord stands as a prominent feature in the acts of His saving Life and Death,

though it was where "no man had yet lain." His Sacred Body opened a new vault for the human race, and led the way to a new cave of Machpelah, beneath whose consecrated escutcheons all the Church desire burial. The burial "in sure and certain hope of a resurrection to eternal life." The burial under the motto, "Resurgam," and the escutcheon of the wing which bears the soul to heaven. So the associations of the grave became ennobled and sanctified. There the felled trees lie. There lies the record of the character with the finish which it had received at death; the penitent, the patient, the innocent, or the heavily-minded. Let those who stand in high places like him aim at an integrity and a stainless association with the past, and they will do well. It is not the pomp of the funeral or the magnificence of the eulogy which sheds the lustre on the departed: but the epitaph of their tomb. (*E. Monro.*) *Barzillai, the Gideonite; or, the influence of age*:—Barzillai's words to the king of Israel remind us of the influence that age produces upon men. I. A MELLOWNESS OF HEART. There is a feeling soft and subdued running through the words of this patriarchal Gideonite. In the gradual passage from maturity to helplessness, the harshest characters sometimes have a period in which they are gentle and placid as young children. One who saw the Duke of Wellington in his last years, describes him as very gentle in his aspect and demeanour. II. AN INDISPOSITION TO EXERTION. "How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem? I am this day fourscore years old." It seems benevolently arranged that, as the limbs get feeble and incapable of action, the inclination to exertion decreases too. III. A LACK OF INTEREST IN THE WORLD. To an old man the world is a plum that has lost its bloom, an orange that has been sucked till the peel is dry. The pageantries of court and the dazzle of fashionable life are to the old man but as the worthless gilt that spangles the dress of an actor. When old age comes over the millionaire, how shapes the world to him? IV. AN INCAPACITY FOR EARTHLY ENJOYMENTS. "Can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink?" He could not relish either the banquets or the concerts of the court. The choicest delicacies of the table would fall upon his appetite, the most transporting strains of music would fall dead upon his ear: "The desire has failed, and the daughters of music are brought low." Years not only steal away our strength, but our relish for earthly pleasures. V. AN INTEREST IN THE DEAD. "Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again," etc. Here is the filial instinct glowing in the breast of an old man. CONCLUSION. 1. Here is a rebuke to worldliness. What if you amass a princely fortune? Whilst it will not make you happy, either in the morning of your youth or the zenith of your noon, it will be utterly worthless to you if you live to old age. 2. Here, is, too, an argument for religion. Form an alliance with those eternal principles that will make your spirits young and strong amidst the infirmities of age. Prepare for the future! (*Homilist.*) *Barzillai the Gileadite*:—Some of the most interesting spots in our Scottish landscapes are hidden from the hasty traveller. He passes through a beautiful valley, sees the clear rushing river, the green fields fringed by the dark woods which climb the skirts of the hills, the mountain tops with their massive swell or rocky precipice indenting the sky, and he thinks he knows the whole. But there are exquisite spots of beauty hidden among the hills, shady pools in the streams, quiet retreats so fresh and far away from the world's eye, that when he sees them he feels as if the foot of man had never been there before. It is so in the Bible. We read the great roll of the heroes of faith in the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews, and it seems as if we had traversed the history of the ancient Church of God. But when we pass through the first ranks and the grander scenes, we light upon spots of tranquil beauty and characters of transparent faith and truthfulness which fill us with the gladness of surprise. The story of Barzillai is one of these. I. WE HAVE A MAN WHO KNOWS THAT HE IS OLD, BUT WHO IS NOT DISTRESSED BY THE THOUGHT OF IT. He has no reticence, no shame, and, so far as we can see, he has no regret. He numbers up his weaknesses, indeed, but it is much in the way a soldier counts the scars he has brought from his battlefields. This is the hoary head which is so beautiful when it is found in the way of righteousness. We should aim at this even from youth. But how are we to prepare for this? First, surely, by taking God with us early in the journey of life. God is willing to receive a man whenever he turns to Him; but the later he turns, the more shall be his regrets. Next, by providing beforehand the compensations which God is willing to give for everything that may be taken away by the changes of life. If the eye is to become dim, we may be preparing an inner vision more open and

clear for Divine and eternal realities; if the ear is to be dulled to earthly music, and hard of access to the voice of friends, we can ask that friend to say to it, "Ephphatha, Be opened!" who will enter our solitude with his words—"To old age I am He, to hoar hairs I will carry you;" if the feet and hands become powerless for their accustomed work, we may exercise ourselves in the faith and hope which make the feet more than youthful and change the hands to wings, so that we shall mount up like eagles, and run and not be weary, and walk and not faint. Someone has said that it would be a melancholy world without children, and an inhuman world without the aged; and the world is never better than when these two can meet and give and receive gladness. We have a natural reluctance to the feeling that we are growing old; we put it away, and when something at last forces it upon us, it is like the rush of an armed man from an ambush, or the flake of the first snow to tell us that the long summer days are gone, and that winter is at hand. And yet, as you may have seen, it is the transition which is the most painful. When the first days of brown October show us the fresh green leaves of summer, now sere and yellow, dropping from the boughs under the wind that wails through the thin woods, we cannot help a feeling of sadness creeping over the heart. But when winter has come it has its own enjoyments; there is the long, quiet evening, the cheerful gleam of the hearth, the closer bosom of the family and of friendship, the pleasant memories of summer, and the hopes of its return—these give to winter its gladness, and even its glow. If we are in this transition, or nearing it, we should seek to realise it, and to rise above it by looking forward. Every time of life to a true man is only a transition to something better.

II. We have a MAN WHO IS RICH, BUT WHO IS SATISFIED WITH HIS NATURAL POSITION. No doubt, the remark will readily be made by some, "It is easy for a rich man to be satisfied; let us have his wealth, and we shall blame ourselves if we ask for anything more." But if you look round on the world, you will perceive that it is at the stage of prosperity that the dissatisfaction of many men begins. It is quite true that the Bible forbids no man to seek the improvement of his worldly circumstances, or to use that improvement in a wise and generous way. It has no malediction on wealth itself, and no canonising of poverty. When our Saviour bade the young man sell all he had, and give to the poor, it was a test of character, not a condition of discipleship. But there are two things against which a man who has risen to wealth should carefully watch—becoming the slave of sensual gratification: "What more can I eat and drink?" or "How can I shine in the social circle?" In the midst of empty ambitions, and vain contests for pre-eminence, our wisdom is to prefer the position which agrees with what is deepest in our nature, and which is most helpful to our spiritual life.

III. We have a MAN OF LONG EXPERIENCE, WHO HAS KEPT UP HIS LOVE OF SIMPLE PLEASURES. We can infer this from the tone in which he speaks. In these times of tumult and change, we think with envy of the quiet, primitive days, when men grew up in their place with leisure for spreading out their thoughts like branches, and sending down their affections like roots. We have no wish to depreciate that kind of life which occupies itself with the activities of the world, which presses into the highways of cities, and the throng of business, and which has its pleasure in breasting and battling with the great waves of public movement in social and intellectual and political progress. There are faculties in man's nature which find their proper exercise in this; the world could not advance or even live without it, and the calm recesses, which seem shut out from the great sea of life, would stagnate if they were not stirred by its tides. But we should take care that the whirl of public life does not unfit us for enjoying private life.

IV. We have a MAN WHO IS ATTACHED TO THE PAST, BUT WHO DOES NOT DISTRUST THE FUTURE. There was evidently a great change coming over the land of Israel at this time. The old patriarchal ways were losing their hold. The capital was growing, and men and gold and silver flowing into it. New views were prevailing which looked on the past as antiquated, and pressed forward, often recklessly, into unknown futures. The young men of revolution who gathered round Absalom were a sign of it, and after the splendour of Solomon's reign it came out more distinctly under his successor. In the parting of Barzillai and David we seem to have the two tendencies, the recoil of the old, the advance of the new. We are in the midst of one of these transitions now, when many are fearing, and some predicting, only evil. The quiet old life of our country is retiring evermore into the background, and the towns with their rush of life, their battles of thought and action, their impulses for good and evil are in the front. We cannot help

regretting it, and wishing to retain as much as we can of what was good. When we think of the old life of Scotland among its hills and cottage homes, of its men and women so intelligent and God-fearing, so independent in spirit, yet so kindly and courteous, it is hard to believe that its departure can be a blessing. The land can scarcely anywhere rear a nobler people than those who, on a Sabbath morning, gathered like streams from the valleys to the house of God, to sing the psalms which had been the strength of their fathers when they were outcasts among the mountains. There is another view of the time which may make us still more anxious. Insurrections of self-will and lawlessness are breaking out which threaten all things human and Divine. Men are setting their mouths against the heavens, and laying bitter and persistent siege to the citadels in which faith has felt itself secure for ages. These things sadden and startle us when we think of the future. The world looks like a ship descending the rapids, and some surge of the stream may dash and shatter it on the black reefs of atheism and anarchy which shoot their heads above the foam. (*J. Ker, D.D.*) *Barzillai*:—

I. HIS SENSE OF THE NEARNESS OF DEATH. "How long have I to live? . . . I am this day fourscore years old." To him the thought of death seemed to be neither unfamiliar nor unpleasant. Christian men and women who are advanced in years should seek to copy *Barzillai's* example, accustoming themselves to the thought and approach of death.

II. HIS CONTENTMENT UNDER THE INFIRMITIES OF AGE. "Can I discern between good and evil? Can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink?" He had no wish for court-life, for he was no longer fit to enjoy it. His powers were waning; he was no longer able to find enjoyment in that which ministered pleasure to others. Resignation marks his words. Some aged people are fretful over their infirmities. Peevishness is a common characteristic of advanced life. Others endeavour to conceal the ravages of time, and eagerly mingle in the pleasures of youth. With one foot in the grave, they wish to appear and be considered as young as possible. Both courses are alike unbecoming in those who are in "the sere and yellow leaf."

III. HIS UNWORLDLINESS. "Why should the king recompense it me with such a reward?" David's proposal would have been greedily grasped at by many. Notwithstanding its attractiveness *Barzillai* courteously declined it. How beautiful to see at a time of life, when men, as a rule, cling more closely to worldly things, such an unregretful renunciation of worldly honour and prosperity!

IV. HIS UNSELFISHNESS. "Behold thy servant *Chimham*; let him go over with my lord the king; and do to him what shall seem good to thee." *Barzillai* was not unwilling that another should enjoy the benefits of which he felt he was unable to avail himself. Too often aged people, no longer able to "enjoy life," frown upon those younger than themselves, who do enjoy it. Forgetful that they themselves were once young, they seek to crush the harmless desires and damp the seasonable enjoyments of youth.

V. HIS FILIAL AFFECTION. "Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother." Even at his great age, the memory of his parents was fresh and tender. It is pleasant to remember that the good that *Barzillai* was thus privileged to do to his earthly sovereign was not "interred with his bones," but "lived after him." David graciously granted the old man's request, and *Chimham* not only was taken as his father's substitute to eat at the royal table, but in addition obtained a portion of David's patrimonial possession near Bethlehem (*Jer. xli. 17*). "The memory of the just is blessed." (*Thomas S. Dickson, M.A.*) *David and Barzillai*:—It is very refreshing to fall in with a man like *Barzillai* in a record which is so full of wickedness, and without many features of a redeeming character. He is a sample of humanity at its best—one of those men who diffuse radiance and happiness wherever their influence extends. Of *Barzillai's* previous history we know nothing. We do not even know where *Rogelim*, his place of abode, was, except that it was among the mountains of Gilead. The facts stated regarding him are few, but suggestive.

1. He was "a very great man." The expression seems to imply that he was both rich and influential. Dwelling among the hills of Gilead, his only occupation, and main way of becoming rich, must have been as a farmer. *Barzillai's* ancestors had probably received a valuable and extensive allotment, and had been strong enough and courageous enough to keep it for themselves. Consequently, when their flocks and herds multiplied, they were not restrained within narrow dimensions, but could spread over the mountains round about.

2. His generosity was equal to his wealth. The catalogue of the articles which he and another friend of David's brought him in

his extremity (2 Sam. xvii. 28, 29) is instructive from its minuteness and its length. Like all men liberal in heart, he devised liberal things. 3. His loyalty was not less thorough than his generosity. When he heard of the king's troubles, he seems never to have hesitated one instant as to throwing in his lot with him. It mattered not that the king was in great trouble, and apparently in a desperate case. Barzillai was no sunshine courtier, willing to enjoy the good things of the court in days of prosperity, but ready in darker days to run off and leave his friends in the midst of danger. He was one of those true men that are ready to risk their all in the cause of loyalty when persuaded that it is the cause of truth and right. Risk? Can you frighten a man like this by telling him of the risk he runs by supporting David in the hour of adversity? Why, he is ready not only to risk all, but to lose all, if necessary, in a cause which appears so obvious to be Divine, all the more because he sees so well what a blessing David has been to the country. Why, he has actually made the kingdom. He has given unity and stability to all the internal arrangements of the kingdom. And is not a country happy that has such citizens, men who place their personal interest far below the public weal, and are ready to make any sacrifice, of person or of property, when the highest interests of their country are concerned? 4. Barzillai was evidently a man of attractive personal qualities. The king was so attracted by him that he wished him to come with him to Jerusalem, and promised to sustain him at court. 5. Barzillai was not dazzled even by the highest offers of the king, because he felt that the proposal was unsuitable for his years. He was already eighty, and every day was adding to his burden, and bringing him sensibly nearer the grave. David had made the offer as a compliment to Barzillai, although it might also be a favour to himself, and as a compliment the aged Gileadite was entitled to view it. In Barzillai's choice, we see the predominance of a sanctified common sense, alive to the proprieties of things, and able to see how the enjoyment most suitable to an advanced period of life might best be had. It was not by aping youth or grasping pleasures for which the relish had gone. There are few more jarring notes in English history than the last days of Queen Elizabeth. As life was passing away, a historian of England says, "she clung to it with a fierce tenacity. She hunted, she danced, she jested with her young favourites, she coquetted, and frolicked, and scolded at sixty-seven as she had done at thirty." "The Queen," wrote a courtier, "a few months before her death was never so gallant these many years, nor so set upon jollity." She persisted, in spite of opposition, in her gorgeous progresses from country house to country house. She clung to business as of old, and rated in her usual fashion one "who minded not to giving up some matter of account." And then a strange melancholy settled on her. Her mind gave way, and food and rest became alike distasteful. Clever woman, yet very foolish in not discerning how vain it was to attempt to carry the brisk habits of youth into old age, and most profoundly foolish in not having taken pains to provide for old age the enjoyments appropriate to itself! How differently it has fared with those who have been wise in time and made the best provision for old age! "I have waited for Thy salvation, O my God," says the dying Jacob, relieved and happy to think that the object for which he had waited had come at last. "I am now ready to be offered," says St. Paul, "and the time of my departure is at hand." 6. Holding such views of old age, it was quite natural and suitable for Barzillai to ask for his son Chimham what he respectfully declined for himself. For his declination was not a rude rejection of an honour deemed essentially false and vain. The narrative is so short that not a word is added as to how it fared with Chimham when he came to Jerusalem. Only one thing is known of him; it is said that, after the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, when Jonathan conducted to Egypt a remnant of Jews that he had saved from the murderous hand of Ishmael, "they departed and dwelt in the habitation of Chimham, which is by Bethlehem, to go into Egypt." We infer that David bestowed on Chimham some part of his paternal inheritance at Bethlehem. The meeting with Barzillai and the finding of a new son in Chimham must have been looked on by David with highly pleasant feelings. In every sense of the term, he had lost a son in Absalom; he seems now to find one in Chimham. We dare not say that the one was compensation for the other. Such a blank as the death of Absalom left in the heart of David could never be filled up from any earthly source whatever. Blanks of that nature can be filled only when God gives a larger measure of His own presence and His own love. (W. G. Blaikie, D.D.) *Barzillai an example of loyalty in perilous times*:—Bar-

zillai was indeed a noble old man. He loved his country, he loved his king, and in perilous times and days of turbulence and anarchy stood forward the friend of the distressed, the consoler of fallen greatness, and the constant and determined supporter of the rightful government and ancient institutions of his land. I wish you to mark two features of the character thus brought before you—the loyalty and the piety of Barzillai. In the midst of the rampant successes of rebellion he would not forsake the cause of his rightful sovereign, and the interests of his country. And his loyalty was disinterested. He looked for no return, he would accept no reward. You have seen that the reinstated sovereign proffered to him all the splendours of a residence with a royal family in the imperial city. And this in general estimation was no worthless boon. It embraced all that most men court, all that the world with such anxiety is toiling for. He would be admitted to the highest circles in the realm; men would bow down to him, and do him reverence; every luxury would be at his command; he was to sit at the king's table; chariots and horsemen, stately attendants, rich and costly clothing, worldly power, honour, magnificence—all that is dazzling in earthly grandeur, all that is enchanting to a worldly mind was within his grasp. But mark his piety. He declined it all! He would not now distract his mind with the dissipating round of earthly vanity. He would rather end his days in peaceful retirement; and, in the simplicity of country life, mature his soul for heaven. I. I REMIND YOU THAT LOYALTY IS PART OF RELIGION, AND MUST SPRING FROM A PRINCIPLE OF OBEDIENCE TO GOD, WHO IS THE SOVEREIGN RULER OF ALL WORLDS. II. Again, SUCH A LOYAL SPIRIT AS THAT WHICH ANIMATED BARZILLAI, WILL LEAD TO A CHEERFUL DEVOTION OF OUR SUBSTANCE, SO FAR AS IT MAY BE NEEDED, FOR THE USUAL PURPOSES OF GOVERNMENT, OR THE OCCASIONAL EXIGENCIES OF THE STATE. The good old man hastened of his own accord to bring his ample supply to David and his people in their extraordinary reverses. And let us cheerfully contribute to the maintenance of good government, by rendering those imposts which the wisdom of the legislature has arranged. III. AND LET OUR TRUE LOYAL FEELING FIND ITS EXPRESSION IN FERVENT PRAYER TO HIM WHO SITS ENTHRONED ABOVE—"the King of kings and Lord of lords." "I exhort," saith the apostle, "that prayers be made for kings and all that are in authority: that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." IV. In conclusion, CULTIVATE, ABOVE ALL, THAT PIOUS SPIRIT WHICH BARZILLAI MANIFESTED IN HIS THOUGHTFULNESS OF DEATH; HIS DISREGARD OF WORLDLY GREATNESS; AND HIS ANXIETY TO HAVE REPOSE IN HIS LATTER DAYS TO PREPARE FOR HEAVEN. (*A. Bumstead, B.A.*) *The lives of courtiers*:—We suppose Barzillai was a good man, and that his example sufficiently proves it. I. Our question is this, HOW FAR DOES THE WORLD, A COURT, OR BUSINESS BECOME A YOUNG MAN? 1. A wise man will never choose a court, or high offices, as most and best fitted to procure true peace. 2. A wise man will always consider a court, and eminent posts, as dangerous to his salvation. It is in a court, it is in eminent posts, that, generally speaking, the most dangerous snares are set for conscience. 3. A wise man will never enter a court or accept of an eminent post, without fixed resolutions to surmount the temptations, with which they are accompanied, and without using proper measures to succeed in his design. 4. The evils, which embitter the lives of courtiers, and of all who are elevated to eminent posts, and (what may seem a paradox), the hazard of being damned among human grandeurs, ought not to discourage those from occupying the highest offices, who are capable of doing great good to society and the church. It is a tempting of God to expose one's self to danger when no good will come of it. It is rash, it is tempting God to expose ourselves to difficulties, which cannot possibly be surmounted. His refusal proceeds from three causes. 1. The insensibility of old age is the first cause of the refusal of Barzillai. This insensibility may proceed either from a principle of wisdom. (1) a man, who hath experienced the vanity of human grandeur; a man, who hath often asked himself what good comes of this pomp and pleasure? Such a man does not entertain a very high idea of the privilege of living with the great, of eating at their tables, and of participating their pleasures. Such pleasures are approved by reason, ripened by age, and such pleasures are satisfactory at all times, and in all stages of life. (2) But there is also a constitutional insensibility. The senses, which transmit pleasures to us, become blunt, and pleasures are blunted with them. 2. The disgraces of old age are a second reason of the refusal of Barzillai. Why should thy servant be a burden to my lord the king? Certainly, an old man ought to be treated with the greatest respect and caution. Whatever idea

Barzillai formed of the equity and benevolence of David, he did justice to himself. He well knew, that a man of eighty would be a burden to this good king. A man at this time of life too strikingly exhibits human infirmities to give pleasure in circles of company, where such mortifying ideas are either quite forgotten, or slightly remembered. 3. In fine, Barzillai revolved in his mind the nearness of old age to death. This was the principal cause of his refusal. Was ever principle better founded? How little is necessary to overset and break the frame of a man of this age? What is necessary? A vapour! a puff of wind! III. But if the principle of this good old man be well founded, the consequence derived from it is better founded, that is, that **WORLDLY AFFAIRS DO NOT SUIT A MAN DRAWING NEAR THE END OF HIS LIFE**; that when death is so near, a man should be wholly employed in preparing for it. Everything engages Barzillai to avoid disconcerting himself in his last moments, and to devote the few that remain to seriousness. 1. The long time he had lived. If the account, which God requires every man to give at death, be terrible to all men, it should seem particularly so to old men. An old man is responsible for all the periods of his life, all the circumstances he has been in, and all the connections he hath formed. 2. The continued cares, which exercised the mind of Barzillai, were a second spring of his action. How necessary is it to make up, by retirement and recollection in the last stages of life, what has been wanting in the days of former hurry, and which are now no more! I recollect a saying of a captain of whom historians have taken more care to record the wisdom than the name. It is said that the saying struck the Emperor Charles V. and confirmed him in his design of abdicating his crown, and retiring to a convent. The captain required the Emperor to discharge him from service. Charles asked the reason. The prudent soldier replied, Because there ought to be a pause between the hurry of life and the day of death. 3. In fine, if Barzillai seemed to anticipate his dying day by continually meditating on the subject, it was because the meditation, full of horror to most men, was full of charms to this good old man. (*J. Saurin.*)

Vers. 34—40. How long have I to live, that I should go up with the King unto Jerusalem?—*Barzillai's refusal of David's invitation to Jerusalem considered*.—I. A SERIOUS CONSIDERATION OF APPROACHING DEATH IS PECULIALLY PROPER FOR AGED PERSONS. Barzillai, in his reply to David, seems to have the near approach of death chiefly in view. And surely such a view was exceedingly proper and becoming for a person of his age, though he seemed possessed of much strength and vigour. But some circumstances make it peculiarly proper that the aged should make these thoughts familiar and habitual to them. 1. The speedy period of their lives is more certain than that of others. There is a probability that they who are in the prime or morning of their days may continue many years; but there is no probability that the aged should. 2. The infirmities which are peculiar to, or most frequent in old age, make the consideration of death highly proper. 3. The remembrance of the many relations, friends, and acquaintance whom they have survived, should excite this disposition in them. II. THE PROSPECT OF A SPEEDY REMOVAL OUT OF THIS WORLD, SHOULD WEAN OUR AFFECTIONS FROM IT. 1. The prospect of death should make the aged dead to the honours and pleasures of this world. 2. The prospect of death should lead them to get free from the cares of the world, as far as they lawfully can. (1.) Their capacity for business is generally weakened. This is Barzillai's reasoning in the verse after the text; "Can I discern between good and evil?" (2.) If their capacities continue ever so good, they have more important concerns to mind, and but a little time for them. The one thing needful, the great business relating to their souls and eternity is sufficient to engage all the time which they can spare from that needful rest which old age requires. (3.) The more cares you have upon your hands the more will your dying thoughts be disturbed, and your last work be interrupted. (4.) By various worldly cares the soul will be less disposed and qualified for the heavenly world. The immoderate love of the world is utterly inconsistent with the love of the Father; and such a love of it as may be regular and allowable in the prime or middle of life, may be immoderate and unjustifiable in old age: (*J. Orton.*) **I am this day fourscore years old.**—*Venerable age: its trials and consolations*.—I. LENGTH OF DAYS IS A SCRIPTURAL BLESSING. It was eminently such under the Hebrew theocracy, where earthly allotments were the

perpetual types of spiritual favour. As death was a penalty, so the shortening of human life was counted as a marked expression of the Divine displeasure, as where the Psalmist exclaims: "He brought down my strength in my journey, and shortened my days. But I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of mine age. For when Thou art angry all our days are gone." But alway, and through all generations, has the hoary head been counted a crown of glory to the righteous. Old age is not to be associated, as a matter of course, with decrepitude or the decays of nature. It has its own appropriate beauty, as well as youth. Undenially the aged are entitled to our liveliest sympathies and our most sedulous attentions. They have reached the border land. They stand hovering between two worlds, and must shortly vanish and be no more seen. They are going from us, and we in our turn may require the kindness and attention which we bestow. But there are trials incident to old age, and which no power of human sympathy can avert or permanently relieve.

1. Infirmary of body is one. The vigours of life are failing. The fibre of a constitution which withstood all the assaults of threescore years, and promised well for a longer continuance, suddenly gives way.
2. Another trial of the aged is the altered aspect of society, the absence of contemporaries and companions, and the deepening loneliness of life. To outlive their generation, even by a little, is to walk a solitary path.
3. I will mention but one other trial to which the aged are exposed—that, namely, which lies in the tendency to depression and the decay of natural spirits.

II. THE CONSOLATIONS WHICH ATTEND AND COMFORT THE AGED BELIEVER.

1. As a rule, and as a blessedness often attained, the last days of the Christian are his best days, and the end better than the beginning.
2. And, again, the aged saint finds comfort in looking back, and holding in review the way over which he has passed. The retrospection of seventy or eighty years presents God continually in forms and ministries of providential care which are only estimated fully, at the end.
3. Finally, the past revelation of God's mercy and goodness is the best pledge of eternal glory. (W. F. Morgan, D.D.) *The Sabbath of life*:—Of the Christian it has been said: "The decay, and wasting, and infirmities of old age will be, as Dr. Guthrie called these symptoms of his own approaching death, only 'the land-birds, lighting on the shrouds, telling the weary mariner that he is nearing the desired haven.'" It is a favourite speculation of mine that, if spared to sixty, we then enter on the seventh decade of human life, and that this, if possible, should be turned into the Sabbath of our earthly pilgrimage, and spent Sabbathatically, as if on the shores of an eternal world, or in the outer courts, as it were, of the temple that is above, the tabernacle that is in heaven. (Dr. Chalmers.) *Life's Winter*:—A grateful admirer of Charles Dickens desired to give the great novelist in his old age a token of affection. He gave him a beautiful piece of plate to stand on his dining-table. As first designed, it was to have represented the four seasons. The giver said, however, "I could not bear to offer him a reminder of the bleak and cold season," so there were but the three figures—the types of Hope and Beauty and Bounty. The great man was touched by the beautiful gift, and by the kindliness of the thought that had designed it; but he said more than once or twice, "I never look at it but I think most of winter." We may try, by little artificial devices, to rid ourselves of all reminders of life's winter, but they will be futile. The Christian philosophy of life recognises that we must have our winters, and it gives us strength to face and endure them, a day at a time, assured that the gloomiest winter is but the herald of the spring time that will never fail.

Ver. 37. **Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city.** *Dying at home*:—In our last great trial, in our conflict with the king of terrors, what a consolation to feel that our friends are about us, that we are at home.

1. How much earthly friends may help us in the hour of death.
2. The limitation of this help.
3. The Christian's consolation that wherever death may overtake him he will die in the midst of friends. His Elder Brother will be there, and God, his father, and he will be encompassed with a host of heavenly witnesses, friends in Jesus Christ. Through death we will go from our earthly home to our heavenly home. (*Homiletic Review*.) *Going home to die*:—When Sir Walter Scott returned from Italy, in sickness and mental affliction, and was approaching his home in Selkirkshire, the old familiar landmarks seemed to recall him to his wonted animation. "That

is Gala Water! Yonder are the Eildon Hills!" was his joyous exclamation. When at last Abbotsford appeared in sight, he became so excited that he desired to be raised up in the carriage that he might look on his beautiful home. Yet he was only going home to die. *Love of home*:—Sir Walter Scott used to say that he loved the honest grey hills of Scotland as his very life, and that if he did not see the heather once a year he thought he should die.

Ver. 43. **And the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.**—*Controversy*:—Here is the beginning of a long controversy which ended in the dismemberment of God's people, and in the permanent alienation of those who by tradition, by hopes, and by privileges, were common children of a common Lord. Here is the little cloud no bigger than a man's hand, of fierce invective, and party jealousy; soon the whole heaven will be black with the cloud and storm of disaster, and divided, Israel and Judah fall an easy prey to their enemy, who leads them away captive into exile and degradation, and failure of purpose, for which they had paved the way by the quarrels between brethren. I. THE HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS DISSENSION IS A LONG AND A SAD ONE. There is a monotonous iteration about it which makes one almost despair of human nature, did we not know that freedom of the will, liberty of opinion, and individuality in all its waywardness, are signs, however perverted they may be, of man's pre-eminence in creation as made in the image and likeness of God, Who wills and no man lets Him, Who moves unfettered by necessity, and untrammelled by restraint. It is easy enough to arrange in order, and in beauty artificial flowers, with all their semblance of life and brilliancy of colour. The real flowers bend their heads, and snap and fall and hang down; but they have this virtue, that they are alive, they are fragrant, they are tinged with that living colour which no art can give. Puppets offer no resistance; they stand where they are placed; they are absolutely at the disposal of the hand which orders them. But puppets cannot think, cannot resist, cannot organise movement, or march to victory. No, in spite of its waywardness, its readiness to yield to temptation, its pettiness of jealousy, its infirmity of purpose, we would not part with our freedom of the will. There is no struggle which appears to men so much as a struggle for liberty. We all of us passionately cry out, Persuade me if you can, but you shall never drive me. We will yield to arguments, but not to force. You cannot drive a man with a stick, nor convince him by violence. Men must have arguments, and not blows, because man is free. It is a sad spectacle to be forced to regard in Holy Scripture that which at first sight seems to be the utter failure of the purpose of God, through the pettiness and infirmity of human nature. Guard, I beseech you, against the controversial spirit. It has been well said by the late Bishop Morley that the temper which prefers to denounce sin rather than faithfully and meekly endeavours to increase holiness in oneself and others; which rather likes railing at want of discipline, than sets itself in gentleness and prayer to bring about the restoration of it, is nearly connected with the feebleness of moral fibre. Certainly a great deal of personal self-indulgence is apt to hide itself (even from its own eyes) under the cloak of a burning and railing zeal for discipline, and personal weakness to find a kind of factitious strength in the complaints of the unholiness of others. Guard against the controversial spirit. It more than anything else serves to damage the sensitiveness of the soul. Look at that poor woman of Samaria, in the Gospel, how nearly she lost the supreme opportunity of her life. Jesus meets her in her sensual, unspiritual condition; He brushes past her unmannerly roughness, her churlish discourtesy, and He speaks to her with that home-thrust of love on which her salvation depended—"Go, call thy husband, and come hither." You notice how she avoided it. Like the cuttle-fish which tries to escape from its antagonist by the inky stream which it leaves behind it, she tries to get away in the obscuring flood of controversy. "Sir," she said, "I perceive that thou art a prophet." Controversy is a dangerous exercise, and, like one of the big guns which our modern military science has produced, may sometimes crumble to pieces the fort from which it is fired if unprepared for the weight of its discharge, and damage those who use it. II. But while we deplore—as deplore we must—the divisions of Israel and Judah, the divisions which rend the seamless robe of Christ, we must not forget, at the same time, that as God can use the fierceness and the passions of men, so He can OVERRULE

FOR GOOD "OUR UNHAPPY DIVISIONS." Nay, we may go further and say that, bad as they are, divisions are not all bad; and sad as it is, disunion is no ground for despair. "Peace with honour," if you like, but a disastrous war is better than an unworthy peace. The presence of controversy, and even the sad spectacle of division, does bear witness to the intense importance of Truth. Is it worth while, the sceptic asks with a sneer, to convulse the Church for a diphthong? "Yes," we answer, emphatically, "Yes," if it means that it is to be an open question whether the Church believes our Blessed Lord to be of the same substance of the Father, or only of like substance. Can anything be more trivial, says the superficial observer, than the addition of one short clause to the Creed, as a cause of separation between Eastern and Western Christendom? Not at all, if it bears witness to the fact that no addition must be made to the Creed of Christendom without the sanction and consent of the whole Church. The great importance of truth must come before everything else. There are words of our Blessed Lord which are a strange comment on the angelic song which blazed across the Heaven on the first Christmas Eve: "Glory to God in the highest," sang the angels, "and on earth peace, goodwill towards men." And shepherds heard it on the peaceful upland in all the pastoral simplicity of idyllic calm. But, as our Blessed Lord sat on the Mount of Olives, where the sun was setting blood-red behind doomed Jerusalem, where the air was full of judgment and of gloom, within three days of Good Friday, He said: "Ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolk, and friends, and some of you will they cause to be put to death, and ye shall be hated of all men for My Name's sake, but he that shall endure unto the end shall be saved." It is possible that we shall often find principles inconvenient things. II. CONTROVERSY IS A BLINDING, MADDENING THING. Yet even dissension has its uses. It is better than apathy, and it witnesseth to the eternal force of truth. But, nevertheless, he who would use the weapons of controversy aright, whether in attack or defence, must look to it that he wears the right equipment, or he will find himself injured by the very force of the weapons which he was trying to wield. (W. E. E. Newbolt, M.A.)

CHAPTER XX.

Vers. 1—5, **And there happened to be there a man of Belial.—***Rebellion of Sheba:*—This chapter is a relation of Sheba's rebellion. 1. The trumpet of this new rebellion was a son of Belial, Sheba the son of Bichri, whom God by His providence ordered to be present when this paroxysm or hot fit of contention happened betwixt the tribe of Judah and the tribes of Israel as before. The Devil (who loves to fish in troubled waters) strikes in with this opportunity, as a fit hour of temptation for him, and excites this Belialist to blow a trumpet and to sound a retreat in the ears of those Israelites, saying [Seeing the men of Judah say that we have no part in David, but they do monopolize him to themselves] let them have him, and let us choose another for ourselves, hoping that they would choose him, because he was a Benjamite akin to Saul, and supposed to be the chiefest captain under Amasa to Absalom (ver. 1.) 2. This Belialist (so-called) was for casting off the yoke of David (as the Hebrew word Belial signifies) and being grieved that the kingdom was translated from Saul's house to David, he bespatters David, calling him the son of Jesse, a private person, so the crown could not descend upon David by inheritance, and therefore (saith he) we are at liberty to choose a new king. This opprobrious title that Sheba gave David here did savour of Saul (who had oft called him so in contempt) and of the old enmity: and possibly Sheba might aggravate to those Israelites, that David had sent Zadock and Abiathar to the men of Judah that they might be persuaded to fetch back the King, but he sent them not to our elders; therefore seeing he hath so slighted us, let us look to our own concerns, and let him look to his (ver. 1.) 3. Behold how great a flame of fire a little spark doth kindle (Jam. 3.5) when God gives way thereunto, Sheba's presence and influence upon those Israelites, though casual in itself, and as to men, yet was it ordered so by the providence of God, who permitted the devil to blow up this

blast of rebellion for several reasons : as (1) first, For a further exercise of David's faith and patience; (2) secondly, To purge out of David's kingdom all factious and seditious spirits; (3) thirdly, To punish Sheba the ringleader of those rebels; (4) fourthly, To animadvert David to his betraying Uriah, and of his spearing Shimei, and (as some add) of his unjust dealing with his dear Mephibosheth, &c., for these and other sins of David God was pleased to correct him again with this new affliction, before he was well got out of the old. (C. Ness.) *Revolt and pursuit of Sheba.*—1. We are first introduced to Sheba, the son of Bichri, or, as it is read by recent commentators, the Bichrite—that is, a member of the family of Becher, the second son of Benjamin. This man was, therefore, by so much related to the clan of Saul. It is difficult to get the old taint out of the blood. Sheba is a minimised Saul, full of hostility to David and all his interests. Even bad men have their opportunity in life. We have seen again and again how easy it is to do mischief. Sheba, a man who probably had no power to construct a positive fame by deeds of beneficence and the origination of statesmanlike policies, had it in his power to set fire to dangerous substances and bring into peril a movement which promised to consummate itself in the happiest results to Israel. The historical instance ought to be a continual lesson. The meanest man may pull down a wall, or set fire to a palace, or whisper a slander concerning the character of a king. The remarkable thing is that whilst society is well aware of all this possibility, it is willing to lend an ear to every wicked speaker who arises, insisting upon the old and detestable sophism that although the report may not be wholly and literally true, there yet must be some foundation for it. 2. Sheba is described in the text as "a man of Belial," in other words, a child of the devil. A man's spiritual parentage is known by the deeds in which he delights. We have in the first verse a kind of double genealogy of Sheba; he is called "the son of Bichri, a Benjamite," and he is also described as "a man of Belial." It would seem as if in some cases men had a lineal physical descent, and had also a direct spiritual ancestry. Account for it as we may, there are practical differences in spirit and character which would seem almost to suggest two different grades or qualities of human nature. Whilst it is profoundly and sadly true that all men are apostates, and that there is none righteous, no, not one, it is also undeniable that there are chiefs in the army of evil, princes of sin, royal and dominating personages in the whole kingdom of wickedness. They are ingenious in the device of evil; their imagination is afire with the very spirit of perdition; they can invent new departures, striking policies, undreamed-of cruelties, unimaginable wanderings from the path of rectitude. It is most certain that many men simply "follow a multitude to do evil"; they have little or no invention of their own; they would never originate rebellions or lead insurrections, or devise plots involving great disasters; they are but followers, imitators, echoes not voices, persons who go by the bulk and not by detail, being only of consequence in proportion to their multitudinousness, having no independent spirit of their own when taken one by one. 3. David, being now impatient of the insolence of Joab, and willing to avail himself of an opportunity of superseding that able but arrogant captain, gave an appointment to Amasa. As Amasa went forth he encountered an unexpected foe in the person of Joab. It is explained in the text how Joab by a peculiar arrangement of his dress—a girdle bound round his military coat—had contrived to conceal a dagger which would fall out as he advanced. The dagger falling out thus gave Joab an opportunity of naturally picking it up, as he wished to use it, without exciting the suspicion of Amasa. Thus even in so small a trick the depravity of Joab is made manifest. Taking Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him, Joab smote him in the fifth rib, with but one blow; but that a fatal stroke. Joab would thus tolerate no rivals by whomsoever they might have been appointed. This desperateness of spirit was really part of the greatness of the man,—that is to say, apart from such desperateness he never could have brought to bear all his various faculties of statesman and soldier. Morality has often commented upon the circumstance that great talents should be turned to base uses. So it is the world over: the completer the education as a merely intellectual exercise, the more disastrous is the power to do evil, unless the education has been supported and chastened by adequate moral training. It is mere idolatry to admire greatness alone: when that greatness is held in check by enlightened consciousness, then its recognition really involves an act of worship to him who is the Spirit of Righteousness and the teacher of the world. It is but just, however, to

say that we are not to judge Joab by the morality of a much later age. Morality itself is part of an infinite but most beneficent evolution. Even a good cause may have bad supporters. The cause in which Joab was now engaged was unquestionably a good one, being nothing less than the restoration of David to his kingly position in Israel, and by so much the fulfilment of a divine covenant. Joab had a good cause, but he brought to its support a very questionable character. Is not this same instance repeating itself along the whole line of history? Is not the Church indebted to many a man whose heart is in the world and whose ambition is his only god? Are there not some men eloquent of tongue whose hearts are silent as to true worship? Is not good money often given by polluted hands? (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Dis-union the devil's policy.*—"Cyrus, in Herodotus, going to fight against Scythia, coming to a broad river, and not being able to pass over it, cut and divided it into divers arms and sluices, and so made it passable for all his army. This is the devil's policy; he laboureth to divide the people of God, and separate us into divers sects and factions, that so he may easily overcome us." This needs no comment. What is needed is that by a spirit of brotherly love we promote the unity of all the churches, and the peace and concord of that to which we belong. May the peace of the church be "as a river." Unity is strength. "Divide and conquer" is Satan's watchword to his myrmidons. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) When the South Carolina convention broke up with a declaration of secession from the north, and the Civil War was thereby proclaimed, there were great jubilations. Bells were rung, cannon saluted, and the streets were filled with the noise and display of great parades. But what a drama of blood it led to, and what a tragedy of disastrous defeat was its end! (*H. O. Mackey.*)

Ver. 9. Art thou in health, my brother?—*The Soul's Health*:—The sickness of the soul is the evil of all evils, and one in comparison with which mere bodily pain is nothing. Whether sin be regarded as a disease, or as guilt, or as both combined, there is only one Physician, even God Himself, who can help us. The medicine and the skill are His, and HE alone can effectually and permanently heal. HE has no pleasure in the sickness or death of His creatures; indeed, so far from this HE desires that all should be in health and be happy. 1. We suppose ourselves in a hospital occupied by those who are spiritually diseased, AND THE SYMPTOMS MUST BE INQUIRED INTO AND NOTED. 1. First, then, as to the condition of the pulse. Does it beat strongly and vigorously, indicating a proper circulation? or is it slow, languid, and irregular? Has joy departed? and has zeal ceased to inspire your soul for the discharge of high and holy duties? 2. Next, let me ask concerning your memory. Are past trials forgotten? Have you ceased to think of God's many mercies with gratitude? There are bitter mercies as well as sweet ones, and the Great Physician administers to us some of His healing remedies in wine, and others in wormwood. 3. The condition of your appetite. Does it relish wholesome fare? Do you find pleasure in the reading of good books; and above all, in the study of God's word? Is plain gospel preaching the nutriment which suits you best; or is there a constant craving after highly-seasoned and stimulating rhapsodies, which constitute so large a proportion of the popular preaching of the day? Mere flowers of rhetoric are like the blue and red blossoms in cornfields—pleasing to those who come for amusement, but prejudicial to those who would reap the grain. 4. The condition of your strength. Is your ability to do God's will, to work for Him, and to endure pains and sacrifices, up to the highest standard which you have ever reached? or is such spiritual strength perceptibly on the decline? How many forget that it is impossible to be good without self-denial and effort, and that in order to such exertion we must have strength. The soul will always be feeble and sickly so long as this is lacking. II. Let us go on, then, to DESCRIBE SOME TIMELY REMEDIES. 1. Avoid everything which disagrees with your soul's health. Many dangerous diseases are infectious, and hence, evil companions, and unlawful pleasures, cannot be too carefully shunned. "Lord, I trust Thou hast pardoned the bad examples I have set before others," said old Thomas Fuller in his prayer, "be pleased also to pardon me the sins which they have committed by my bad examples." The Nazarites whose strict vows allowed them to drink no wine, also forbade them to cut grapes from which wine is made. And so, they who would enjoy spiritual health, must not only avoid sin in itself, but also the companionship and associations which lead to it. 2. Retirement. The

Great Physician should be sought often, that we may be alone with Him. Virtue always goeth out of Him to heal those who thus manifest a desire for His saving help. Especially, during the holy season of Lent, let us thus seek to be alone with the Saviour. "Depart from the highway," says St. Chrysostom, "and transplant thyself in some enclosed ground, for it is hard for a tree that stands by the wayside to keep her fruit till it be ripe." 3. We must be willing to take freely of the balm of Gilead, the doctrine of God's unchangeable love; and also of bitter herbs, such as meditations on the shipwrecks and apostasies of unfaithful Christians. 4. Take plenty of exercise. Attend diligently on all means of grace, public and private prayer, the Lord's Supper, and labour with cheerfulness in the Master's vineyard. Again, therefore, I ask the question of the text: "Art thou in health, my brother?" If honesty obliges you to answer no, then let me implore you to lose no time in seeking for the Good Physician. Cry aloud, this day, to the Good Physician: "Have mercy on us, O Lord, Thou Son of David!" The virtue which goes forth from Him is no mere temporary palliative. Jesus not only comforts, but He cures. Wilt thou be made whole? Look to Christ Jesus to do it for you. (*J. N. Norton.*) *Health of body in moral state*:—The lesson of this close interaction of mind and body is that we should put the whole treatment of the body on a moral basis. De Quincey closes the section dealing with health of his treatise on casuistry with some strong words, which have added weight from his own mistakes in dealing with himself: "Casuistry, justly and without infringing any truth of Christianity, urges the care of health as the basis of all moral action, because, in fact, of all voluntary action. Every impulse of bad health jars or untunes some string in the fine harp of human volition, and, because a man cannot be a moral being but in proportion of his free agency, therefore it is clear that no man can be in a high sense moral, except in so far as through health he commands his bodily powers, and is not commanded by them." (*Hugh Black, M.A.*) *Wanton abuse of health*:—Health is the sum of money in the bank which will support you, economically spent. But you spend foolishly and draw on the principal. This diminishes the income, and you draw the oftener and the larger drafts until you become bankrupt. Overeating, overworking, every imprudence is a draft on life which health cashes and changes at a thousand per cent. and interest. Every abuse of health hastens death. (*F. G. Welch, M.D.*)

Ver. 12. And when the man saw that all the people stood still.—*Horror at sight of a slaughtered man*:—What unutterable, illimitable pity it seems that our horror at the corpse of a slaughtered man should not have been made just so much stronger as to render war impossible! It looks as if human nature has been within half an inch of escaping that Upas tree of all evils (*Chas. Buxton.*)

Vers. 16—22. Then cried a wise woman out of the city.—Abel's oracle; or prudence and peaceableness:—I. THE PEOPLE IN AREL OF BETHMAACHAH ARE ON THE VERGE OF RUIN, for Joab is battering away at the walls. Soon his soldiers will be pouring into the city, and the sword will devour and destroy. Now if a man could do wrong and suffer alone it would be more tolerable. No man can, however, suffer alone. We always suffer in greater or less degree by any sin committed by our fellows. We are all so co-related, interwoven. We may even, as one has said, "sin in the persons of other men," for those who received an evil influence from us may go on sinning through that influence, and so suffer through their own sin and ours. Even when we have passed from this stage of existence our influence will still live. "Being dead we speak," either for evil or for good. It is so hard to check evil once committed, much more to stop it altogether. Every day we meet with instances of similar suffering. A father has forged a cheque, and his children must suffer, although it is not their fault that they are his children. A mother is fretful and gloomy, and the whole household is made wretched. A brother defrauds another, or over-speculates with money entrusted to him, and his sisters are ruined; or a marriage just about to take place is checked, and the sister's hopes blighted. Sin is terrible. Its near and remote consequences are beyond our power of conception. The deed of folly and sin soaks into the lives of others, and breaks out or flows on in channels undreamt of. We can do nothing that shall have an end in ourselves. "One sinner destroyeth much good." The rough, unskilled hand touching a picture, or attempting to re-

pair the delicate mechanism of a watch, may do much greater damage than can be conceived. So one Sheba can imperil a city. So one hidden sin can endanger salvation—can ruin a soul. II. But we see, on the other hand, that the POWER OF AN INDIVIDUAL TO BLESS MAY BALANCE THE EVIL WROUGHT BY THE CARELESS AND SELFISH. While Joab's soldiers are battering the walls, above the din is heard the voice of a woman—"Hear! listen! listen, I pray you!" "Deliver him up, and I will depart from the city." This was the concession the wise woman wanted, and soon Sheba's head was thrown over the wall. Then Joab blew the trumpet of recall, and his soldiers dropped their arms and refrained from further attack. The city was saved. 1. We may learn that as no city is safe with a traitor in it, so no heart is safe where a single sin is cherished. We must pluck out or cut off the sin that besets or absorbs us. 2. We should in all circumstances seek to act in a commonsense manner. Wisdom is not merely extraordinary knowledge, but perception. 3. There was no sacrifice of principle in the action of the woman or of the citizens. Caiaphas in after ages suggested that it was better that Christ should die than that the whole nation should perish. Caiaphas cared not that Christ was innocent. Christ had not brought the evil Sheba had. It was better for a nation to suffer than to permit an innocent man to be condemned. 4. The wise woman chose a suitable time for ending the strife. Some good projects are marred through being inopportune, but it was not so in this case. The woman had done all she could to save the city. Conclusion. In the matter of our salvation, we would say, let not the traitor of pride and procrastination be permitted to remain within the soul. Cast away self-will and pride, and seek peace. Law is terrible, so long as we are not in harmony with it, not when our sin is forgiven. Christ has come to make peace. He is our peace. He saw our danger. At the right moment he interposed. He allowed Himself to bear contumely and crucifixion that we might be delivered. He took, as it were, the place of Sheba. He was made sin for us, and permitted Himself to be cast out, that we might be saved. He died in our place, for sin-enslaved, defiant, rebellious souls. He did it unasked. He did it from pure love. He saw not one man, but a whole world perishing, and He said, "Better that I should die than that all these should perish." (*F. Hastings.*)

Ver. 18. **They shall surely ask counsel at Abel.**—*An old-time custom*:—It will have to come to that again. Things cannot be settled really and lastingly except by counsel, wisdom, consent. The sword has had its day; it is a fool's argument. What is the idea of the text that is translatable into the practice of all places and all ages? Whether there was an oracle at Abel, whether there was a counsel of referees there, whether this one wise woman had in her own hand, as it were, the decision of important controversies, we can never determine: suffice it to know that there was a time, holy, sabbatic time, when men said, Let us go to the little town of Abel and talk this matter out: and so they ended the matter. The point to which we should direct attention is that there comes a moment when things must be settled by authority. Blessed are they who consent to the constitution of that authority; then it is no longer despotism or tyranny, it is settlement by consent. In old time men were wont to take counsel at Abel; and so they ended the matter. They discussed it, canvassed it, threshed it out, and went into it through and through, saw what it was made of, and then, having done so, they put out hand to hand, and were men and brothers once more. This same principle is amongst us like a ghost. Sometimes we get it in a concrete form and work it into the very practice of life, yet it is ever amongst us as a kind of spectre, some being more or less afraid of it, some offering it hospitality, all acknowledging that if it really could be brought into play on a large and just basis it would settle everything. I. **THE ABEL OF EXPERIENCE.** There is an Abel, a venerable city, called Experience; why not go down to the Abel of experience, take counsel there: and so settle the matter? Experience ought to go for something. Experience is man's account of life. He tells you where he has been, what he has done, how he has conducted himself, and what results have accrued from the policies and the processes which he has adopted. We ought to hear that man. We always think there is a shorter cut than he took. Every age think it could work the programme better than Solomon worked it. For a long period this must go on, but the day will come when experience will go for something, when grey hairs will be taken as the symbols of philosophy, when the wrinkled face will itself be a title to be heard on all the practical questions and issues of

life. II. **THE ABEL OF TIME.** Why not go to another aspect of this same experience, another corner of this same Abel, and consult Time? Why not admit Time to our counsels? Why leap at new theories? Why bristle up when the unpronounceable name of some lager-beer drinker is associated with some new mare's nest in the realm of letters and theology? How many theories have come and gone! Where are they? Gone with the lager-beer! When men come to you with new theories, you should say, We must test these, or see them tested by long time. The Cross—the weird, grim, ghastly Cross—is nineteen centuries old, and it lifts itself up to-day the symbol of universal life. As for these theories and inventions of yours, it is only right that we should see how they bear the stress and the sifting of time. In old time our fathers were wont to come to the Abel of the Bible; venerable men would say, To the law and to the testimony! Perhaps they had too narrow a way of referring to the scriptures; they might make too much of a chapter and a verse, they might not sufficiently compare Scripture with Scripture and get their souls into the very genius of Divine revelation as to speak Biblically rather than textually: but their principle was right. They said, We know nothing of God but what is revealed, we know nothing of the future but what is written in the Book, we know nothing about sin and about redemption except what we are told by the revelation of God, as we believe it to be: therefore let us go to: III, **THE ABEL OF THE BIBLE,** take counsel, and so end the matter. I am here to say in my own name, as the result of my own searching and experience, that I can get no answers to the greatest problems of mind and time equal in largeness, in precision, in hopefulness, to the answers that are given in the Bible. There are other answers, but I have found none that can stretch themselves with ease and dignity over the whole space of necessity. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Asking counsel at Abel:*—It has been supposed that the true interpretation of asking counsel at Abel is that Abel had become famous for his wisdom. In one of the Targums we read: "Remember now that which is written in the book of the law, to ask a city concerning peace at the first. Hast thou done so to ask of Abel if they will make peace." No certain interpretation can be given to the words; but we are at liberty to remember that even superstition has sometimes played a useful part in history. Men have attached importance to times, places, emotions, and by so much have been checked in their impulses and subdued in their fiery ambitions. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XXI.

Vers. 1—14. **Then there was a famine in the days of David three years.**—*The quickening of David's conscience by Rizpah's example:*—Some years since it was found that many returned emigrants were ending their days in English workhouses. When the authorities inquired into the causes of this fact, they ascertained that in nearly every case those who were then paupers had formerly prospered in the colonies; but they had forsaken their prosperity and come back to England, because they could not bear the thought of dying and being buried in the strange lands wherein they had made their homes for a season. While they were in health and vigour, they were comparatively content to be far away from the old country; but as soon as the shadows of evening began to fall they yearned to return to the familiar haunts of life's morning, in order that, when they fell asleep, they might be laid to rest in their fathers' sepulchres. The desire was so strong, that they yielded to it, although they thereby doomed themselves to poverty for the remainder of their days. This is an instinct which cannot be put down by force of argument. After all that can be said about the un-wisdom of it, the voice of nature will still plead for it, and "it seems to be the appointment of heaven that the first attachments of which the heart is conscious should be its last." If we have no such desire about our own final resting-places we have about those of our friends, and we like to have the graves of our loved ones near to us, and not far away amongst strangers. This feeling must not be denounced as mere sentimentalism, for it has been cherished as an honourable thing by men who were neither feeble nor foolish. When Barzillai pleaded against the preferment which David was urging upon him, this was his last and most

forcible entreaty: "Let thy servant, I pray thee," etc. Was it not strange that David should for so many years leave the remains of Saul and Jonathan in the place of their hasty sepulture, far from the burial of their fathers? It might have been fairly anticipated that, on his coming into power, David would make an early effort to bring the body of Jonathan to his native place, and there inter it with all the honour befitting the burial of such a princely man and faithful friend. Instead of this, David allowed thirty years to pass away before he did what reverence and gratitude for the dead should have constrained him to regard as a sacred duty to be discharged as soon as possible. Towards the close of David's life, the prosperity of the kingdom was interrupted by a famine. "He inquired of the Lord." It will be remembered that, in the days of Joshua, the Gibeonites had, by means of false pretences, obtained a covenant of peace between themselves and the Israelites. They were degraded to perpetual servitude; but with all the sacredness of a solemn oath the public faith was pledged to them for the security of their lives. Under circumstances not fully disclosed to us, Saul broke the oath and forfeited the honour of the nation, by slaying many of the Gibeonites, and by attempting to destroy them all. It has been supposed by some that he was severe and cruel towards the Gibeonites, as a kind of set-off against his pretended compassion towards the Amalekites. Later commentators have thought that light is to be obtained from the question Saul put to his courtiers when he was disclosing his suspicions against David: "Hear now, ye Benjamites," etc. This implies that Saul either had given or would give them fields and vineyards. The sin of Saul was regarded by God as a national sin, either because the people shared in the plunder, or because they sympathised with or connived at the deed. The matter was one of double guilt, for, besides the shedding of innocent blood, there was the violation of a solemn compact. Some men have a feeling that there is an appearance of injustice if a crime be punished many years after its perpetration. But lapse of time has no power to diminish the guilt of an action, and why should it deter or diminish punishment? If lapse of time work change in the offender, bringing him to repentance, then it is meet for mercy to interpose with pardon, and keep back punishment for ever. This is according to God's promise. Where, on the other hand, the rolling years reveal no improvement, the guilt is increased instead of diminished. In these cases delayed judgment will be at last heavier judgment. Of course, objectors will ask the old question: "Was it just to make one generation suffer for the sins of another?" Seeing the famine did not come till more than forty years after the offence, the greater part of the offenders must have entirely escaped the punishment; and it is said, therefore, the delayed judgment must have been an unjust judgment. How is it people never think of asking this other question: "Is it just for one generation to be enriched in many ways by the skill and labour and victories of a preceding generation?" The law of God that links the generations together is constantly and powerfully working for good. We are all of us more or less better in body, mind, and estate, because of the virtues of those who have lived before us. If we were to be stripped of all the fruit of the various excellences of bygone generations, how poor and feeble we should be! Our freedom, our art and science, our civilisation, with all its power to mitigate the sorrows and increase the pleasures of life, are not the creation of our wisdom, they are not the product of our virtues. By far the larger portion of them we owe, under God, to the work and worth of those who now sleep in their graves. "Other men laboured, and we have entered into their labours." It was doubtless by God's direction that David suffered the surviving Gibeonites to decide what should be done to expiate the sin. They demanded that seven of Saul's descendants should be publicly executed, and their demand was granted. Saul and his sons had been the leaders in the unprincipled slaughter, and his descendants were most likely the largest holders of the unrighteous spoil. It was contrary to Jewish custom to leave the bodies upon the gibbets to waste away; but it was done in the case of these seven, either because the Gibeonites demanded it, or in order to make the warning more terrible. It gave rise to a most touching display of motherly affection and fidelity. Two of the seven were sons of Rizpah, who, though she had been one of Saul's wives, was still living. She could not bear the thought of their hanging there for the vultures to tear to pieces and devour, and she determined to keep watch over them and drive off the foul birds of prey. She made her home upon the rock, and watched with a vigilance that never slept, and a devotion that never wearied. It was told David what Rizpah had done, and in-

stantly his memory was awakened, and his conscience was quickened. He thought of the bones of Saul and Jonathan sleeping in the place of their somewhat hurried and unseemly burial. He saw the duty he ought to have discharged. He fetched the long-neglected remains from Jabesh-Gilead, and carried them to the country of Benjamin, and buried them in the sepulchre of Kish, the father of Saul. With them he buried also the bodies of the seven, and thus relieved the tender and faithful-hearted Rizpah from the burden of work and woe which her love for her own had laid upon her. Long-forgotten sin had been brought to mind, and acknowledged, and expiated; homage had been paid to justice; the evil of unfaithfulness had been exposed; the honour of the nation had been purged from foul stains; it had been shown that neither kings nor princes can do wrong with impunity; maternal fondness and fidelity had been touchingly displayed; a long-forgotten duty had been attended to; a noble example had borne fruit; and "after that God was entreated for the land." The way in which Rizpah's conduct moved David to his duty affords a fine instance of what has been aptly called "unconscious influence." She had no design upon the conscience of the king, but her right doing told with great effect. Words are often feeble and in vain, but deeds are seldom fruitless. The most eloquent preachers may have to cry out complainingly—"Who hath believed our report?" The success of example is far more certain, for its fragrance has never been a sweetness wholly "wasted on the desert air." (C. Vince.)

Conscience assertive:—Conscience works after the manner so beautifully set forth in a ring that a great magician, according to an Eastern tale, presented to his prince. The gift was of inestimable value: not for the diamonds and rubies and pearls that gemmed it, but for a rare and mystic property in the metal. It sat easily enough on the finger in ordinary circumstances; but so soon as its wearer formed a bad thought, designed or committed a bad action, the ring became a monitor. Suddenly contracting, it pressed painfully on his finger, warning him of sin. Such a ring, thank God, is not the peculiar property of kings; all, the poorest of us, those who wear none other possess and wear this inestimable jewel—for the ring in the fable is just that conscience which is the voice of God within us. (T. Guthrie.)

Famine in the days of David:—I. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN MORAL EVIL AND PHYSICAL SUFFERING. Do we believe in God as the Moral Ruler of men? Then we cannot but believe that He designs and controls what is occurrent around them to the education and bettering of the moral nature that is within them. National calamities follow upon national sins. Let no corn-seed be sown; no provision made as far as man can make it for harvest, and famine will come as a Divine retribution. But with all the husbandmen's forecast and arduous anticipative toil, famine may still come as a punishment because of a nation's sins—drought, mildew, destructive insect life, the ministers of God that do His chastening pleasure. Atheistic philosophy resolves the government of the world into the action of natural laws, as if there could be laws without a Law-giver, as if they could act except He continued to be and continued to make them efficient. Some may point to second causes. "These suffice; hence come war, famine, black pestilence." But why hence? Design there cannot be without a Designer. Punishment may smite the nations through the operation of natural law; but that law is the expression of God's will, and in its operation moves His hidden, but correcting hand. As men deal with their children, God deals with them; from moral evil comes physical suffering. The punishment may be delayed, but it is inevitable. Nations, as such, have no future beyond the bounds of time. Punishment, then, for national sins must fall upon nations now. Sometimes with startling, convicting sharpness. Sometimes "after many days"—days that have gathered into many years. It was so in the case of the famine that was the punishment for Israel's accessory guilt in Saul's crime against the Gideonites forty years before. A truth this not without modern confirmatory instances. France slaughtered many of the Huguenots—her best and purest sons—and chased many more into exile. Two hundred years afterwards came the full appalling punishment for that stupendous crime in the horrors of the French Revolution—in the "dire Religion stript of God." America cherished slave-holding into a domestic institution—and, at length, long after the first slave-holders had passed, in tremendous national convulsion, and through the Red Sea of slaughter, the African bondmen made their wondering, exultant way into freedom. "God's judgments often look a long way back."

II. GOD'S DISPLEASURE WITH NATIONAL PRIDE AND VIOLATION OF TREATY OBLIGATIONS. The famine afflicted Israel because of the perfidy shown to

the Gibeonites by Saul and his approving subjects. What instruction, what warning, in these records for England to-day! We are in treaty with many dependent nations and tribes. Let us be faithful to our treaties—honest, kind, not aggressive on the reserved and acknowledged rights of any. To wrong African or Indian tribe—any tribe though as weak and helpless as the ancient Gibeonites, with the national approval, is to assure in coming days for the nation storms of the Divine displeasure. Nor is national pride to go unpunished. And are we guiltless herein? Vast, inclusive of many languages and all climates, the empire that acknowledges our King. But let us not forget who has made us to differ; who has exalted us among the nations; who has lifted us up and can cast us down. III. IN RIZPAH WE SEE THE UNUTTERABLE, UNVANQUISHABLE STRENGTH OF A MOTHER'S LOVE. Her sons were doomed to ignominious, dishonoured end. She will honour them! An aged woman; adult sons; a king's sons—thus to end! To her they are royal still. As her grey hair streams to the wind, as her voice and arms are raised against the prowling creatures, oh strength of resolution! oh, thronging memories in that lonely woman's heart!

The barley harvest was nodding white
 When my children died on the rocky height,
 And the reapers were singing on hill and plain
 When I came to my task of sorrow and pain.
 But now the season of rain is nigh,
 The sun is dim in the thickening sky.
 I hear the howl of the wind that brings
 The long, drear storm on its heavy wings;
 But the howling wind and the driving rain
 Will beat on my houseless head in vain.
 I shall stay, from my murdered sons to scare
 The beasts of the desert and fowls of air.

Unconquerable love! not rewarded—winning comely sepulture for the bodies of her dead. (*G. T. Coster.*) *Punished sin expiated*:—1. A famine in Palestine was always a consequence of deficient winter rains, such a deficiency being by no means uncommon; but in this case the famine endured three successive years, and thus became alarming, and impelled men to ask religious questions and make religious arrangements. "David inquired of the Lord"—in other words, he sought the face of the Lord. Is not the action of David imitated, to some extent at least, by the men of all time? When the east wind blows three days, or three weeks, men do but remark upon it complainingly, and it passes from criticism; but when it continues three months, and three more, and the earth is made white with dust, and every tree stands in blackness and barrenness, and every bird is silent, and the whole landscape is one scene of blank desolation—then men begin to inquire concerning causes, and even the most flippant and obdurate may be easily moved to seek the face of the Lord. Thus selfishness assumes a religious aspect, and religion is degraded by being crowned with selfishness; thus men make confusion in moral distinctions, and imagine themselves to be pious when they are only self-seeking, and suppose themselves constrained by persuasion when they are simply driven by fear. 2. David, having learned the Divine reason for the continued famine, now turned in a human direction, as he was bound to do, saying unto the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you?" The word is the term which is used throughout the law in connection with the propitiatory sacrifices. The word literally means to cover up. David inquires what he can do to cover up the sin of Saul, so as to remove it from the sight of the men against whom it had been committed. Saul himself being dead, his male descendants were considered as standing in his place, and were looked at in the solemn light of actually personating him and having responsibility for his evil deeds. The Gibeonites regarded the whole affair as involving theocracy, and not until the execution had been completed could the stains be removed which had been thrown upon the most sacred history of the race. Men's ideas of compensation undergo great changes. It is no surprise that at first the idea of compensation should be considerably rough and formless. Jesus Christ, remarking upon it, set it aside in the letter, and displaced it by a nobler spirit:—"Ye have heard it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you" . . . and then came the gospel so difficult to be apprehended by the natural reason, but

yielding itself as an infinite treasure to the claim of faith and love. David took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah. He could not lawfully refuse the demand of the Gideonites, having before him the fact that the law absolutely required that bloodguiltiness should be expiated by the blood of the offender. David spared for Jonathan's sake the only descendants of Saul in the direct line who could have advanced any claim to the throne. 3. The beginning of harvest points to the time as being immediately after the Passover (Leviticus xxiii. 10, 11), and consequently about the middle of April. The rains of autumn began in October, so that Rizpah's tender care must have extended over about six months. She waited until water dropped upon them out of heaven—that is, until the water-famine was at an end; and thus the Divine forgiveness was assured. A most vivid and ghastly picture this: see the seven bodies fastened to a stake, either by impaling or by crucifixion, and watch them standing there day by day and week by week, until the clouds gathered and the returning rain attested that God had been satisfied because justice had been done in the earth. The Lord from heaven is watching all our oblations and sacrifices and actions, and when we have done that which His law of justice requires He will not forget to send the rain and the sunshine, and to bless the earth with an abundant harvest. 4. Then we come upon a beautiful expression—"And after that God was intreated for the land." There is a solemn lesson here for all time. We must do justice before we can make acceptable prayer, we cannot turn dishonoured graves into altars which God will recognise. "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee: leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings." These are the conditions upon which God will be intreated. 5. There is a line of true melancholy in the remainder of the chapter. The Philistines had yet war again with Israel, but now when David went down and fought against the Philistines we read that "David waxed faint" (v. 15). A splendid life is now showing signs of decay. David in his old age was fighting with giants, but he was no longer the ruddy youth who smote Goliath in the forehead. There is a time when a man must cease from war. There is also a time when his character, his peaceful counsels, his benignant smile, may be of more value than the uplifting of his enfeebled arm. Patriots should take care that their leaders are not too long in the field of danger; and these leaders themselves should know that there is an appointed time for withdrawing from the battle and sitting in noble and well-earned seclusion, guiding by counsel when they can no longer lead by example. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Famine and war*:—This chapter is a double narrative, first of famine, and secondly of waters, in the latter end of David's days. 1. The time when those three years of famine were, this is uncertain. Some expositors are for a transposition of those stories both of the famine and of the wars, which (they say) fell out before the rebellions both of Absalom's and of Sheba's, rendering probable reasons for their opinion; seeing 'tis said here in the general only that this famine fell out in the days of David (ver. 1), but other authors of profound judgment do see no reason for admitting any such transposition in the Scriptures, seeing it is never safe to allow it, but when it is necessary, and cannot be avoided; and therefore 'tis best to take them in that order, wherein the Holy Spirit hath placed them; yet sometimes Scripture-story puts those passages that belongs to one matter all together, though they happened at several times. 2. The cause of this famine made known by God's oracle. The natural cause was the drought (ver. 10). David, though a prophet, knew not the supernatural cause, until he consulted with the Urim, and God told him it was to punish Saul's fallen zeal, who had so perfidiously and perjurally brought the Gibeonites into perdition (vers. 1, 2.) 3. The means made use of for removing this judgment of famine, namely, the getting both God and the Gibeonites reconciled to Israel (vers. 3, 4, 5, and 6.) Those Gibeonites had complained of their grievances to God, and he had heard them, for he is gracious. (Exodus xxiii. 27.) The reason why they had not all this long time complained to King David. That happened to them which befalls all that are deeply oppressed, they are so dispirited that they dare do nothing for their own relief, and possibly they suspected that David would be unwilling to rescind the acts of Saul. (2.) God now rouses David. He asks them what would satisfy them, seeing Saul had so wronged them from a zeal without knowledge (Rom. x. 2), against the public faith, which God (under no pretence) will suffer to be broken, no not though it was won by a wile. (Josh. ix.

1.5) Yet was it binding to successors. (3.) It was not a money-matter they sought for satisfaction, but that seven of Saul's sons might be hanged up before the Lord in Gibeah of Saul, that the place wherein he plotted to root out our families, even at his royal palace, may now become the open stage for the rooting out of his family. (4.) The matter, manner, and form of the expiation of Saul's sin, whereby God was reconciled, and the famine removed from Israel at the Gibeonites' prayer. (1.) Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, is so named to distinguish him from that other Mephibosheth, the son of Saul's concubine (vers. 7, 8). This poor cripple was saved for Jonathan's sake, because of the Lord's oath between them. How much more will the Father of all mercies be mindful of the children of believers for Jesu's sake, and for the covenant made with their parents. (2.) But David, doubtless at God's direction, took the two sons of Rizpah, Saul's concubine, and the five sons of Merab, who was married to Adriel. (3.) The manner of this expiation, it was the execution of this sevenfold matter, by hanging them all up before the Lord (ver. 9), though David had sworn that he would not cut off Saul's seed (1 Sam. xxiv. 21, 22). Yet God, dispensing with David in this oath, directed him to do thus; otherwise David had been as guilty of perjury as Saul himself was, and God would not have been so well pleased with this sacrifice as to remove the dearth at it. (4.) Rizpah's motherly affection to her two hanged sons. (ver. 10.) She erected a tent upon a contiguous rock made of sackcloth (in token of mourning) to secure herself from the parching heat of the sun in the droughty day, and from the malignant vapours of the dark nights. Resolving to watch their bodies from all annoyances, because they were doomed by David with the direction of God, who in this extraordinary case dispensed with his own double law. (Deut. xxi. 23, and 24, 16.) To hang there until the anger of God was appeased for Saul's sin, and rain reobtained, which Rizpah prayed earnestly for in her mourning tent; and that the Lord would accept the sacrifice of her sons for an atonement, to remove the famine, etc. If so, then Rizpah must be a religious woman, having this providence made an ordinance to her. However, she was certainly a virago of a more than manly courage that durst watch there night and day without fear of wild beasts, etc. Not wanting servants as a king's concubine, yet will she watch herself alone. 5. David's high commendation of Rizpah's doing, inasmuch as he made her his pattern in declaring due respect to the dead. (vers. 11, 12, 13, 14.) (1.) Tidings of Rizpah's condoling the death of her sons, etc., being brought to David, it pleased him so well that he willingly learnt to do his own duty to the dead, and not only towards the bodies of these royal persons now executed, but also to the bones of Saul and Jonathan. (2.) David hereupon giveth out his royal order, that the bones of Saul and Jonathan laid up in the sepulchre (where the men of Jabesh Gilead had buried them, 1 Sam. xxxi. 10, 11, 12), should be brought thence, and be buried in the sepulchre of Kish, Saul's father, and for the bodies of those seven sons he ordered also an honourable burial, to make them all the amends he could possibly for their ignominious death: all which do clearly demonstrate that David bore no malice either to Saul (who had been so malicious to him while he lived) nor to his sons, and what little reason Joab had to accuse David for hating his friends (2 Sam. xix. 6), but herein he most piously loved his enemies. 6. The effect of all this. (ver. 14.) (1.) The Lord's tenderness towards Rizpah, when God saw her motherly bowels, in lamenting the loss of her sons with so much love and patience, and lodging in such an open air to keep their dead bodies from all harm either by bird or beast, he would not suffer her to suffer this hardship till September (as some say) which was the time of God's giving Israel their latter rain (as their former rain fell in Nisan or spring before their barley-harvest, the very time wherein they were hanged (ver. 10), for then Rizpah must lodge upon the rock in her sackcloth tent for many months night and day; but God soon sent rain as that phrase intimateth "Water dropped upon them out of heaven" after so long a drought, causing a dearth, whereby she presently understood God's anger was appeased, seeing rain was now re-obtained. (2.) The Lord soon sent rain, not only because He saw David had done that due execution of justice (demanded both by God and the Gibeonites) which so far pleased God that the wickedness of wicked Saul, of his sons, and of his subjects was expiated thereby as to temporal punishments, but also God was pleased because David found in his heart (as the phrase is, chap. vii. 27) to recompense good for evil to his enemies, in ordering an honourable interment to Saul and all his sons, and to bury them honourably in a place of Benjamin, named Josh. xviii. 28. (3.) After their execution God was intreated for

the land (ver. 14.) Those intreaters were many, not only all the religious people of Israel, but also Rizpah prayed for rain, that a speedy period might be put both to the pinching famine and to her own painful watchings. 7. The wars David had with the Philistines, wherein were four famous battles fought, from ver. 15 to the end. (1.) In the first battle David was present in person, though 'tis expressly said "He now waxed faint" with old age (ver. 15.) Some say this fell out before Absalom's rebellion. Let this story be timed without interruption where the Holy Spirit hath placed it. Here David was in danger to be slain by the giant Ishbi Benob (v. 16), who being made a new colonel, pressed into Israel's army, and with his new sword essayed to slay David as a proof of his valour, but Abishai succoured him, and slew the daring monster (v. 17), Josephus saith, it was done as David nursed them, &c. (2.) David was absent in all the three following battles, for his men swore to him because of his former personal danger [That he should descend into no more battles] as they had only obliged his absence (chap. 18, 3, 4.) (3.) The issue of these three battles succeeding the first, and one another as the Philistines (routed in all the four fights) could recruit, and rally their forces. All these victories are ascribed to David (v. 22), learn we to do so unto Christ for all our victories both corporal and spiritual: These all made way for Solomon's peaceable reign. (*C. Ness.*) *God's Delays in Punishing.*—Saul had been some time dead, when this famine, year by year, for three years, visited the people of Israel. You must look back to the book of Joshua, to see what the sin was. There we find that Israel had made a league with the Gibeonites. "Joshua," it is written, "made peace with them, . . . to let them live; and the princes of the congregation swore unto them . . . And the children of Israel smote them not, because the princes of the congregation had sworn unto them by the Lord God of Israel." But in after times they forgot this oath, by suffering Saul to slay the Gibeonites, and did not see the guilt of letting him take their lives. But the sin, though at first it brought no chastisement, began to put forth thorns and to prick in David's day. Now we often act like Israel; we brush away from our minds what we have done. We are too busy with to-day; we are interested in what is going on just now. Who likes to look an old folly in the face? Who likes to unroll the book of life, to read the pages that are stained and blackened with old sins? We do not like to rake up all our sins. There is enough of sin in every man's life to put him to the blush. But is it wise thus to treat ourselves and our sins? Is all well because we are at ease, and have got rid of the sting of our old misdeeds? Is all really safe? Is there no cause for a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation? Are sins to be thrown aside, and got rid of this way? Nay, we may be very easy and composed; but this is not safety; it is only a treacherous peace; true peace must be sought for by the very opposite course. The true way of peace is not to turn away from the past, but to turn towards it, that we may search and see what we have been about; the true way of peace is not to try to forget our sinful or frivolous deeds of old, but to be at pains to recollect and recall them; for the true way of peace lies through the gate of repentance, through a deep, sincere, careful repentance. It is the penitent who can lay hold of the Cross and live. We must not mistake the ways of God in this matter. The famine that fell on Israel for offences long since past shews us that the edge of God's sword is not blunted, because for a time it is withheld; for every sin there is punishment in store. No man resists the Spirit, and goes unpunished, if he remains impenitent. The Lord often withholds His arm, not because He disregards the sin, but because He knows the terror of His vengeance, and would fain see the conversion of the sinner. If we are at all moved by the long-suffering and forbearance with which we have been treated, what wiser thing can we do than solemnly and carefully to retrace our steps, and, by a close accurate study of our past lives, to see whether we have much to repent and to confess before the Lord? (*J. Armstrong, D.D.*) *The enquiry into sin:*—Here we have an example of the dealings of God with sinners; we see the sin of one man, Saul, coming upon his family, according to that rule which God hath specially laid down among the strictest of his commandments. "I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." The first thing to be learned from such a manifestation of the ways of God's dealing with sin, is the very dreadful extent to which it goes: nearly 200 generations have past since the days of Adam, and yet the

effects of his sin have not run out their course. All this world is of a piece; one part is joined on to another, so that no man, however selfish, can do any thing for himself only; some one else must in some way or another come in for his share in it. Can the Christian then take too great heed to himself? The sin of Saul, we see, brought a judgment on the whole land; and it is most instructive to observe how it had been so completely forgotten by men, so that David was obliged to enquire the reason of the judgment. So little do men think of sin until they begin to smart for it. Is not this also a matter of daily experience? But the child of God, and joint-heir with Jesus Christ, has no need of being compelled to enquire of God. He does enquire daily; daily there is presented to his eyes the miserable spectacle of this world, full of sorrow and death, and daily and hourly he feels in his body the tokens of mortality; and daily God gives him an answer with greater clearness, "It is for sin." And daily also he sees his Saviour on the cross, in his agony and sufferings; and daily he enquires of the Lord in his heart, "Why is this?" and daily the answer comes to him with a deeper experience of his own need and God's abundance, "It is for sin." Sin, therefore, is his abhorrence; he sees God's judgment ever upon it. We see from this chapter that after David had enquired of the Lord, and found the reason of the judgment which was upon the land, he immediately set to work to remove it. But how few will follow the example of David in their own case! God having spoken to their enquiring conscience in a manner not to be mistaken, how slow are they to give up the darling sin to be crucified! Such never can have made serious and earnest enquiry of the Lord. Let all enquire with David's sincerity, and then they will perform with David's faithfulness. But the business of the Christian is to enquire with all sincerity, and with daily diligence; for, if he be not less watchful than becomes his profession, he must see both within him and without him continual occasion for such inquiry. And thus they daily grow in the knowledge of themselves, and in the resignation of their wills unto God; thus they become more conformed to the image of the Son of God, who Himself, when in the flesh, though He were a Son, yet "learned obedience by the things which He suffered." Thus, as persons find pearls of inestimable price by diving to the bottom of the sea, and groping there amid fear and darkness, so they, searching into the dark depths of their heart with godly fear, bring always up to sight the precious pearl of their redemption in Jesus Christ. (R. W. Evans, B.D.)

Vers. 10—14. **And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth.**—*Rizpah*: or, *relative suffering*.—We may generally see the cause of any suffering if we only go far enough. David began to enquire, and found out the cause. The demand of the Gibeonites was in harmony only with that crude, cruel, harsh age. They demanded that the survivors of Saul's race should be handed over to them, that they might do that which they thought would appease outraged law. Some have supposed that David was glad of the opportunity of getting rid—after an Eastern fashion—of possible rivals to the throne; but this could not have been his motive, or he would not otherwise have spared the one who was the only direct and lineal descendant, Mephibosheth, the eldest son of the deceased heir apparent, Jonathan. If all forsake those who hang as accursed, Rizpah will not. She cannot hinder the seizure of her sons and relatives, but she can watch that no further dishonour shall be done to their bodies. She takes sackcloth, spreads it to shield her by day and to rest on at night. Stifed by the heat, and chilled by the cold night air, she remains near to those sun-scorched, haggard, weird, blackened, dishonoured bodies, watching to save them from further ignominy. I. We may gaze with admiring wonder at a WOMAN'S FAITHFULNESS, LOVE, AND PATIENCE. What faith! She believed that sooner or later God would be entreated for the land, and that when the rains came it would show that guilt had been appeased, and that her dear ones might at least have honourable burial. She believed that they hung there, not for their own sin, but for the sin of others, and, therefore, she does not forsake them. It is so easy to turn our back on those whom the world forsakes. Rizpah would not believe her sons were wrong. How like a woman! They are always slowest to believe wrong, and always readiest to bear the heaviest burdens for those they love. And what a burden, to watch through all those slowly passing weeks. II. THE SORROWS THAT ARE SILENTLY ENDURED. In thousands of homes every day, there are wives and sisters and daughters who are watching as assiduously, either by the bedside of loved sufferers, or mourning at their death, as Rizpah on the rock of Gibeah. How

many there are out of whose lives all that is bright is gone, because one to whom they gave their heart's best devotion is lying pulseless, in the blank stare of death. III. THE BITTEREST TRIALS OF LIFE COME THROUGH THE WRONGDOINGS OF OTHERS. Rizpah had nothing to do with Saul's sin, and yet she had to bear some of the fearful consequences. Here, too, we see how Christ has suffered through the sin of others. There was no sin in Him. Yet was He treated as a sinner, because He became one with us. Love bound Him to us. How He drove back the vultures of sin and the demons of darkness! How He hung on the cross in the full blaze of a broken law that He might take away the sin of the world! How He has waited since, like Rizpah, at the door of the heart, to give life and peace, and to let the rain of His mercy drop on us out of heaven! Our sins nailed Him to the tree, but He does not love us the less. He knows that when we see how He has loved us, love will break or melt our hearts. For that sign of penitence and love He waits through the long years, as Rizpah did through days of furnace heat and nights of intensest cold, for the sign of coming rain from heaven. Oh, how unwearied is Jesus in His waiting for souls! His locks are wet with the dews of heaven, and His form withered as by the solar heat! IV. THE OVERWHELMING INFLUENCE OF A DEVOTED LIFE IS SEEN IN THIS ACT OF RIZPAH. That silent, watching woman little thought how others were taking note of her,—how her heroic action would be recorded in the Book which would be the most widely read of all books. Example has immense power. Men submit to it more readily than to any commands. Of it speaks Hudibras—

“Example, that imperious dictator
Of all that's good or bad to human nature;
By it the world's corrupted or reclaimed,
Hopes to be saved or studies to be damned.”

However obscure, we cannot be sure but that our example may have a good or an evil influence. In proportion to the extent of our circle, so our power for good or evil. V. FAITHFUL LOVE IS FINALLY REWARDED. Rizpah, at last, when the dead are buried, can rest, and only think with a shudder of the long and weary days when her strong arm drove off the vultures, or of the nights when the wild beasts were only kept at bay by the fire that flashed from her eye, and the force that she threw into her voice. And as we think of Him who was homeless, rejected, crucified, we ask, “Will not Christ see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied?” (*F. Hastings.*) Rizpah:—One of the most affecting narratives in Holy Writ—a story, full of beauty and pathos, is the solitary vigil of Rizpah as she watched with a mother's love over the dead bodies of her two sons. In years gone by she had been a favourite with Saul. Her home was in the king's palace; in his love she found both home and happiness. She had no wishes ungratified; whatever could add to her wondrous beauty or minister to her woman's vanity was freely at her command. The hues of health and youth mantled in her cheeks, the rose and the lily lent to her their charms, the light of hope sat upon her calm brow and brightly beamed in her dark eye; her light, elastic step told of the joy that filled her heart. The stream of life flowed gently on, as a river of peace; the present hour was without a cloud of care; the visions of the future were as bright and rose-coloured as her own playful fancy could paint them. All men paid their court to her, they lived upon her smiles; she was the beneficent fairy who administered happiness and favour to the admiring throng. Far above all these and more than all these was the king's love, the love of Saul, not more distinguished for his manly honours than for the grace of his manly beauty, for his heroic courage and valour, for his warlike triumphs—those qualities which might well commend him to her woman's heart. He was the lover of her youth, the father of her children, the two beautiful boys, who were not only the source of the young mother's pride and joy, but the pledge and assurance of her continued reign in the royal heart. Well might she move on in her peerless beauty and pride, careless of the whispering envy that followed her steps, and mindful only of the great prize she had won and so gracefully bore. The scene changes; we stand upon the mountains of Gilboa. Over them like a sirocco has swept the rude blast of war; they are covered with the dying and the dead. Woe, woe to the land, for the Philistines have triumphed; the beauty of Israel is slain upon the high places, the mighty are fallen. Weep, O ye daughters of Israel! weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and other delights, who

put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel. How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! Such might have been the exclamations of Rizpah over the dead body of Saul. Her bosom was rent with anguish, her heart broken with sorrow. At one fell blow all her hopes were crushed; vain now were her beauty and her pride. The palace was no longer a fitting home for one so forlorn and distressed; its stores of wealth, its jewelry and costly array, had departed from her for ever; another king had come to the throne who knew not Rizpah. But what cared she? Why, when Saul was himself lost, tell her of past splendour and past joys? Had she not already suffered the worst that could befall her, since the king's death, from one of the new king's captains—insult, ignominy, and shame? A consuming sorrow preyed upon her life; grief had done the work of years, and, if she lived on, it was but for the sake of her two sons. They were all that was left her of her former wealth, and while the mother love survives the human heart still preserves its capacity to suffer and endure. So she went forth—she, so delicately nurtured and cared for; her summer friends had all forsaken her; she went forth into a world of poverty and loneliness with her two sons. She sought some retired hamlet, that she might devote her life to her sorrow and to them. They had now come to the years of youth, or, it may be, of manhood, and were able to do something to repair the mother's loss and to repay her love. Their united toil provided the scanty fare and supplied their simple wants. With untiring patience and love they devoted themselves to her comfort, living not for themselves, but for her. Rizpah could not but be touched with the spectacle; she could but see with maternal pride their beauty and virtues. Despite herself, hope would re-kindle in her heart, not for her own future, that was dead for ever, but for theirs; she could but think and believe they so honoured her that their days would be long in the land. They might, they ought, to regain their ancestral name and wealth; they would be the comfort and the solace of her declining years, and would pay her the last sad offices of love. God had come very near to her, but He had not left her altogether without comfort; while her two sons survived, such sons as mother never had before, she need not wholly despair. It was perchance while Rizpah thus communed with her own heart in her chamber and was still, while she was thus recovering from the staggering blow which Providence had dealt upon her, that she heard the tramp of horses' feet approaching her lowly cottage; she looks up, and the king's messenger is at the door. Her heart beats with agitation, but not with fear. Already God has heard her prayers; her two sons are to be restored to the king's court; even on earth they will reap in part their reward. The royal David has heard the touching story of their love; her visions and her hopes are to be realized. Her neighbours and her friends know, alas! how vain such an imagination is. They have suffered from the famine; the only remedy and relief has been bruited abroad—the sacrifice of the seven sons of Saul on the hill before the Lord; it has reached all ears but the ears of Rizpah. Who should break such a tale to that lone and sorrowing woman? Who should bear to her what might be her own as well as the death-warrant of her two sons? What manly courage would not shrink from her wail of woe? Without any fault or crime of theirs, having violated no law human or divine, they, the good sons, were to die a death of shame; like malefactors, they were to be hanged upon a tree. It is one of the strange workings of Providence we can neither fathom nor explain, the visiting upon the innocent children the father's sins, though it is every day exemplified before our eyes. The sacrifice was ordained; it was accepted of God. The king's messenger had come; he tells his sorrowful errand, and Rizpah makes no resistance and no reply. Her heart is paralyzed, she is dead to the world; naught survives in her but that maternal love which, like the instinct of modesty, may remain long after all outward consciousness is gone. The signal is at length given, the fatal drop falls, and the sacrifice is complete; the seven sons of Saul have ceased to live; the multitude depart, and Rizpah is left alone with her misery and her dead. Now commences her sad, solitary vigil. Her two sons have died like criminals; no sacred burial rites await them. The gibbet on which they perished is to be their only tomb; they are left to be a prey to the unclean birds of heaven and to the wild beasts of the field. From this last indignity the love of Rizpah shields them. What a picture for the pencil of the painter or for the pen of the poet! What a proof of the strength and devotion of maternal love! It survives death and the grave; it lives through good and through evil report; in the discharge of its office it fears no danger and shuns no toil. Who can tell but she may yet win them that last favour man

can bestow upon the sons of Saul—the rite of burial? So she watches in darkness and in light; the very stillness of her sorrow spreads over her a halo of sanctity that scares away all that would molest or make afraid. A vigil so remarkable soon attracts the notice of the passers-by, the piteous tale is told from one to another, until at length it reaches King David's ears. His royal heart is moved with compassion for her sorrows. He collects the bodies of Saul and Jonathan and of their dead sons, and gives them such royal burial as it became a king to bestow. Thus the work of Rizpah was done, her painful vigil ended; and she lays down to die, perhaps to share the grave of Saul and of her two sons, and God was entreated for the land, and instead of famine plenty reigns. Oh! wondrous power of maternal love, hallowing by its sacred influences even the gibbet of infamy, and lending a halo to the noisomeness of death and the grave. Oh only love of earth which finds its prototype in the love of God! (*G. F. Cushman, D.D.*)

Rizpah.—In the days of David, King of Israel, there prevailed a famine which lasted three years. On inquiring of the Lord the cause, David received for answer that it was "because of Saul and his bloody house." Already is one striking lesson to be derived from the history. We learn, not only that the weather is in the hands of God,—Rain and sunshine, "wind and storm, fulfilling His word"; but also, that one of the causes which influence Him in sending the weather which produces abundance, or which occasions famine, is the conduct of the people. Now the crime of Saul was this. Whereas Joshua and the men of Israel on first coming into Canaan had entered into a solemn covenant with the Gibeonites that they would do them no injury, but suffer them to dwell on unmolested, Saul had sought to slay them. That ancient oath and covenant of the people of the land,—made upwards of four hundred years before,—Saul, the unscrupulous, irreligious Captain of the Lord's people, had broken; and three years of famine were the penalty, inflicted on all Israel for the sin of their ruler. Money they spurned. They would have the lives of seven of Saul's sons. Accordingly, seven men were surrendered, and "hanged in the hill before the Lord." Two mothers here come to view,—Rizpah and Michal. Of the latter, little is related: but we are guided to a very solemn warning to be derived from this seemingly casual mention of her name. Saul's daughter had loved David when she knew him as the warlike and victorious captain; but despised him when she beheld him as the religious King, transported with holy joy at the recovery and return of the Ark of God. Michal proved childless: but she is found from this place of Scripture to have adopted five of her sister's children and made them hers. Yet, mark you! Those five children are taken from her to complete the number required to make atonement for her father's sin; and she remains childless until the day of her death. Very different is the character of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah,—who becomes for evermore a pattern to mankind in respect of piety towards the dead. The sackcloth which she is said to have taken and spread upon the rock, was a token of her mourning, as well as an emblem of her grief. What is of more importance, is the hint afforded us of Rizpah's piety towards God no less than towards man, contained in those words,—"until water dropped upon them out of Heaven." "Cursed" (says the Law,) "is every one that hangeth upon a tree": and here were seven men appointed to sustain the curse which rested upon the land, and to make atonement for the sin of Saul and of his bloody house. So long as the famine (occasioned by the want of rain) lasted, so long was it to be thought that the wrath of God rested upon the people, and the atonement remained unaccepted by the injured majesty of Heaven. The poor mother watched, therefore, in sackcloth, upon the hard rock; "until water dropped upon them out of Heaven": and Rizpah enjoyed the blessed assurance that the Lord was pacified, and that His wrath had indeed passed away! Only one circumstance more requires to be mentioned. "It was told David that Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul had done." David beholds in Rizpah's conduct a lesson to himself; and he proceeds at once to copy the example of piety which that sorrowful bereaved mother has set him. He bethinks him of the bones of Saul and of Jonathan his son which are still lying dishonoured at Jabesh-gilead; sends for them; causes the bones of the seven sons who had been hanged at Gibeah to be gathered also; and honourably buries them. So true is it that no one lives to himself; but the effect of good example spreads, and (as in the case before us) a weak woman's example becomes a model for the imitation of the monarch on the throne! We never know, we cannot possibly tell the remote consequences of our acts for good or for evil. We cannot even pretend

to describe their present influence, and the results which they may immediately occasion. (*J. W. Burgon, M.A.*) *Rizpah's watch; or, the story of a mother's love*:—Rizpah, the widow of Saul, was getting to be an old woman when her two sons, Armoni and Mephibosheth, were hanged in Gibeah, at the demand of the Gibeonites, who had been ravished and desolated by the cruel wickedness of Saul, their father. These men suffered not only for their own sin, but for the sins of the wicked family in which they were born, and especially for the sins of their father. Rizpah stands out as the true type of the undying loyalty of motherhood. What the world owes to good mothers, who have sacrificed themselves with all joy that they might live again in their children, no statistician will ever be able to adequately determine. John Newton, who caused his mother much sorrow while she lived, was brought back to righteousness long after she had gone to heaven by the recollection of the lessons she had taught him. God brought her back to him again in a vision, and the memory of her prayers and of her tender solicitude broke his heart and turned him away from sin. John Randolph once said: "I should have been an atheist if it had not been for one recollection—and that was the memory of the time when my departed mother used to take my little hand in hers and cause me on my knees to say, 'Our Father, which art in heaven.' " When General Grant was at West Point, he wrote to his mother: "Your kind words of admonition are ever present with me. How well do they strengthen me in every good word and work. Should I become a soldier for my country, I look forward with hope to have you spared to share with me any advancement I might gain, and I trust that my future conduct will prove me worthy of the patriotic instruction you and father have given me." No human being in this world has so much power over the life of man or woman, taking it all in all, as the mother. A mother gives the very emphasis and tone and colour to the speech of her child, and that is only an outward indication of the way she moulds the plastic soul within. Of all the most important classes for the welfare of the world, mothers lead the van. No wonder Napoleon said, in his wicked day, "What France needs is good mothers." And as there is no devotion more beautiful and splendid than that of a mother's, so there is nothing that wins a higher meed of love and gratitude in return. The affection which the noblest and truest men and women in the world have had for their mothers brightens up the pages of history. Lord Macaulay once said that it was worth while being sick to be nursed by a mother. William Cowper said: "Every creature that bears an affinity to my mother is dear to me." When Thomas Guthrie, the great Scotch preacher, was on his deathbed, his latest words were these: "How strange to think that within twenty-four hours I may see my mother and my Saviour!" How much it means when God says that He will comfort us, when we give our hearts to Him, as a mother comforteth her child! How can anyone fear to yield completely to the mother-like arms of Divine love? It is this mother-God to whom I call you to-night. (*L. A. Banks, D.D.*) *Changes of fortune*:—Some of the worst distresses have come to scenes of royalty and wealth. What porter at the mansion's gate has not let in championing and lathered steed bringing evil despatch? On what tessellated hall has there not stood the solemn bier? Under what exquisite fresco has there not been enacted a tragedy of disaster? What curtained couch hath heard no cry of pain? What harp hath never trilled with sorrow? What lordly nature hath never leaned against carved pillar and made utterance of woe. Gail is not less bitter when quaffed from a golden chalice than when taken from a pewter mug. Sorrow is often attended by running footmen, and laced lackeys mounted behind. Queen Anne Boleyn is desolate in the palace of Henry VIII. Adolphus wept in German castles over the hypocrisy of friends. Pedro I. among Brazilian diamonds shivered with fear of massacre. Stephen of England sat on a rocking throne. And every mast of pride has bent in the storm, and the highest mountains of honour and fame are covered with perpetual snow. Sickness will frost the rosiest cheek, wrinkle the smoothest brow, and stiffen the sprightliest step. Rizpah quits the courtly circle and sits on the rock. Perhaps you look back upon scenes different from those in which now from day to day you mingle. You have exchanged the plenty and luxuriance of your father's house for privation and trials known to God and your own heart. The morning of life was flushed with promise. Troops of calamities since then have made desperate charge upon you. Darkness has come. Sorrows have swooped like carrion birds from the sky and barked like jackals from the thicket. You stand amid your slain, anguished and woestruck. So it has been in all ages. Vashti must doff the spangled robes

of the Persian Court, and go forth blasted from the palace gate. Hagar exchanges Oriental comfort for the wilderness of Beersheba. Mary Queen of Scots must pass out from flattery and pomp to suffer ignominious death in the Castle of Fotheringhay. The wheel of fortune keeps turning, and mansions and huts exchange, and he who rode in the chariot pushes the barrow, and instead of the glare of festal lights is the simmering of the peat-fire, and in place of Saul's palace is the rock, the cold rock, the desolate rock. But that is the place to which God comes. Jacob with his head on a stone saw the shining ladder. Israel in the desert beheld the marshalling of the fiery baton. John on barren Patmos heard trumpeting, and the clapping of wings, and the stroke of seraphic fingers on golden harps, and nothing but heavenly strength nerved Rizpah for her appalling mission amid the scream of wild birds and the steady tread of hungry monsters. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Sins of fathers visited upon children*:—But it hardly ends before you cry out: What a hard thing that those seven boys should suffer for the crimes of a father and grandfather! Yes. But it is always so. Let everyone who does wrong know that he was not only, as in this case, against two generations, children and grandchildren, but against all the generations of coming time. That is what makes dissipation and uncleanness so awful. It reverberates in other times. It may skip one generation, as is suggested in the Ten Commandments: which say: "Visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation." Mind you, it says nothing about the second generation, but mentions the third and the fourth. That accounts for what you sometimes see, very good parents with very bad children. Go far enough back in the ancestral line and you find the source of all the turpitude. "Visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation." If, when Saul died, the consequences of his iniquity could have died with him, it would not have been so sad. Alas, no! Look on that hill a few miles out from Jerusalem and see the ghastly burdens of those seven gibbets, and the wan and wasted Rizpah watching them. Go to-day through the wards and alms-houses, and the reformatory institutions where unfortunate children are kept, and you will find that nine out of ten had drunken or vicious parents. Yea, day by day, in the streets of our cities you find men and women wrecked of evil parentage. They are moral corpses. Like the seven sons of Saul—though dead—unburied. Alas! for Rizpah, who, not for six months, but for years and years has watched them. She cannot keep the vultures and the jackals off. (*Ibid.*) *The courage of woman amid great emergencies*:—What mother, or sister, or daughter would dare to go out to fight the cormorant and jackal? Rizpah did it. And so would you if an emergency demanded. Woman is naturally timid and shrinks from exposure, and depends on stronger arms for the achievement of great enterprises. And she is often troubled lest there might be occasions demanding fortitude when she would fail. Not so. Some of those who are afraid to look out of door after nightfall, and who quake in the darkness at the least uncertain sound, and who start at the slam of the door, and turn pale in a thunderstorm, if the day of trial came would be heroic and invulnerable. God has arranged it so that woman needs the trumpet of some great contest of principle or affection to rouse up her slumbering courage. Then she will stand under the cross fire of opposing hosts at Chalons to give wine to the wounded. Then she will carry into prison and dark lane the message of salvation. Then she will brave the pestilence. Deborah goes out to sound terror into the heart of God's enemies. Abigail throws herself between a raiding party of infuriated men and her husband's vineyards. Rizpah fights back the vultures from the Rock. Among the Orkney Islands an eagle swooped and lifted a child to its eyrie far up on the mountains. With the spring of a panther the mother mounts hill above hill, crag above crag, height above height, the fire of her own eye outflashing the glare of the eagle's; and with unmailed hand stronger than the iron beak and the terrible claw she hurled the wild bird down the rocks. In the French Revolution, Cazotte was brought to be executed when his daughter threw herself on the body of her father and said, "Strike! barbarians! You cannot reach my father but through my heart!" The crowd parted, and linking arms father and daughter walked out free. During the siege of Saragossa, Augustina carried refreshments to the gates. Arriving at the battery of Portillo she found that all the garrison had been killed. She snatched a match from the hand of a dead artilleryman and fired off a twenty-six pounder, then leaped on it and vowed she would not leave it alive. The soldiers looked in and saw her daring, and rushed up and opened another tremendous fire on the enemy. The life of James I.

of Scotland was threatened. Poets have sung those times, and able pens have lingered upon the story of manly endurance, but how few tell the story of Catherine Douglas, one of the Queen's maids, who ran to bolt the door, but found the bar had been taken away so as to facilitate the entrance of the assassins. She thrust her arm into the staple. The murderers rushing against it, her arm was shattered. Yet how many have since lived and died who never heard the touching, self-sacrificing, heroic story of Catherine Douglas and her poor shattered arm. You know how calmly Madame Roland went to execution and how cheerfully Joanna of Naples walked to the castle of Muro, and how fearlessly Madame Grimaldi listened to her condemnation, and how Charlotte Corday smiled upon the frantic mob that pursued her to the guillotine. And there would be no end to the recital if I attempted to present all the historical incidents which show that women's courage will rouse itself for great emergencies. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *A mother buries remains of her executed sons*:—In the time of George IV., two men were convicted of robbing the Brighton mail-coach, and were hung on gibbets on the spot where the crime had been committed. When the clothes and the flesh had at length fallen away, an aged woman was observed to go night after night, in all weather, to the lonely spot, and bring away something in her apron. These were the bones of her son, which she interred with her own hands in the parish churchyard. (*Memoir of Lord Tennyson.*)

Vers. 18—22. **Sibbechai the Hushathite slew Saph, which was of the sons of the giant.**—*On doing valiantly*:—If his master bids him perform exploits too hard for him, he draws upon the resources of omnipotence, and achieves impossibilities. Wellington sent word to his troops one night: "Cindad Rodrigo must be taken to-night." And what do you think was the commentary of the British soldiers appointed for attack? "Then," said they all, "we will do it." So, when our great Captain sends round, as He doth to us, the word of command, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature," if we were all good soldiers of the Cross, we should say at once, "We will do it." However hard the task, since God Himself is with us to be our Captain, and Jesus the Priest of the Most High is with us to sound the trumpet, we will do it in Jehovah's name. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Deeds*:—When a man dies they who survive him ask, what property he has left behind; the angel who bends over the dying one asks what good deeds he has sent before him. (*H. W. Beecher.*) *What one can do*:—In one of the Napoleonic wars a young soldier complained to his commanding officer that his sword was too short. "Then add a step to it." was the curt and significant reply. "When I hear," says the Rev. W. L. Watkinson, "a man say, 'You know you cannot do more than you can do,' I am always still for a moment. It is such a philosophic sentence that it can only be taken in slowly." But you never know what you can do until you put your soul into it—until you add a step. Says Paul to Timothy: "Stir up the gift that is in thee." And it is not so much a question of environment as it is a question of soul; it is not a question of opportunity, because "it is in thee." *Action more than knowledge*:—"It is not the man who knows most, but the one that does best, that wins the victory. Grant, and Meade, and Sheridan could have been taught many lessons by our learned professors of military tactics and strategy, but none of these could have guided his forces to victory as Grant did at Chataanooga, Meade at Gettysberg, or have hurled his masses as Sheridan did at Winchester. Action guided by knowledge, if you will, but better action without knowledge than much knowledge and feeble action." (*General Sherman.*)

CHAPTER XXII.

Vers. 1—51. **David spake unto the Lord the word of this song.**—*The song of thanksgiving*:—Some of David's actions are very characteristic of himself; there are other actions quite out of harmony with his character. This psalm of thanksgiving belongs to the former order. It is quite like David, at the conclusion of his military enterprises, to cast his eye gratefully over the whole, and acknowledge the goodness and mercy that had followed him all along. The date

of this song is not to be determined by the place which it occupies in the history. It is likely that this psalm was written considerably before the end of David's reign. Two considerations make it all but certain that its date is earlier than Absalom's rebellion. In the first place, the mention of the name of Saul in the first verse would seem to imply that the deliverance from Saul was somewhat recent, certainly not so remote as it would have been at the end of David's reign. And secondly, while the affirmation of David's sincerity and honesty in serving God might doubtless have been made at any period of his life, yet some of his expressions would not have been likely to be used after his deplorable fall. I. The leading thought of the song, **AN ADORING ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF WHAT GOD HAD BEEN AND WAS TO DAVID** (vers. 2—4.) 1. The feeling that recognised God as the Author of all his deliverances was intensely strong, for every expression that can denote it is heaped together: "My rock, my portion, my deliverer; the God of my rock, my shield; the horn of my salvation, my high tower, my refuge, my Saviour." He takes no credit to himself; he gives no glory to his captains; the glory is all the Lord's. He sees God so supremely the Author of his deliverance that the human instruments that helped him are for the moment quite out of view. He who, in the depths of his penitence, sees but one supremely injured Being, and says, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned," at the height of his prosperity sees but one gracious Being, and adores Him, who only is his rock and his salvation. In an age when all the stress is apt to be laid on the human instruments, and God left out of view, this habit of mind is instructive and refreshing. It was a touching incident in English history when, after the battle of Agincourt, Henry V. of England directed the hundred and fifteenth Psalm to be sung; prostrating himself on the ground, and causing his whole army to do the same, when the words were sounded out, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Thy name give glory." 2. The emphatic use of the pronoun "my" by the Psalmist is very instructive. It is so easy to speak in general terms of what God is, and what God does; but it is quite another thing to be able to appropriate Him as ours, and rejoice in that relation. The use of the "my" indicates a personal transaction, a covenant relation into which the parties have solemnly entered. 3. One other point has to be noticed in this introduction—when David comes to express his dependence on God, he very specially sets Him before his mind as "worthy to be praised." II. **TRIALS AND GOD'S DELIVERANCE IN HIS TIMES OF DANGER** (vers. 5—20.) That description is eminently poetical. First, there is a vivid picture of his troubles. "The waves of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid; the sorrows of hell compassed me; the snares of death prevented me." ("The cords of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodliness made me afraid; the cords of sheol were round about me; the snares of death came upon me," R.V.) It is no overcharged picture. With Saul's javelins flying at his head in the palace, or his best troops scouring the wilderness in search of him; with Syrian hosts bearing down on him like the waves of the sea, and a confederacy of nations conspiring to swallow him up, he might well speak of the waves of death and the cords of Hades. Then, after a brief account of his calling upon God, comes a most animated description of God coming to his help. The description is ideal, but it gives a vivid view how the Divine energy is roused when any of God's children are in distress. Faith saw God bestirring Himself for his deliverance, as if every agency of nature had been set in motion on his behalf. And this being done, his deliverance was conspicuous and complete. He saw God's hand stretched out with remarkable distinctness. And what a blessed thing to have accumulated through life a store of such providences—to have Ebenezers reared along the whole line of one's history! III. **THE GROUNDS ON WHICH THE DIVINE PROTECTION WAS THUS ENJOYED BY DAVID.** Substantially these grounds were the uprightness and faithfulness with which he had served God. The expressions are strong, and at first sight they have a flavour of self-righteousness. "The Lord rewarded me according to my self-righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath He recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God." But it is impossible to read this Psalm without feeling that it is not pervaded by the spirit of the self-righteous man. It is pervaded by a profound sense of dependence on God, and of obligation to His mercy and love. Now that is the very opposite of the self-righteous spirit. What he here celebrates is not any personal righteousness that might enable him as an individual to claim the favour and reward of God, but the ground on which he, as the public champion of God's

cause before the world, enjoyed God's countenance and obtained His protection. There would be no self-righteousness in an inferior officer of the navy or the army who had been sent on some expedition, saying, "I obeyed your instructions in every particular; I never deviated from the course you prescribed." IV. His PROVIDENTIAL MERCIES, FOR WHICH HE SPECIALLY PRAISES GOD. One of the earliest appears to be recalled in the words, "By my God have I leaped over a wall"—the wall, it may be supposed, of Gibeah, down which Michal let him when Saul sent to take him in his house. Still further back, perhaps, in his life is the allusion in another expression—"Thy gentleness hath made me great." He seems to go back to his shepherd life, and in the gentleness with which he dealt with the feeble lamb that might have perished in rougher hands, to find an emblem of God's method with himself. If God had not dealt gently with him, he never would have become what he was. But what? Can David praise God's gentleness and in the next words utter such terrible words against his foes? How can he extol God's gentleness to him and immediately dwell on his tremendous severity to them? We cannot but regard it as the spirit of one who was imperfectly enlightened. We rejoice in the Christian spirit that teaches us to regard even public enemies as our brothers, for whom individually kindly and brotherly feelings are to be cherished. In the closing verses of the Psalm, the views of the Psalmist seem to sweep beyond the limits of an earthly kingdom. His eye seems to embrace the wide-spreading dominion of Messiah; at all events, he dwells on those features of his own kingdom that were typical of the all-embracing kingdom of the Gospel. "It is beyond doubt," says Luther, "that the wars and victories of David prefigured the passion and resurrection of Christ." At the same time, he admits that it is very doubtful how far the Psalm applies to Christ, and how far to David, and he declines to press the type to particulars. But we may surely apply the concluding words to David's son: "He sheweth loving-kindness to his anointed, to David and to his seed for evermore." (W. G. Blaikie, D.D.) *Psalm singing*:—Would you know? asks William Law, in his beautiful chapter on singing psalms—would you know who is the greatest saint in the world? Well, it is not he who prays most or fasts most; it is not he who gives most alms, or is most eminent for temperance, chastity, or justice; but it is he who is always thankful to God, who wills everything that God wills, and who receives everything as an instance of God's goodness, and has a heart always ready to praise God for His goodness. And then Law winds up with this, and I wish it would send you all to the golden works of that grace-laden writer: Sometimes, he adds, imagine to yourselves that you saw holy David with his hands upon his harp, and his eyes fixed upon heaven, calling in transport upon all creation, sun and moon, light and darkness, day and night, men and angels, to join with his rapturous soul in praising the Lord of heaven. Dwell upon this imagination till you think you are singing with this Divine musician; and let such a companion teach you to exalt your heart unto God every new morning in his thanksgiving psalms. Or make a morning psalm suitable to your own circumstance out of David's great thanksgiving psalms. You should take the finest and the selectest parts of David's finest and selectest psalms, and adding them together make them every morning more and more fit to express your own thankful hearts. (A. Whyte, D.D.) *Abundant cause for thanksgiving*:—Max O'Rell has well and wittily said that people are divided into two classes—those who complain that roses have thorns and those who rejoice that thorns have roses. We know to which class we ought to belong. Let us make most of our mercies. God is a great God, and His gifts are like Himself, and more than can be numbered. The Rev. Mark Guy Pearse tells us that, when going home from a meeting once on a starlit night, and wishing to have a little quiet to think, he gave his little girl, who was with him, the task of counting the stars, knowing this would be a task long enough until they reached home, and longer. He heard her count into the third hundred, then she stopped, and he heard her say, "Dear me! I never thought they were so many!" "And so," he said—and we can say it with him—"when I begin to count my mercies and the kindnesses of my God, I am surprised, and have to say I never thought they were so many until I began to count them." (*Christian Endeavour Times*.)

Vers. 2, 3. **The Lord is my Rock and my Fortress.**—*God our Rock*:—A great mountain lifts itself up, with perpendicular face, over against some quiet valley; and when summer thunders with great storms, the cliff echoes the thun-

der. and rolls it forth a second time, with majesty increased; and we think that, to be sublime, storms should awaken mountain echoes, and that then cause and effect are worthy of each other. But so, too, an oriole, or a song-sparrow, singing before it, hears its own little song sung back again. A little child, lost and crying in the valley, hears the great cliff weeping just as it weeps; and, in sooth, the mountains repeats whatever is sounded, from the sublimest notes of the tempest to the sweetest bird-whisper or child-weeping; and it is just as easy to do the little as the great, and more beautiful. Now God is our rock, and from His heart is infected every experience, every feeling of joy or grief that any human soul utters or knows. (*H. W. Beecher.*)

Vers. 10—14. He bowed the heavens also and came down.—*Jesus announced*:—In 1808 there was a meeting of the Emperors of France and Russia at Erfurt. There were distinguished men there from other lands. It was so arranged that when any of the Emperors arrived at the door of the reception-room the drum should beat three times; but when a lesser dignitary should come, then the drum would sound but twice. After a while the people in the audience-chamber heard two taps of the drum. They said, "A prince is coming." But after a while there were three taps, and they cried, "The Emperor!" Oh, there is a more glorious arrival at your soul to-night. The drum beats twice at the coming of the lesser joys and congratulations of your soul; but it beats once, twice, thrice, at the coming in of a glorious King—Jesus the Saviour, Jesus the God. I congratulate you. All are yours—things present and things to come. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *God comes to our succour*:—"God lives," that is the armour that David had. You cannot see it; it does not glisten in the sun; but he has it; God is with him. There are two sovereigns who never move from their capitals. The Pope sticks to the Vatican—it is papal etiquette; and the Sultan, he has remained for fifteen years within the bounds of his capital—it is Mahommedan etiquette. But God is not like that. God, as it were, leaves high heaven, and He has betaken Himself to this young David's side. Oh, warrior for Christ, why should you be downhearted? Why should you be sad? Why should not your vision be glorified so that you can behold the horses and the chariots of the living God? In the battle against sin, the armour you have is the consciousness of the living God. David knows God. (*J. Robertson.*)

Ver. 17. He sent from above, he took me; he drew me out of many waters.—*Progress from above*:—All real progress is from God. There is no little truth in the observation of Mephistopheles "that the human mind merely advances spirally, and reverts to a spot close to its origin." Dr. R. D. Hitchcock says: "In all human advancement, the motive power has not been a force in man, lifting him upward, or on the earthward side, driving him onward, but the movement has been along an inclined plane, due to an engine drawing from the top. (*A. T. Pierson, D.D.*) *Christ a deliverer*:—I have heard of the following story of a Chinaman who had become a disciple of the Lord Jesus. In explaining to others what Christ had done for him, he put it thus: "It seemed as if I was at the bottom of a pit in great distress crying for help. Buddha passed and said, 'If you crawl up, never get down again.' Confucius then came to the pit's mouth, and said, 'I have a rope at home that will go two-thirds down the pit, if you can crawl up one-third,' but he left me; then the Lord Jesus, hearing my cry, came quickly to my rescue, put His hand down and helped me out of the pit; put my feet upon a rock, and established my goings; that is what Christ has done for me." (*Newton Jones.*)

Vers. 26, 27. With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful.—*God does not forgive the unforgiving*:—You say that the desert is a desert, because no rain falls upon it; but this is only half the truth. No rain falls upon it because it is a desert. The heated air rushing up from its arid surface disperses the vapours that would descend in rain. Some moisture there must be on the earth, else there cannot be rain from heaven. So in your heart this forgiving disposition must be, else you cannot rejoice in the fulness of God's forgiving grace. The pardon may wait in the sky for you, but it cannot descend to you until that spirit is in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

Ver. 29. For Thou art my lamp, O Lord; and the Lord will lighten

my darkness.—*Rejoicing in the light of God*:—The Rev. Dr. Horton, who, after a period of seclusion through trouble with his eyesight, recently returned to his church at Hampstead, related in one of his Sabbath sermons how one day he was in the oculist's consulting-room at Wiesbaden, and as he waited he put his hand into his pocket and drew out his little Bible—not to read it, but to see if he could—and as he opened it his eyes fell on the text in II. Sam., "For Thou art my lamp, O Lord: and the Lord will lighten my darkness." "I had not been aware of the very existence of this text, and do not know who but an angel could have led me to it; but I felt that whether I received my sight or not, those words were enough for me, and from that time I seemed to know that I should not die, but live to proclaim the words of this life." *Christians' love of the light*:—It is worth noting how plants and trees turn to the light; how bleached vegetation becomes if it be shut up in darkness. The utter dark is dreadful to men, it may even be felt, so does it press upon the mind. The dimness of a foggy day depresses many spirits more than trouble or pain. The cry of the sick man, "Would God it were morning!" is the groan of all healthy life when gloom surrounds it. What, then, can be said, if there be light, and we refuse it? He must have ill work on hand who loves the darkness. Only bats, and owls, and unclean and ravenous things are fond of the night. Children of light walk in the light, and reflect the light. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Light essential for vigorous life*:—What a wonderful effect the light of God's countenance has upon men who have the Divine life in them, but who have been living in the dark! Travellers tell us that, in the vast forests of the Amazon and the Orinoco, you may sometimes see, on a grand scale, the influence of light in the colouring of the plants when the leaf-buds are developing. One says:—"Clouds and rain sometimes obscure the atmosphere for several days together, and during this time the buds expand themselves into leaves. But these leaves have a pallid hue till the sun appears, when in a few hours of clear sky and splendid sunshine, their colour is changed to a vivid green. It has been related that, during twenty days of dark, dull weather, the sun not once making his appearance, the leaves were expanded to their full size, but were almost white. One forenoon the sun began to shine in full brightness, when the colour of the forest changed so rapidly that its progress might be marked. By the middle of the afternoon, the whole, for many miles, presented the usual summer dress." (*Ibid.*) *Turn your face to the light*:—It had been one of those days on which everything goes contrary, and I had come home tired and discouraged. As I sank into a chair, I groaned, "Everything looks dark, dark." "Why don't you turn your face to the light, auntie, dear?" said my little niece, who was standing unperceived beside me. "Turn your face to the light!" The word set me thinking. That was just what I had not been doing. I had persistently kept my face in the opposite direction, refusing to see the faintest glimmer of brightness. Artless little comforter! She did not know what healing she had brought. Years had gone by since then, but the simple words have never been forgotten, "Turn your face to the light." *Light and health*:—Sir James Wylie, late physician to the Emperor of Russia, attentively studied the effects of light as a curative agent in the hospital of St. Petersburg, and he discovered that the number of patients who were cured in rooms properly lighted was four times that of those confined in dark room. These different results are due to the agency of light, without a full supply of which plants and animals maintain but a sickly and feeble existence. Light is the cheapest and best of all medicines. Nervous ailments yield to the power of sunshine. Pallid faces grow fresh and ruddy beneath its glow. The sun's rays have wonderful purifying power. (H. L. Hastings.)

Ver. 31. **As for God, His way is perfect; the Word of the Lord is tried; He is a Buckler to all them that trust in Him.**—*God's way perfect, His Word tried, Himself the believer's Buckler*:—We have, in the words of our text—first, the perfection of God's way—next, the purity of God's Word—and, lastly, the privilege of God's people. I. THE ESSENTIAL PERFECTION OF A "WAY" IS THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF ITS END; the contingent or relative perfection is the accomplishment of the end, with the utmost attainable extent of benefit, and with the least practicable amount of difficulty. Of the first, so far as both God and man are concerned, we are competent to judge; on the second, we can only form a judgment of beings endued and encumbered with like passions as ourselves. It is of the first that David speaks. He found himself, after the lapse

of many years, after the endurance of many privations and persecutions, in full possession of all that the Lord had promised, delivered out of the hand of all His enemies, and exalted, from following the sheep, to be governor over God's people Israel. He remembers and records, indeed, that "the waves of death compassed him, the floods of ungodly men made him afraid." But this is a grateful commemoration, not an insinuated complaint. Hence, then, we infer, that we are in danger of falling into error, when we look upon the dispensations of God as an insulated or individual case. With the destinies of David, we cannot doubt, were interwoven those of many others, with whose instruction, deliverance, or confirmation in the faith, his trials and persecutions might be intimately and indissolubly connected. Whatever portion may be allotted to those who serve God, of that chastening, which "for the present seemeth not to be joyous, but grievous," they possess, if not a clue to all God's dealings, that which will be at least a balm, and a solace, and a support, under all trials, in the single emphatic assurance—"As for God, His way is perfect." He proportions the endurance to the issue, and adapts the way to the end—to many ends, for "we are members one of another." II. **THE PURITY OF GOD'S WORD.** We do not here speak, however, of moral purity in its application to man's righteousness, but of the abiding excellence, the inviolable faithfulness of the Word, in reference to God Himself. None of God's people will, on reflection, ever find cause to question the purity of His Word, the integrity of His promise. And the principle on which I ground the assertion, is simply this—"The end of faith" is "the salvation of the soul;" this is the one great object, which must be pursued through all difficulties and accomplished at all sacrifices; a true believer, therefore, can only then begin to doubt—on reflection, at least—when he is placed in circumstances, of which he can positively say, "These cannot minister either to my salvation, or to the salvation of any other living soul." Now, this cannot be affirmed even of entanglement in sin; for, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another," exhorted the apostle James, "that ye may be healed"—the inference from which is that the acknowledgment of a fault may instrumentally confer a great benefit upon another than the commission of it has inflicted injury upon the believer himself. III. **WHAT IS THE NECESSARY CONCLUSION FROM SUCH PREMISES**—the privilege of God's people. "He is a buckler to all them that trust in Him." Nothing, it would appear, could be more simple, nothing could be more reasonable, than the essential condition, imposed on all such as would be saved, of an entire and implicit trust in God; nothing more simple, from the very nature of the case—nothing more reasonable, from the impossibility of the opposite. "Hath God said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" Who can even conceive of a God all power, unable—or of a God all love, unwilling—to redeem His pledge, and to accomplish His purpose? We are called, however, on the present occasion to consider the gain, the incalculable gain of those who trust God. Trust is active. The proof of it lies in action. Action is the element which is essential to its existence. He who trusts God must try at least to serve Him; otherwise trust were nothing better than presumption. And there are some who do not trust because they do not try. Religion is with them no effort, no struggle, no conflict, no sacrifice. They recite articles of faith, they respond to the utterance of prayer, they listen to the preaching of the Gospel; and then they return into the world with undiminished relish of its vanities—not, as they ought, with a livelier perception of its emptiness, and an increased repugnance to its pollutions, and a more settled abhorrence of its sins. Such men do not trust God—men whose religion is but a Sabbath parade. They cannot trust Him. They have no right to trust Him; there are no portions of His Word on which to ground their trust; for the tenour of the Scripture promises supposes consistency of life. Let me, then, exhort you to settle at once the unspeakably momentous point whether you trust God; and not only so, but whether you are warranted in trusting Him—whether it is your endeavour to walk in His "perfect way," and your desire to repose full confidence in His pure and inviolable Word. It is no time to commence all this when we are involved in calamity. Then is the time to profit by what we have already learnt—not to enter upon that lesson for the acquirement of which a whole life might be far too brief. It rests with every individual hearer to "examine himself whether he be in the faith," to "prove his own self." (*T. Dale, M.A.*) *The Lord the Christian's Buckler*:—It suggests a perfect equipment. A soldier may be endowed with strength and robustness, and yet may have most ineffective armour. During the recent war

our soldiers in South Africa were possessed by a spirit of splendid courage; their strength and nerve were irreproachable; but many of their weapons were comparatively useless. What is the use of a strong arm with a flimsy sword? Or what is the use of a keen eye with an imperfect gun? On the other hand, a soldier may have a perfect weapon, and yet be possessed of most inadequate strength. A besieged garrison may have splendid military equipment, and yet in the process of a long siege they may be so impoverished in body as to be reduced to absolute impotence. And so I say a soldier needs the two-fold gift; he requires health and armour, the strength and the shield. And so the Psalmist magnifies his God, because He endows the soul with a full sufficiency both of strength and armour. There is nothing which I require which I cannot find in God. In Him my defence and security are complete. (*J. H. Jowett, M.A.*) *God's way:—I. THE "WAY" HE PRESCRIBES IS "PERFECT."* He prescribes a way, a course of action, for all the creatures He has made, animate and inanimate, rational and irrational. The stars, the oceans, insects, brutes, and souls of every kind, from the least to the greatest, have each their "way" marked out, and the highest science attests that the way is "perfect." But the course or the way which is prescribed for man is what the writer refers to. 1. The way which is prescribed for our moral conduct is "perfect." 2. The way that is prescribed for our spiritual restoration is "perfect." What is the way? Here it is: "What the law could not do," etc.; "God so loved the world," etc. Faith in Christ is the prescribed way. This way is "perfect" in its wisdom; it is in every way adapted. "Perfect" in its justice; it honours the righteousness of God. "Perfect" in its sufficiency; it is adequate to the needs of each man, and all. *II. THE WAY HE PURSUES IS "PERFECT."* God has a method of action. He acts not by caprice or impulse, but by a settled eternal plan. 1. His method of procedure is "perfect" in conception. We have not the full draft of this plan—an infinitesimal section only comes under our eye. The architect of the great building presents you with a whole plan, and you may understand it and see the superstructure on the paper. Thus God has not acted; and if He had given us the whole plan we could not have scanned the millionth part. What we see, however, we feel to be "perfect." 2. His method of procedure is "perfect in execution." What His infinite benevolence promoted and His infinite wisdom conceived, His almightiness carries out with almost perfection. A conviction of the perfection of God's way (1) Is essential to our well-being. Without this we cannot supremely love and trust Him. (2.) Is the most attainable of beliefs. Our reason, conscience, Bible, observation, and experience all concur in urging on the soul this the grandest of all conclusions. (3.) Must flash on every sinner's nature sooner or later. If not here in the day of grace, yonder in the period of retribution. This conviction flashing on the corrupt soul in eternity, is the hell of the lost. The soul burns with anguish as it rolls and rolls in the great thought, "As for God, His ways are perfect." (*Homiliast.*) *God's way perfect:—*This chapter is almost identical word for word with the eighteenth psalm. We may regard this chapter, and the eighteenth Psalm, as a vocal Ebenezer; and in this way it is very touching to give heed to the testimonies of an aged saint of God as he thus erects his Ebenezer, and in the second and third verse pours forth the rapturous utterances of a grateful heart. Among the conclusions to which David had been drawn, is that which is presented to us in the simple but pregnant words of the text. *I. THE WORKS OF GOD REGARDED AS THE CREATOR.* In this respect we hesitate not to affirm that the words of the Psalmist are fully applicable, and that "His way is perfect." Now, of course, in affirming that God's way as Creator is perfect, we must bear in mind that we are not in a position to see into the whole of this matter. Unquestionably, before we can utter this sentiment with our hearts we must have learned the lesson of faith. Our knowledge of creation is very limited. Our philosophers are still arguing as to the plurality or the non-plurality of worlds; they are still discussing such fundamental subjects as the antiquity of man and the origin of species; and with regard to our own world, it is a common proverb among us that nothing on earth is perfect. And yet the searches and the conclusions of modern science are only revealing, we hesitate not to affirm, greater wonders, and those wonders are increasingly exhibiting the perfection of God's laws. And thus, whether we take the eye or whether we take the hand, we have the most striking evidences of design and of adaptation—evidences enough to lead us, if we are modest and candid and reverent, to this conclusion—that if we knew more, and if other organs of the body and if other elements of man's nature were as clearly opened up to us as

have been the organ of the eye, and the member of the hand, we should be still more strikingly and irresistibly brought to the conclusion with regard even to the creation, "As for God, His way is perfect." II. BUT THE DECLARATION OF OUR TEXT IS NOT LESS TRUE IN REFERENCE TO GOD AS THE GOD OF PROVIDENCE. In reference to His providential dealings, most unquestionably David's testimony was that God's way is perfect; and indeed this is the point in the psalm. Now consider this for a few moments in connection with the world. The aspect in which a man of faith and a man of this world regard all that is passing around them is as different as light can be from darkness. But "as for God, His way is perfect" in the Church. We do not see the bearing of the means upon the end. We do not, for instance, understand how it is that the tares and the wheat are permitted to grow together. We do not understand how it is that from the very beginning, from the very earliest years down to the days in which we live, whenever there has been the slightest activity or energy put forth on the part of God's people, when the Church has not been fast asleep, there have arisen grave and deadly heresies, and the Church of Christ is constantly witnessing it. In our own land, even in the lifetime of most of the persons to whom I am preaching, at the very time when everything seemed ready for the Church to advance on her great aggressive work against the heathenism that was around her, to rise to her position as the evangelist of distant nations, and to delve into the courts and alleys, and to go down into the cellars and to climb the garrets in our own heathen England; when the Church seemed ready to gird herself to this work, and faithful ministers were raised up, there has come some blight of deadly heresy upon us, and we have been constrained to enter into controversy even with our own brethren, with men bearing the ministry of our own Church. All this is most mysterious; we do not understand it; we cannot justify the ways of God to man fully. All we can say is this, that the anticipation of faith which enables us to bear a testimony even now in the words of David, is, that when all is wound up we shall assuredly discern that in dealing with His Church, as the God of Providence, the way of God has been perfect. III. LASTLY, HIS WAY IS PERFECT AS A WAY OF SALVATION. Here again faith must come in. We are surrounded by depths on every side. What is the mystery at the bottom of it all? Archbishop Whately has said, and said truly, that the entrance of moral evil into the world is very nearly the only difficulty in theology. If you and I could understand how it is that there can be moral evil, and, as its result, physical evil, in the world of a perfect God, and an Almighty God, we should be able to cut pretty nearly every knot; but we cannot understand it. We do not understand the ruin; we do not understand the entrance of sin. But let faith lay hold of this; nothing but faith can lay hold of it; reason cannot defend it, reason can only put her hand upon her mouth. God's salvation is provided, on the one hand, fully for the vindication of His own glory, while on the other hand He has adapted His salvation fully to the need of men. There is the fullest adaptation to the need of the sinner, and there is the most glorious illustration of the glory of God. (*Canon Miller, D.D.*) *God's way inscrutable but right*:—The mind of a pious workman, named Thierney, was much occupied with the ways of God, which appeared to him full of inscrutable mysteries. The two questions, "How?" and "Why?" were constantly in his thoughts—whether he considered his own life, or the dispensations of Providence in the government of the world. One day, in visiting a ribbon manufactory, his attention was attracted by an extraordinary piece of machinery. Countless wheels and thousands of threads were twirling in all directions; he could understand nothing of its movements. He was informed, however, that all this motion was connected with the centre, where there was a chest which was kept shut. Anxious to understand the principle of the machine, he asked permission to see the interior. "The master has the key," was the reply. The words were like a flash of light. Here was the answer to all the perplexed thoughts. Yes; the Master has the key. He governs and directs all. It is enough. What need I know more? "He hath also established them for ever and ever; He hath made a decree which shall not pass." (Ps. cxviii. 6.) *God makes no mistakes*:—I once experienced a great bereavement, which tested my trust in God's providence beyond any previous trial of my life. One night I was seated, with my little boy on my knee, mourning over my loss, when my eye rested on a favourite text over the mantelpiece. The eye of the child also turned in the same direction, and, without any request on my part, he read the text aloud: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." As I heard the words from my dear boy's lips,

they seemed to sink into my heart with a power they had never done before. To my surprise, the child asked the question, "Papa, what does 'perfect' mean?" My heart was too full to make any reply for a few moments; and before I could break the silence, my little one supplied the answer by saying, "Papa, doesn't it mean that God makes no mistakes?" **The Word of the Lord is tried.**—*The Word of God a proved word*:—Things of acknowledged and intrinsic value are ever liable to be counterfeited. Valueless things tempt no imitation. That which is excellent and of good report never lacks its counterfeit. This fact makes necessary the application of some reliable test to those things, whether material, intellectual, or moral, that come to us with high claims of value. The gold or silver that has been tried and stamped as genuine is that which the jeweller alone accepts as genuine. The words, or works, or systems of thought of men come to be generally accepted only when tested and proved to be worthy. A man's character and reputation only become established when in a variety of circumstances they have been found to be genuine and trustworthy. In the same way the Bible must be and has been "tried." It comes to us, claiming to be "the Word of God," to contain the highest revelation of God and His will, to give "a knowledge able to make wise unto salvation." It is of the highest consequence, therefore, that it should be tested, and prove itself genuine, and so establish its high claims. That it has been subjected to the severest tests, few will doubt. It is "a tried Word." Into all the manifold forms in which that trial has been successfully borne, we cannot now enter. But there are one or two lines of thought that will serve to show the Divine character of that revelation contained in the Holy Scriptures. 1. That we have in these records the genuine Word of God is seen when we **SUBJECT THEIR MAIN TEACHINGS TO THE TEST OF THE HIGHEST STANDARDS OF TRUTH AND DUTY AMONG MEN.** Outside the Scriptures themselves these are found in the human conscience, judgment, and reason. The Apostle Paul declares that by the light within even the heathen are capable of seeing the grand distinction between right and wrong, and of feeling the charm of moral beauty and truth. Even a race so utterly degraded as the Terra del Fuegians have proved to be not wholly devoid of moral instinct and power; while among heathen philosophers not a few have reached sublime moral conceptions and truths. Following the light within them, men like Socrates, Plato, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, Buddha, and Confucius have attained to marvellous views of truth, and have given utterance to teaching the moral beauty and Divine character of which we cannot deny. Now, when we test the teachings of the Bible by these, and ask, "What is the result?" the answer is ready and complete. Among the choicest, the flower of heathen philosophy and religious teaching there is nothing that is equal in sustained loftiness of character, in quantity and beauty, to that of the New Testament. 2. But we may look at it in another light. Tested by our own modern conceptions and ideas of what is truly noble and Divine, what is the result? We, living to-day, are the heirs of all the knowledge, civilisation, and religion of the past. At no previous age of the world's history has knowledge of so universal a kind been possessed. Not only has science laid her treasures at our feet, but the stores of knowledge gathered and garnered of old by such nations of antiquity as the Babylonian, Egyptian, Chaldean, Hindu, Grecian, and Roman have been opened to us in wonderful ways. We know far more of the religious teaching and moral ideas of these great peoples than was possible before. Our civilisation and knowledge, based upon and including all that was best in these bygone ages, is richer than any previous. Moreover, we have come into possession of eighteen hundred years of Christian thought and influence, and all that means in raising the tone of moral feeling and judgment. Judging, then, of the character of Biblical teaching as a whole, what is the verdict? Simply this: men all admit that the precepts of Christ embodied in daily life would regenerate the world; the golden age would no longer be a dream, but a sober reality; and Jesus Christ enthroned as King would make a world of purity, moral glory, and blessedness. 3. There is another point of view from which we may look at and test this subject in the present connection. Not only is the Bible proved to be Divine in view of our best judgment, but also according to the evidence of the greatest among sceptical writers. What is the testimony of many of these, men of sceptical, but deeply reverent minds? While they reject the Bible as the supreme and all-commanding revelation of God and religious truth, they all agree that in the records of the life and character of Jesus Christ in the Gospels we have the grandest and most complete presentation of moral beauty the world has seen.

II. ONE OF THE SEVEREST TESTS OF THE VALUE OF A THING IS THE WAY IN WHICH IT WITHSTANDS THE EFFECTS OF TIME AND CHANGE. If it be spurious, time, sooner or later, will show it. If it be genuine, time will only make its true character the more manifest. The false jewel, the counterfeit coin, the imitation bric-a-brac, the insincere character, the false teaching or unsound reasoning, needs only time to discover the worthlessness that attaches to it. But that which is the "truth and of the truth" becomes more and more clearly revealed as genuine and precious. In nothing has this been more fully shown than in the history of the sacred Scriptures. See how long and severe the trial to which they have been subjected! Age after age has rolled away, many things have passed out of mind and existence since many parts of the Bible were first spoken or written, but its records and teachings remain. In the darkest days of the Middle Ages, when the Church became a great world-power, its greatest foes became those of its own household, and every effort was made to destroy the Book, and to consign to oblivion its glorious, life-giving, liberty-producing truth, and to substitute a system of ecclesiastical tyranny and tradition. In still more modern days its teachings and records have been assailed by the fierce fire of criticism, hostile and mighty. Battery after battery of the most powerful and perfected artillery has been placed in position, and threatened by its presence and force to destroy the fortress of truth. So certain has been the issue in the estimation of some that they have boldly avowed that the days of Christianity were numbered. Voltaire declared that ten years after his attack on the Christian system it would cease to be. But, instead of such an issue, Christianity has come forth as from a refining furnace, like gold purified seven times. The dross and alloy have been destroyed; the precious gold of truth shines the more brightly.

III. THE METHOD BY WHICH ALMOST EVERYTHING MAY BE SURELY TESTED IS THAT OF EXPERIENCE. It seldom fails. In ordinary life and with some of the most material things it is of highest value. The article we purchase, the word of a neighbour, the work of the artisan, the professed friendship of an acquaintance, the soundness of a theory, the wisdom or folly of any step taken in business—all are proved and their true worth discovered by experience. The manner in which they stand the wear and tear of actual life is the infallible sign of their genuineness. It is perfectly scientific. It is the only safe method. Now, the Scriptures have been subject, during thousands of years, to this conclusive test. Their teachings are proved to be genuine and Divine because they bear infallibly the critical force of experience. The unbelief and sinful disregard of Christ and His Gospel, the rebellion against conscience and morality, against Christian light and leading, in their consequences and effects fulfil the utterances of Holy Writ. Men's experience of sin and its penalty is but a testimony to the reality and Divine character of that Book that declares: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." But equally true is the opposite experience: What is the testimony of those who have put its teachings to the test of practice—who have not merely tried them by reason and the moral judgment, but subjected them to the experiment of actual obedience? They have proved the truth of the Divine Master's statement: "If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God." It has verified itself to them by its power over their hearts, consciences, characters, and lives. It has brought peace, hope, comfort, strength, purity, and quickening of soul. The "Gospel has" proved "the power of God unto salvation." They have found: "Great peace have they that love Thy law." (IV. Bishop.)

The tried word:—We usually do not trust anything until it is tried. Boys dare not skate across the river until they have tried the new ice. The swing just put up on the tree is not deemed safe for the children until the rope is tried. A tried friend is a friend worth having. The Bible tells us, "The Word of the Lord is tried." It declares that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." It promises, "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." John Bunyan, the wild, wicked tinker-boy, went and found it so. John Newton, the swearing slave captain, went and found it so, and thousands are ready to testify that they went to the Son of God and found Him to be a precious Saviour.

The word of God tried in the crucible of personal experience:—The famous singer, Jenny Lind (Madame Goldschmidt), writing after her retirement from public life to one of her friends, said: "My Bible was never more necessary to me than now; never more truly my stay. I drink therein rest, self-knowledge, hope, faith, love, carefulness (circumspection), and the fear of God, so that I look at life and the world in quite

another fashion than what I did before. Would that all men came to this knowledge, and that we all daily feasted on that Divine Book! Then should we all know how to taste the true life."

Ver. 32. **For who is God, save the Lord? and who is a Rock, save our God?**—*Jehovah owned and honoured*:—If these questions were proposed from the throne of God amidst the surrounding glorified spirits, there would be but a single word of answer echoed through the glorious realm, "None! none is God, save Jehovah. None! none a Rock, save our God." If that echo were caught by the adjacent circle of angels within the sphere of bliss, and they were asked one by one, or in the mass, "Who is God, save the Lord?" the reply would but reiterate the answer which sounds upon the harps of the glorified spirits, "None! none is God, save the Lord!" If the question were put by Beelzebub, in the bottomless pit, among his infernal crew, "Who is a God, save the Lord?" the howling of their despair, the anguish of their spirits, the horror of their damnation, would all echo, "None but Jehovah is God, and we feel his power. Put the question, here upon earth, to the ears of poor, vain, proud mortals, "Who is God, save the Lord?" and we shall find the reply in that solemn Scripture, "There are Gods many, and Lords many," and all owned by poor sinners in rebellion against the Most High God. But put the question in the Church of the living God, to those who stand upon the same ground that David did when he wrote this song. Put the question to those who have experienced delivering grace by the mighty hand of Jehovah, who have been subdued at the foot of the cross by omnipotent power, and of whose hearts the Holy Ghost has taken possession, and commanded them to submit to the sway of King Jesus; and they, with one voice, would exclaim, "The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is our God." I. **THE APPEAL.** Fallen man has made many gods, and, consequently, the world is full of idolatry. I need not go to the millions of avowed Pagans and Mahometans for examples of idolatry, and of bowing down to stocks and stones. I need not go to what are called Popish countries for examples of unmitigated idolatry. There are cases constantly coming before our notice in wretched Ireland, aye, and in dear old England too, in which the grossest idolatry is transacted. Men make unto themselves gods of materials. They make unto themselves gods of mortals. They make unto themselves gods of meal. I wonder who, in the possession of the meanest common sense, would worship such gods—gods of mortals; gods of materials, and gods of meal, gods of wafers. These are specimens of the brutish ignorance, the worse than brutish ignorance, into which man has fallen. II. **A CHALLENGE.** In the 41st chapter of Isaiah the Lord is reproving these idolators, and says, "If ye be gods, show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods; ye, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and behold it together." If ye be gods, show us the things that are to come. And let these idols—these material gods, and mortal gods—show us "the things that are to come hereafter." Then we will own them to be gods. Now the great matter of fact, with relation to our covenant God, is that He has told us "the things that are to come hereafter." He has set down in His own most precious word what is to take place in time, at the judgment and in eternity. He has shown the "things that are to come hereafter" to the faith of many of us, and we do not and cannot dispute them. Faith has discerned and received them, and has acknowledged that God hath shown them unto us. III. **THE TRIUMPH.** (*J. Irons.*)

Vers. 33, 34. **He maketh my way perfect.**—*The perfect way indicated*:—A gentleman crossing the English Channel stood near the helmsman. It was a calm and pleasant evening, and no one dreamed of a possible danger to their good ship. But a sudden flapping of a sail, as if the wind had shifted, caught the ear of the officer on watch, and he sprang at once to the wheel, examining closely the compass. "You are half a point off the course," he said sharply to the man at the wheel. The deviation was corrected, and the officer returned to his post. "You must steer very accurately," said the looker-on, "when only half a point is so much thought of." "Ah! half a point in many places might bring us directly on the rocks," he said. What avails being almost right, if destruction is the end? Many, it is to be feared, have missed eternal life by "half a point." Alas, many Christians allow slight deviations from the law of Christ in their lives. He is daily with us to correct us, and we attain to the perfect way only by implicit obedience

to the word of the Captain of our Salvation. *The perfect rule for the path of life*:—"The Bible is so strict and old-fashioned," said a young man to a grey-haired friend who was advising him to study God's Word if he would learn how to live. "There are plenty of books written nowadays that are moral enough in their teaching, and don't bind me down as the Bible does." The old merchant turned to his desk and took down a couple of rulers, one of which was slightly bent. With each of these he ruled a line, and silently handed the ruled paper to his companion. "Well," said the lad, "what do you mean?" One line is straight and true, is it not? Now, my young friend, when you mark your path in life, do not use a crooked ruler!" *God made ways for our feet*:—God does not make straight even paths all alike, as in great cities now. There is infinite variety in the paths He makes, and He can make them anywhere. Think you not that He who made the spider able to drop anywhere, and to spin its own path as it goes, is not able to spin a path for you through every blank or perplexity, or depression? (C. A. Fox.) *Go straight and keep steady*:—While walking in the country with several relatives, a little girl came to a deep ditch which could only be crossed by a narrow plank. Though for a time she feared to cross, she suddenly looked round and exclaimed: "Grandpa, you go first; you are the heaviest, and I want to see how you do it." After watching her grandparent safely over the plank, the child said: "Oh, I can do that; you have only to go straight and keep steady." May we not learn that if we would go the way that God has opened, we have but to follow His Word, go straight, and keep our faith steady? Our difficulties may be overcome if we will but allow God to clear the way, instead of attempting to do so in our own strength. (*The Advertiser*.) *Our way perfected by the hand of another*:—I sometimes think of it as of a child sitting in a boat. The child does not know the coast, and it very little understands how to row. If the child were left to itself, pulling upon the oars, its right hand being a little stronger than the other, it would be all the time veering the boat to the right, and the boat would be constantly turning round and round. The child would, perhaps, make its way out of the harbour and into the ocean, and it would be carried away and lost if there were no guiding power in the boat except its own. But there in the stern sits the father. The uneven strokes of the child would carry the boat this way or that way out of its course; but the steady hand of the father overcomes those uneven strokes; and all the mistakes with the oars are rectified by the rudder, and the boat keeps the right course. So that the force exerted by the child, though misdirected, all works for good when the father guides. (H. W. Beecher.)

Vers. 35—43. He maketh my hands to war.—Faith winning victories:—Dr. Campbell Morgan told me at Northfield of an instance of the kind. A poor man came to him after a service on Round Top, where the body of Mr. Moody lies, and said, "Do you believe that when you are tempted, and say, 'Get thee behind me, Satan,' the victory is won?" Dr. Morgan, after a moment said, "No, I do not." "Then," said his interlocutor, "you stop preaching Christ and deliverance from sin: for I have a temptation. I don't want to live with it; I don't want to be defeated; I would do the best I knew if I had the power, but I have not. If I can't say, 'Get thee behind me,' and be sure of victory, what am I to do?" Dr. Morgan said, "Do you believe that Christ said it, and won?" "Yes, I believe He is the only One who could ever say it, and win." "Then you go, and in the name of Christ say, 'Get thee behind me, Satan,' when your hour of torture comes, and see which gets the victory." "The next morning," says Dr. Morgan, "as I drove up I met this man standing in the middle of the pathway in front of me. He looked at me with radiant face, standing square on his two feet, and said, 'Man, it works!'" He had found the Christ a present Deliverer as well as an abstract Saviour.

Ver. 36. Thy gentleness has made me great.—The real greatness of man:—David spake unto the Lord the words of this song on the day when he had emerged victorious from all his struggles. It is the story of a life written and set to music by the man who lived it. It is not a piping song of peace, green pastures, and still waters, like some of those tender lyrics which came from the same pen. It deals with rougher and fiercer scenes, and resounds with the clash of arms and noise of battle. It is such a song as St. Paul might have sung, and did sing, when, on the eve of martyrdom, he looked back on his ministry; such a

song as every Christian would wish to raise when life's little day is near its close, and he is waiting in the shadows for another and fairer morning. Now these are the words of every man who takes a truthful reading of the facts of life, who views his life's doings and gains in the searching light of God. The great mind always clothes itself in humility, because it takes a true estimate of self, and disdains to walk in a vain show. In spite of his sins, awful blunders, and moral falls, David stands out in huge bulk as one of the world's master minds; a far-seeing statesman, a gifted thinker and poet, a brilliant soldier, a man of charming personality and winsome attractiveness, a man of infinite patience and unwearying energy, and every inch a king. If he had been a vain man, what a loud story he would have told of his own mighty doings and conquest of difficulties; how loftily he would have carried himself among his throngs of courtiers and flatterers. If there is genius it is heaven-born, not self-wrought. If there is the weighty brain and the keen, far-reaching vision and the indomitable will, they are talents bestowed upon us unasked for, and not digged and coined by our own hands. If your stature is six feet are you to look down with supercilious disdain upon that other piece of humanity which is six inches lower, as if you yourself had manufactured the extra six inches? If you have had a brilliant career and succeeded in everything to which you have set your hands, are you to strut about as a little god, forgetting whence came all the powers and gifts of fortune which carried you to victory? A man of David's build knows better than this, because his eyes are opened. The Bible has the greatest contempt for self-important people. Think how it lashes them with the whip of scorn. Its Pharaohs in their Egyptian palaces; its Rabsakehs, with their insolent bravado, boasting as if all the world belonged to them, and as if they could defy omnipotence; its Nebuchadnezzars walking about Babylon and calling upon all men to behold the grandeur of their doings and the majesty of their wisdom; its Herods arrayed in gorgeous robes and flaunting themselves in unholy pride as if they sat on the throne of God. How the Bible scouts and scorns these marionettes that dance for a moment on the world's tawdry stage and mouth-inflated speeches as if they were hardly less than the Almighty. The saints of God were always like David in this one thing. There is not a man in the Bible story worth reading of who was not stamped with this characteristic feature. They had a hundred faults, but the sin of over-estimating their importance was never one of them. They had measured themselves, not with human tape-lives, but with God's larger rule. And this was the language in which they all wrote the story of their lives—"I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies which the Lord my God has bestowed upon me. Thou hast given me the shield of Thy salvation, and Thy gentleness hath made me great." The gentleness of God: what is it? It is almost indefinable, but something which the heart can feel and understand. The gentleness of man is the most winsome of human attributes. It is strength forgetting its strength and becoming tender as a kiss and soft as a sunbeam. You see it in the old oft-told story of Hector, the Greek warrior, doffing the helmet which frightens the child, and stooping down with smiling face and velvet touch to caress and bless the child. You see it in the soldier with iron arm and mighty heart kneeling over the feeblest wounded thing and soothing it with touches soft and tearful as a child's. You see it in the mother's face as she bends over her sick and helpless infant. You see it more than all in the picture of Christ's healing ministry when He lays His mighty hand, soothing and calming, upon the diseases and sicknesses of men. There is always something of unconscious stooping and condescension in it; something very high, and perhaps mighty, that puts off its mightiness to help and bless. That is human gentleness, and that is the gentleness of God, which makes us great. Infinitely more than all this to you is the fact that God is lowly enough to think of you, to care for you, to follow you with watchful eyes, to take any trouble with you at all. If we possessed the whole world, if we had each the genius of a Shakespeare or Milton or David, it would not give us as much right to exalt ourselves as the simple fact that we can pray to God, that it is not a waste of words, a flinging out of something into the dark, a piece of self-deceiving, but that prayer is a reality, the real talk of a real man with a real Almighty God. Think of it! It almost transcends thought. The wonder of it is unspeakable. And our greatness, if we have any, is in the fact that He thinks us worth caring for, worth teaching and training and leading on to all goodness that we may dwell with Him and enjoy Him for ever. (*J. G. Greenhough, M.A.*) *Life's most honourable distinction*:—The writer is reviewing the experiences of an eventful career, and

uttering his thankfulness in song as he traces the work of God's hand in all the tumultuous and trying scenes that went before the day of kingly rest. He teaches us what should be: 1. **THE PEACEFUL REFLECTION REWARDING EVERY EARNEST LIFE.** "Thy gentleness hath multiplied me." The words are not spoken in the midst of strife, yet with the vivid recollection of many toils and sorrows attending on the career of one who spared not himself in seeking to gain an object which he considered to be of God. He had been in earnest, not afraid to sacrifice considerations of momentary ease for future and wider good; not erecting the boundary wall of personal advantage so high as to darken the heaven-born interests of the people. In commending sacrifice he had known how to be a sacrifice. The man after God's own heart had given himself for the attainment of what he knew to be dear to God's heart, and the reward came to him, as all real and spiritual rewards do come to faithful man, in the form of his own reflections upon what he had been or had tried to be. Happy are they who, on looking down the avenue of an eventful life, can trace all strength to resist and to achieve, all wisdom to choose and to avoid, all victory and honour, all wealth and distinction and blessing, to their proper source, and say, "Thy gentleness hath made me great." II. **A CORRECT EXPLANATION OF LIFE'S BEST SUCCESS.** When common battles are won, and ordinary mountain paths climbed, and men are seen standing high above their fellows who are still contending with difficulty and toiling hard to carry burdens, the question is asked, "What made them great?" And to such a question the world about us is generally ready with its answer. "Fortune made this man great. It was a mere accident, a stroke of chance over which he had no control." Or, "It was natural perseverance. He had no temporal advantage or native brilliance, but he was nature's tortoise, who kept right on and won the race." The secret of another's distinction is given as "Self-reliance. With almost unlimited belief in himself, he contrived by force of will to make others accept him at his own valuation. He made himself great." Another "was born to greatness. Inherited wealth and courtly favour caused his earliest footprints to be made on flowers, and all the world seems to have conspired to lift him upward into radiance and honour. He is great because he could not possibly be otherwise." Either one of these sayings may account for something which is seen in the lives of men, but the further question arises, "Is it greatness that is here explained? Do these by virtue of any position thus achieved or held, really possess greatness?" It is very possible for those who live in the eastern counties to think they reside amongst hills, until they go to Cumberland or Wales, and for these to boast of mountains until they have seen Switzerland or Northern India. Is there not an ennobling of the whole idea of greatness in human life which is possible to us after the manner of such experience? May not the popular conception be dwarfed by admitting a Divine thought just as sandhills become insignificant and poor to him who looks on Alps and Himalayahs? The Christian's hope for the world is in the adoption of a corrected estimate. He sees that fortune, perseverance, self-reliance, wealth, and favour, good and right, as each one in its place must be, give, when they are alone, only sandhills, and that towering far above them all there is a snow-capped mountain life, spiritually more noble, and eternally beautiful, in love to God, and reliance on his gentle favour. III. **THE LOFTIEST PRINCIPLE ON WHICH TO BUILD OUR LIFE.** When David's throne was established in the hearts of a united and loyal people, he began to seek a worthy place for God's tabernacle. His heart was set on the noble height of Zion, and he obtained it. How much of life's sorrow and humiliation might remain untasted, if we were as careful in choosing a foundation on which to build our character and life! Of all the claims asserted in our hearts, one stands supreme. It is the need of our nature to lay the beginnings of its strength on the rock of Divine security. Human life needs that God should give it a resting-place. IV. **THE OLD GOSPEL OF THE CHURCH.** It is old. It is older than Israel's march through the wilderness, or Abraham's declaration of faith, or Noah's gentle preaching of a righteous life; it dates from before the mission of the angel who guarded the tree of life. The "old, old story" is the compassion of Jehovah, the gentleness of the Eternal. It is the old Gospel. And yet how delightfully, sadly, strangely new! How vast the field of human life where "there is no speech or language" setting it forth convincingly! God apparently speaking an unknown tongue, and man untouched by the sweetest music that ever tried to charm and elevate his life! (W. H. Jackson.) *The work of gentleness*:—These words look back to the pasture lands of Bethlehem; to the fights with the bear and the lion; to the valley

of Elah, where he met Goliath; to the palace of Saul, where his friendship with Jonathan grew, and to the caves and fastnesses where he hid from Saul, and to Ziklag and Hebron. They look back over all his troubles, and upon all the deliverances which the Lord wrought out for him, and over all the way by which the Lord had brought him. They gather up into their brief utterance all the song of the great King David, when he recounted his greatness, and reveal at once the secret of his greatness and the heart of his song. The "gentleness" of God: that was the secret of his greatness. "Thy gentleness hath made me great": that was the heart of his song. David was well acquainted with God. He knew Him as few human souls have done. He knew Him out to the length and breadth of what the human soul can grasp of God. He knew Him as the Judge who doeth terrible things in righteousness. He knew Him as the Creator, by whose might the heavens were built, and the everlasting mountains rooted to the earth. In this very psalm he refers to powers and manifestations of God which make man tremble: "There went up a smoke out of his nostrils and fire out of his mouth devoured. He thundered. He sent out arrows and lightnings. The channels of the sea appeared. The foundations of the world were discovered at the rebuke of the Lord." David knew all that. He had seen all that. But when he comes to consider his own life, and all the way he had been led, it is to the gentleness of God he turns. His gentleness, not his strength; his gentleness, not his terrors, had made him what he was. I. THE GENTLENESS OF GOD! It is the secret spring of all the worth to which the great ones of God's kingdom have ever reached. It nourished the life of Abraham in all his wanderings, and was in his thoughts when he told how the God of heaven took him from his father's house, and promised the land in which he was a stranger, to his seed. It sustained Moses in his mighty enterprise, and was in his teaching when he told the Israelites that "God was the Rock of their salvation," and when he recited in their hearing the beneficent wonders which had been wrought for their deliverance. And, long centuries after, it is to the same rich spring the peerless life of the Apostle Paul is traced: "I am what I am by the grace of God." Great Paul! Great David! Great lawgiver of Israel! Great father of the faithful! Great as men, great as ministers of God; great in thought and word and deed! But, lo! they cast their crowns at the feet of God. The summing up of the life of each is this: "Thy gentleness hath made me great." In our studies of saintly life we are apt to think that we have come on the secrets of spiritual greatness when we find faith, or prayer, or zeal for God, or deep acquaintance with His Word, or lips eloquent in His Gospel, or self-denial, or love. But these very qualities are results. Above them and underneath them all are the dews and fountain springs of the gentleness of God. Consider also the greatness of the men whose names are associated with the mighty developments of thought and life in the Church—men like Augustine, Bernard, Huss, and Luther; in our own country, like Anselm, Wiclif, Knox, and Wesley—and the thousand thousands, whose names were never named on earth for greatness, who yet were as great in God's sight as these. What faith in God, what love for souls, what perseverance in tasks for which there was no praise on earth, what unquailing courage, what hoping against hope, as fellow-workers sank exhausted at their side; and, greater than all, what lowliness and meekness of heart! What was the secret of such manifold greatness? Not one would say: "My genius, or my learning, or my eloquence, or my creed." But one and all, with an irrepressible throb of gratitude, would exclaim, "Worthy is the Lamb!" And for souls truly great, whether as workers on earth, or worshippers in heaven, this is and must be the everlasting song. For it is this gentleness of God, this mercy He shows to men, this generosity, pity, forbearance, and love of the Divine heart, which is the source of all the excellence, worth calling great, to which human beings have ever reached. It is, indeed, the very beginning and possibility of spiritual life itself. Not one of all that multitude could have risen into the Divine presence, or attained the position of a worshipper, if God had marked iniquity against him. He had to bear with them, pardon them, again pardon them, thousands of times pardon each one of them. He had to fence them in by ordinances, laws, and spiritual helps. But do I require to appeal to the histories of the redeemed in heaven, or to the lives of saintly thinkers and workers in former centuries, to illustrate this fact? II. I SHALL APPEAL TO THE EXPERIENCE AND TESTIMONY OF CHRIST'S PEOPLE. To be what you are—Christian men and women—is the greatest attainment of human life. Except Christ's own, there is no greatness to be

named by its side. And in a sense it is Christ's greatness. Can you reveal the mystery of your possession of it? What force separated you from the world and the life of the world, and drew you to the side of Christ, and filled you with that life in Him in which you are rejoicing now? The very instincts of Christian life within you make you impatient to say: "Not unto us, O Lord: to Thee be all the glory: in Thee are the springs of our life: it is Thy gentleness which has made us great." Can you ever forget that hour when the fact first flashed in upon your spirit that you were a lost soul? You recollect the horror of great darkness which fell upon you then. But you also remember the vision of gentleness in the cross, and how, little by little, it was borne in upon your spirit that there was forgiveness with God, forgiveness even for you. Speak next, you who have been smitten by great affliction. What is your testimony respecting the mystery of Christian life? No one knows better than you how near despair the human heart can be driven by sorrow; nor how unbelief, black and terrible, can come on the wings of a great despair. You have felt the cold touch of that despair. Who shall describe the black thoughts, or the rebellious impulses of despair like that? Shadows of spiritual death, ghastly fancies from the pit, rising, swelling, spreading over the whole life and darkening and eating it up, as clouds of locusts darken and eat up the joy of harvest! You felt all that: you gave way to all that. And yet—here is the gentleness of God to you—you are still on God's side; you are still believers in his love. The evil thoughts were not permitted to triumph over you: the black despair was not allowed to suck out your life. A healing hand was laid on your wounds. Your very sorrows have made you cleave more closely to his love. By the very things you have suffered you have climbed higher into his kingdom, and from the height to which his mercy has raised you, your daily song is, "O Thou Helper of the helpless: Thy gentleness hath made us great." III. OF THIS GENTLENESS WHICH MAKETH GREAT, CHRIST IS THE MANIFESTATION TO US. He is that very gentleness itself. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." He is a God so gentle that He would not leave the sin-filled world to perish. Out of His gentleness He gave us Christ. What men first saw in Him was "the Lamb of God, Who taketh away the sin of the world." The very symbol by which He was revealed is one which at once expresses His gentleness, and the depths into which that gentleness led Him for our sakes. The work Christ came to accomplish was the bestowal of gentleness on a world, which had lost the very elements of it. He came to put away a life of pride and unbelief and hatred from the human heart, and put his own life of humility, faith, and love in its place. Christ's coming into the world, therefore, was the advent of gentleness. It was heaven stooping to the earth to heal the wounds which sin had made. It was the great God taking up His home among the creatures who had rebelled against Him, that He might raise them and bring them back to His love. It is this quality of gentleness which makes Christ's earthly life so beautiful. The death of Christ is the most touching exhibition of gentleness the world has ever known. The light which shines from the cross is the gentleness of God. One of the gentlest deeds recorded in the Old Testament is David's dirge over the dead Saul. He folded in beautiful words the memory of the man who sought his death, and taught the people to remember him as "the beauty of Israel." But the gentleness of Jesus sounded a profounder deep. In the yearning pity of His heart He wrapped His living enemies in His prayers, and carried them up and laid them on the breast of mercy: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." A poor prodigal once went out into the glooms of evil and made himself base with the base, and vile with the vile, and hateful, and irreverent, and cruel. And all the world turned from him, and put his name away from their lips. All but one. She still clung to his name, she still interested herself in his life. She followed him into the darkness. She went in and down into the deepest, thickest, foulest darkness, and owned him there, and laid her hands on him, and her lips to his lips, and her heart to his heart, that she might lead him back. Oh, the gentleness of a mother! But the gentleness of Jesus transcends even that of a mother. The prodigal He came to save would have none of His love. His sins were an insult to Him: his merciless speeches stabbed Him: he filled the air with the cruel demand to "Crucify Him." It lay in the work Christ came to fulfil, that it could only be finished in the shadow of death. Into that shadow, therefore, He passed. Through the insults, through the hatred, through the shame and the agony, through the very jaws of hell, into the fires of a most painful death. He passed;—and there, with the gentleness of a

Divine mother, laid His hand on the hand, His heart on the heart, of the very race which crucified Him, that He might overcome their enmity and bring them back to God. IV. AND THIS IS STILL THE GREATNESS OF CHRIST AS A SAVIOUR, AND HIS POWER OVER THE HEARTS OF MEN. He is strong to save because He is long-suffering and merciful and generous. We are surprised when we read, "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us;" but it is the same wonder of mercy, the same manifestation of gentleness, that He still lives to save His enemies. Christ is still the same in His gentleness. On the throne as on the cross, He is the gentleness of God towards men. His reign is the reign of gentleness. His intercession within the veil is the appeal of gentleness. It is because He is the gentle Jesus that He intercedes with God for man and with man for God. Exalted though Christ now is, His works as a Saviour are still the same in their gentleness as when He ministered on earth. Still, by the ministries of His Word and Spirit, and by the hands and lives of His people, He works those works of healing and mercy which made his life on earth sublime. I saw a picture once which went to my very heart. It was the interior of a humble cottage on a lonely wild. A poor old man, a travelling pedlar, worn with exhaustion, ghastly pale and cold, is seated in the centre. You can see that he has had the very narrowest escape from death. The father of the house, casting anxious glances towards the stranger, is pouring out some cordial to revive him; the mother is bringing warm wraps, and doing it with the prompt energy of one who knows that life may depend on the haste she makes. It is only a moment since the poor man entered. The door is not yet closed. The children are peering out awe-struck into the night. The snow-flakes, falling through the light, reveal and measure back the terrible gloom outside. A wild night is upon the earth; a night of blackness and blinding snow! And this old man had been caught in the storm, and had to fight with death in the darkness, and, at the very eleventh hour of the conflict, exhausted and utterly worn, had sunk against the door of this hospitable home. "He was a stranger, and they took him in." It was the picture of a gentle deed. But the gentleness of Jesus, in saving the souls of men, no human picture could portray. He goes out into the darkness, out into the snows and wastes and storms of sin, to seek the wanderers and the lost, to lift them in his arms and bring them in. It is this gentleness which has been laid on the heart of the Church in the command. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." What are all the ministries of mercy in Christian life, but the outflow of this gentleness? The gentle Saviour still lives, and in His gentleness is the very life and mercy of God to men. He is near to each of us. O hearts of men and women, Christ is the Saviour for you! Open wide your doors, and let the King of Glory in. He is the gentlest, lovingest, helpfulest Friend we can have. He will not break the bruised reed; He will not quench the smoking flax! (A. Macleod, D.D.) *The gentleness of God*:—Life holds no motive for stimulating gentleness in man like the thought of the gentleness of God. Unfortunately, it seems difficult for man to associate delicacy and gentleness with vastness and strength. It was the misfortune of Greek philosophers, and is, indeed, that of nearly all the modern theologians, to suppose that a perfect being cannot suffer. Both schools of thought conceive of God as sitting upon a marble throne, eternally young, eternally beautiful, beholding with quiet indifference from afar how man, with infinite blunderings, sufferings, and tears, makes his way forward. Yet He who holds the sun in the hollow of His hand, who takes up the isles as a very little thing, who counts the nations but as the dust in the balance, is also the gentle One. Like the wide, deep ocean, that pulsates into every bay and creek, and blesses the distant isles with its dew and rain, so God's heart throbs and pulsates into the uttermost parts of the universe, having a parent's sympathy for His children who suffer. Indeed, the seer ranges through all nature, searching out images for interpreting His all-comprehending gentleness. "Even the bruised reed He will not break." Lifting itself high in the air, a mere lead-pencil for size, weighted with a heavy top, a very little injury shatters a reed. Some rude beast, in wild pursuit of prey, plunges through the swamp, shatters the reed, leaves it lying upon the ground, all bruised and bleeding, and ready to die. Such is God's gentleness that, though man make himself as worthless as a bruised reed, though by his ignorance, frailty, and sin he expel all the manhood from his heart and life, and make himself of no more value than one of the myriad reeds in the world's swamps, still doth God say, "My gentleness is such that I will direct upon this wounded life thoughts that shall recuperate and heal, until at last the

bruised reed shall rise up in strength, and judgment shall issue in victory." (N. D. Hillis.) *The need for gentleness*:—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 breath, 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. *God's gentleness restraining*:—A lady visiting Germany was surprised to find in the midst of a city a lovely little garden of flowers, quite unprotected, at the base of a huge equestrian statue. Remarking that here in England such an experiment would be very tempting to the children, the startling answer was given, "Why, the reason the flowers were planted was to save the statue from the children's destructive attentions. They were constantly mounting the back of the horse, and occasionally falling off from it; but since the flowers have been here there has been no more trouble. Such is the German child's love for flowers, and fear to hurt anything living, that they form a perfectly sure protection to anything round which they are planted." When our hearts are right with God, it is His very gentleness and love that saves us from sin and folly; the thought that He might be grieved is an effectual barrier against offences. Thus His gentleness makes us jealously careful, as well as great. (H. O. Mackey.)

Ver. 45. **As soon as they hear they shall be obedient unto me.**—*The magnetism of a great personality*:—William Wetmore Story tells an interesting tale of James Russell Lowell and himself. It was when they were young men, and they were very angry with Daniel Webster for staying in Tyler's cabinet, and, as he was to speak in Faneuil Hall one evening, they determined to go in from the Harvard Law School and hoot at him, and show him that he had incurred their displeasure. The house was packed with people, and the young men felt sure that the crowd would hoot with them, young as they were. But they reckoned without their host. Mr. Story says: "Mr. Webster, beautifully dressed, stepped forward. His great eyes looked, as I shall always think, straight at me. I pulled off my hat; James pulled off his. We both became as cold as ice, and as respectful as Indian coolies. I saw James turn pale; he said I was livid. And when the great orator began that most beautiful exordium, our scorn turned to deepest admiration, from abject contempt to belief and approbation."

Ver. 47. **The Lord liveth.**—*A live Christ*:—One day the late Dr. Dale, of Birmingham, was writing a sermon, and when half-way through, the thought of the living and risen Lord broke in upon him as it had never done before. "Christ is alive!" I said to myself. "Alive!" and then I paused. "Alive!" And then I paused again. "Alive! Can that really be true? Living as really as I myself am? I got up and walked about, repeating, "Christ is living! Christ is living!" At first it seemed strange and hardly true, but at last it came upon me as a burst of sudden glory. It was to me a new discovery. I thought all along I had believed it, but not until that morning did I feel sure about it. For months afterwards the one great theme of his preaching was the living Christ.

Ver. 48. **The people under me.**—*Majesty of the people*:—The word people has, by the French, been long applied to the lowest order only; it was considered by many members of the first National Assembly as lowering the Deputies to denominate them "Représentans du Peuple Français." Mirabeau, in one of his discourses, made the following energetic observation:—"I give no weight to the signification of words, according to the absurd language of prejudice. I here speak the language of liberty, and am supported by the example of the English and of the Americans, who have always respected the name of the "People," and have always adopted it in their declarations, in their laws, and in their politics. When Chatham compressed the charter of nations in a single expression, and pronounced the "Majesty of the People"; when the Americans opposed the natural rights of the "People," to all the trash published against them; they showed that they understood the true signification and full energy of an expression, to which freedom gives so great a value." (Christian Weekly.)

Vers. 49, 50. **And that bringeth me forth from mine enemies.**—*Passing through an opposing medium*:—Those meteoric stones, which sometimes fall to the earth, but which much more frequently, at certain seasons of the year, are

seen shooting across the midnight sky, may also be fragments of the aforesaid world which has perished. These blocks of meteoric matter are flying through space, and when they get within the range of our atmosphere, there is an opposing medium, they have to drive through it at an enormous rapidity, and so they become burning hot, and thus they become visible. And, in like manner, I believe that there are plenty of good men in the world who are invisible till they get to be opposed, and being opposed, and having the love of God driving them on with tremendous momentum, they become red-hot with holy fervour, they overcome all opposition, and then they become visible to the eye of mankind. For my part, I rather like to pass through an opposing medium. I think that we all want to travel in that kind of atmosphere just to give us the sacred friction that will fully develop the powers with which we have been entrusted. If God has given us force, it is not at all a bad thing for us to be put where there is opposition, because we shall not be stopped by it, but shall by that very process be made to shine all the brighter as lights in the world. (*The Sciences as Sources of Illustration.*)

CHAPTER XXIII.

Vers. 1—5. **Now these be the last words of David.**—*The "last words" of David:*—According to a commonly received interpretation of this passage, David mourned over the ungodly state of his children, but exulted in the assurance of his own personal salvation. He first repeated the description he had received from the Lord of the character which kings and rulers should maintain, and it is supposed that he next lamented the fact that his children did not answer to the Divine ideal. It is further supposed that his sorrow on account of their shortcomings instantly gave place to grateful joy in the hope that, through the mercy and faithfulness of God, he himself should be secure and blessed for ever. It might go ill with his children, but it would be well with him. His family troubles were great and many. Some of his children were anything but what his conscience could approve and his heart could desire. They were thorns in his side and arrows in his heart. Still, is it not incredible that David, as he contemplated the lost condition of his children, could instantly get comfort by thinking of his own safety? He was sometimes sadly unlike his true self, but assuredly he was never so unlike himself as to say in effect, "My children may perish, but, the Lord be praised, I shall get to heaven myself!" This must be deemed impossible to David, even by those who take the worst view of his conduct in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. There is another interpretation of the passage which makes it chiefly and almost exclusively a prophecy of Christ. It is supposed to regard Him as the King ordained of God, and to describe the perfection of His kingly character, the righteousness of His rule, the benignity of His sway over those who submit to it, and the destructive effects of His sovereignty upon those who are rebellious and disobedient. Those who adopt this interpretation make certain changes in the translation of the passage which remove from it everything like lamentation on David's part. There is a third interpretation according to which David here sets forth the Divine ideal of a ruler over men as he in early life received it from the Spirit of the Lord. Now that he has reached the close of his kingly career, he compares that career with the description of a good king which God had given to him, and he finds that he has fallen far short of it. When he speaks of his "house" not being "so with God," he does not mean his domestic circle, but the reigning dynasty, and he refers, not to the godless character of his children, but to the imperfections of his own kingship. That had not been altogether such as God had enjoined, and as he himself had desired and determined. When he speaks of the "covenant ordered in all things," he exults, not in the thought that he is personally safe despite the irreligion of his children, but in the assurance that he shall be saved despite his shortcomings and failures as a king. 1. These "last words" reveal to us the lofty standard of kingly character which was set before David in early life. Righteousness towards men and reverence towards God are named as the two great essentials in a good king. For lack of these, monarchs have been curses instead of blessings, and peoples have been oppressed, and kingdoms have been ruined. But where the authority of God has

been recognised, and the rights of the people have been respected, nations have flourished, and kings have been a terror to evil-doers, and a praise to them that do well. Stress is laid upon justice rather than upon compassion, and history warrants the emphasis. The benignant influence of a God-fearing and righteous ruler is described in expressive figurative language. Gladness and growth shall characterise his reign, for "he shall be as the light of the morning," etc. Several years elapsed before the throne promised to David came into his possession; and it is probable that this vivid picture of kingly perfection was also placed before him some time prior to his accession. These last words reveal to us the sad consciousness which David had in his old age, that the lofty standard set before him in early life had not been reached. His kingship was anything but a great failure. It cannot be questioned that David's reign was a great blessing to the Jews, and that in the review of his career there was much to inspire him with joy and thankfulness. Earthly perfection is one of the pleasant dreams of inexperience. It is generally the honest determination of young beginners to do very great things, and they firmly believe that all their lofty aspirations will be fully realised. This is one of the illusions of life by which every new generation is fascinated despite all the disappointments of preceding generations. Each fresh comer into the field is blissfully forgetful of human frailties and heroically defiant of difficulties, and nothing but his own personal experience will be able to shake his faith in the splendour of his future achievements. There never lived but One in this world whose review of His earthly life was free from all the sadness which sight of fault and failure brings. When Jesus hung upon the cross, He could think of such a work as had never been devolved upon man or angel, and of that matchless work He could say, "It is finished!" (*C. Vince.*) *The last words of David*:—The song falls into four parts. 1. In the introduction, we cannot but be struck with the formality and solemnity of the affirmation respecting the singer and the inspiration under which he sang. The first four clauses represent David as the speaker; the second four represent God's Spirit as inspiring his words. The introduction to Balaam's prophecies is the only passage where we find a similar structure, nor is this the only point of resemblance between the two songs. In both prophecies, the word translated "saith" is peculiar. While occurring between two and three hundred times in the formula, "Thus saith the Lord," it is used by a human speaker only in these two places and in Prov. xxx. 1. The second part of the introduction stamps the prophecy with a fourfold mark of inspiration. 1. "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me." 2. "His word was in my tongue." 3. "The God of Israel said." 4. "The Rock of Israel spake to me." So remarkable an introduction must be followed by no ordinary prophecy. 2. We come, then, to the great subject of the prophecy—a Ruler over men. It is a vision of a remarkable Ruler, not a Ruler over the kingdom of Israel merely, but a Ruler "over men." The Ruler seen is One whose government knows no earthly limits, but prevails wherever there are men. It is worthy of very special remark that the first characteristic of this Ruler is "righteousness." There is no grander or more majestic word in the language of men. Not even love or mercy can be preferred to righteousness. And this is no casual expression, happening in David's vision, for it is common to the whole class of prophecies that predict the Messiah. It is the grand characteristic of Christ's salvation in theory that it is through righteousness; it is not less its effect in practice to promote righteousness. To any who would dream, under colour of free grace, of breaking down the law of righteousness, the words of "the Holy One and the Just" stand out as an eternal rebuke, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." And as Christ's work was founded on righteousness, so it was constantly done "in the fear of God"—with the highest possible regard for His will, and reverence for His law. Having shown the character of the Ruler, the vision next pictures the effects of His rule. No imagery could be more delightful, or more fitly applied to Christ. The image of the morning sun presents Christ in His gladdening influences, bringing pardon to the guilty, health to the diseased, hope to the despairing. The chief idea under the other emblem, the grass shining clearly after rain, is that of renewed beauty and growth. The heavy rain batters the grass, as heavy trials batter the soul; but when the morning shines out clearly, the grass recovers, it sparkles with a fresher lustre, and grows with intenser activity. So when Christ shines on the heart after trial, a new beauty and a new growth and prosperity come to it. 3. Next comes David's allusion to his own house. In our translation, and in the

text of the Revised Version, this comes in to indicate a sad contrast between the bright vision just described and the Psalmist's own family. The key to the passage will be found, if we mistake not, in the expression "my house." We are liable to think of this as the domestic circle, whereas it ought to be thought of as the reigning dynasty. What is denoted by the house of Hapsburg, the house of Hanover, the house of Savoy, is quite different from the personal family of any of the kings. So when David speaks of his house, he means his dynasty. In this sense his "house" had been made the subject of the most gracious promise. But take the marginal reading—"Is not my house so with God?" Is not my dynasty embraced in the scope of this promise? Hath He not made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure? And will He not make this promise, which is all my salvation and all my desire, to grow, to fructify? It is infinitely more natural to represent David on this joyous occasion congratulating himself on the promise of long continuance and prosperity made to his dynasty, than dwelling on the unhappy condition of the members of his family circle. And the facts of the future correspond to this explanation. Was not the government of David's house or dynasty in the main righteous, at least for many a reign, conducted in the fear of God, and followed by great prosperity and blessing? David himself, Solomon, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah—what other nation had ever so many Christlike kings? 4. The last part of the prophecy, in the way of contrast to the leading vision, is a prediction of the doom of the ungodly. While some would fain think of Christ's sceptre as one of mercy only, the uniform representation of the Bible is different. In this, as in most predictions of Christ's kingly office, there is an instructive combination of mercy and judgment. Nor could it be otherwise. The union of mercy and judgment is the inevitable result of the righteousness which is the foundation of His government. Sin is the abominable thing which He hates. To separate men from sin is the grand purpose of His government. Oh, let us not be satisfied with admiring beautiful images of Christ! Let us not deem it enough to think with pleasure of Him as the light of the morning, a morning without clouds, brightening the earth, and making it sparkle with the lustre of the sunshine on the grass after rain! (W. G. Blaikie, D.D.) *The dying king's last vision and psalm*:—It was fitting that "the last words of David" should be a prophecy of the true King, whom his own failures and sins, no less than his consecration and victories, had taught him to expect. The dying eyes see on the horizon of the far-off future the form of Him who is to be a just and perfect ruler, before the brightness of whose presence and the refreshing of whose influence verdure and beauty shall clothe the world. As the shades gather round the dying monarch, the radiant glory to come brightens. He departs in peace, having seen the salvation from afar, and stretched out longing hands of greeting toward it. Then his harp is silent, as if the rapture which thrilled the trembling strings had snapped them. 1. We have first a prelude extending to the middle of verse 3. In it there is first a fourfold designation of the personality of the Psalmist-prophet, and then a fourfold designation of the Divine oracle spoken through him. Similarly, the fourfold designation of the Divine source has the same purpose, and corresponds with the four clauses of verse 1, "The spirit of the Lord spake in (or, 'into') me." That gives the Psalmist's consciousness that in his prophecy he was but the recipient of a message. It wonderfully describes the penetrating power of that inward voice which clearly came to him from without, and as clearly spoke to him within. Words could not more plainly declare the prophetic consciousness of the distinction between himself and the Voice which he heard in the depths of his spirit. It spoke in him before he spoke of his lyric prophecy. 2. The Divine oracle thus solemnly introduced and guaranteed must be worthy of such a prelude. Abruptly, and in clauses without verbs, the picture of the righteous Ruler is divinely flashed before the Seer's inward eye. The broken construction may perhaps indicate that he is describing what he beholds in vision. There is no need for any supplement such as "There shall be," which, however true in meaning, mars the vividness of the presentation of the Ruler to the prophet's sight. David sees him painted on the else blank wall of the future. When and where the realisation may be he knows not. What are the majestic outlines? A universal sovereign over collective humanity, righteous and God-fearing. In the same manner as he described the vision of the King, David goes on, as a man on some height telling what he saw to the people below, and paints the blessed issues of the King's coming. It had been night before he came—the night of ignorance, sorrow, and sin—but his com-

ing is like one of these glorious Eastern sunrises without a cloud, when everything laughs in its early beams, and, with tropical swiftness, the tender herbage bursts from the ground, as born from the dazzling brightness and the fertilising rain. So all things shall rejoice in the reign of the King, and humanity be productive, under his glad and quickening influences, of growths of beauty and fruitfulness impossible to it without these. 3. The difficult verse 5, whether its first and last clauses be taken interrogatively or negatively, in its central part, bases the assurance of the coming of the king on God's covenant (2 Sam. 7), which is glorified as being everlasting, provided with all requisites for its realisation, and therefore "sure," or perhaps "preserved," as if guarded by God's inviolable sanctity and faithfulness. The fulfilment of the dying saint's hopes depends on God's truth. Whatever sense might say, or doubt whisper, he silences them by gazing on that great Word. So we have all to do. 4. But the oracle cannot end with painting only blessings as flowing from the king's reign. If he is to rule in righteousness and the fear of the Lord, then he must fight against evil. If his coming causes the tender grass to spring, it will quicken ugly growths too. The former representation is only half the truth; and the threatening of destruction for the evil is as much a part of the Divine oracle as the other. Strictly, it is "wickedness"—the abstract quality rather than the concrete persons who embody it—which is spoken of. May we recall the old distinction that God loves the sinner while He hates the sin? The picture is vivid. The wicked—and all the enemies of this king are wicked, in the prophet's view—are like some of these thorn-brakes, that cannot be laid hold of, even to root them out, but need to be attacked with sharp pruning-hooks on long shafts, or burned where they grow. There is a destructive side to the coming of the king, shadowed in every prophecy of him, and brought emphatically to prominence in his own descriptions of his reign and its final issues. It is a poor kindness to suppress that side of the truth. Thorns as well as tender grass spring up in the quickening beams; and the best commentary on the solemn words which close David's closing song is the saying of the King Himself: "In the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, 'Gather up first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them.'" (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *David's last words*:—

I. GOD'S WORDS BY DAVID. 1. David's words as king, "David, the man who was raised on high, saith" (ver. 1.) 2. David's words as Psalmist, "David saith, the sweet psalmist of Israel" (ver. 1.) 3. David's words from God, "The spirit of the Lord spake by me" (ver. 2.) 1. "These be the last words of David." (1) David's many words; (2) David's precious words; (3) David's last words. 2. "The man whom God raised on high." (1) The lowly origin; (2) The Divine uplift; (3) The exalted end. 3. "The spirit of the Lord spake by me." (1) David the voice; (2) God the speaker. (1) The source of revelation; (2) The mediums of revelation. II. GOD'S WORDS CONCERNING RULERS. 1. What good rulers must be: "One that ruleth righteously, in the fear of God" (ver. 3.) 2. What good rulers are like: "He shall be as the light of the morning" (ver. 4.) 3. How God treats good rulers: "He hath made with me an everlasting covenant" (ver. 5.) 1. "He shall be as the light of the morning." (1) He illuminates; (2) He invigorates; (3) He comforts. 2. "He hath made with me an everlasting covenant." (1) The source of the covenant; (2) The recipient of the covenant; (3) The scope of the covenant; (4) The duration of the covenant. 3. "It is all my salvation, and all my desire." God's covenant (1) As a source of blessing; (2) As an object of desire. III. GOD'S WORDS CONCERNING ENEMIES. 1. Equipped for evil: "The ungodly shall be all of them as thorns" (ver. 6.) 2. Overcome by power: "The man that touched them must be armed with iron" (ver. 7.) 3. Doomed to destruction: "They shall be utterly burned with fire" (ver. 7.) 1. "The ungodly shall be all of them as thorns to be thrust away." The ungodly (1) Intrinsically harmful; (2) Universally doomed. (1) Full of virulence; (2) Appointed to destruction. 2. "Armed with iron and the staff of a spear." (1) Man's equipment for extirpating thorns; (2) God's equipment for extirpating rebels. 3. "They shall be utterly burned with fire in their place." The end of the wicked: (1) Its terribleness; (2) Its completeness. (*Sunday School Times.*) *Broken ideals*:—The history does not inform us at what period of David's chequered life "the God of Israel—the Rock of Israel," spake thus to him. We may not be presumptuous, however, in fixing on what in our judgment would appear to have been the most likely time. Voices of highest inspiration, visions of loftiest things, come, as a rule, to men in early life. By an irresistible sense of the fitness of the figure, we speak of the youth as the "Morning of life," when all within and without is at

its brightest and its best, and heaven and earth smile with the promise of the coming day. It would seem but natural, then, that we should place this vision of the ideal man—the ideal ruler—at least in some period of David's earlier life. There are two or three purposes which ideals and visions serve, and though they are the mere commonplaces of all serious thinking, I may be permitted briefly to state them. I. IDEALS AND VISIONS ARE OUR ONLY POSSIBLE MEANS OF ENLARGEMENT AND ENRICHMENT. For the chances of true greatness everywhere never lie so much in what a man is as in what he sees, in perhaps rare moments, he may become. This is clear and obvious enough to all our minds; but in days when men are asking whether ideals do not stand in our way, it will bear enforcement. An ideal is the soul, the only soul, and the only soul in every conceivable direction of sustained effort and assured progress. Our Saviour knew this full well when He pitched the tune of our Christian lives in the highest key of all, and bade us "be perfect, as our Father who is in heaven is perfect." And the high ground which He took, all experience approves. A vision of our personal possibilities may be extravagant—it may even be misleading; but find a man who has ceased to see such visions, who has ceased to be allured by them, who has ceased to follow them, and you find a man who is growing from small to less, from mediocrity to insignificance. II. WE SHOULD FEEL THINGS AS WELL AS KNOW THEM. There is no chance of continuous and successful effort, apart from a strict fidelity to what, in our best moments, "the God of Israel—the Rock of Israel," has said to us, or has set before us. Moral precepts will help us on a long way, but they cannot kindle an abiding endeavour. Abstract injunctions and commands will help us on a long way, but I doubt if they ever yet carried a single struggling soul within sight of a very high goal. III. GOD SENDS US OUR IDEALS—our religious ideals—to break the binding and blinding spell of religious custom. What stagnation, what paralysis sometimes comes over us! Then, happy is the man whom the memories of former days, of former visions, of former vows, disturb at such a time; who accepts, as from God, the reproachful looks of former ideals; who goes back in thought to the times of his youthful consecration, and who determines that henceforth Christ and not custom shall be his King. And when memory travels back to life as it shaped itself to our young imagination, and then reflect on the way and manner in which it has all turned out, it requires something like an effort to talk about ideals. And yet consider—1. Most of the deepest things in life we can only learn from conscious, perhaps repeated failure. In a fine lecture on Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the late Principal Shairp has the following: "Through the wounds made in his own spirit, through the brokenness of a heart humbled and made contrite by the experience of his own sin, he entered into the faith which gave rest, the peace which settles where the intellect is meek." Now wounds and failures, and even sin, remembered ideals that seem sometimes only to reproach us, sometimes almost to mock us, these things have a good account to give of themselves, if they accomplish for us anything like that. 2. Patiently, too, do we come to look upon our brother's failures. Sons of consolation indeed do we become when we learn to look through the open windows of our own. The Voice of voices to this generation exclaims, "Oh! my brother, my brother, why cannot I fold thee to my breast?" That brother cannot be folded to this breast in any very effective way till I have come to know much more what is inside than I could know when "the God of Israel—the Rock of Israel," first spake to me. 3. Lastly, there are many great sights in this world. There are many great and noble things done under the sun. Heroes and heroines are only scarce to those who, often enough for good reason, cannot see them. (*J. Thew.*) *David's swan song*:—And now comes the last "Lay of the Minstrel," with its flashes of heavenly fire—the true "Swan song." If we treasure with peculiar fondness the closing sayings of great men, with what devout interest may we not listen to the concluding strains of the Laureate of the universal church—the last cadences of that harp of a thousand strings! The grandeur of earthly empire is fast waning. He has heaven in view. But he would give to his people—to the world—this dying "Confession of faith" farewell ode of victory. The whole poetry of his nature seems summoned up for the expiring effort. (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) *Last words*:—Dr. Preston: "Blessed be God! though I change my place, I shall not change my company; for I have walked with God while living, and now I go to rest with God." Matthew Henry: "You have been used to take notice of the sayings of dying men, this is mine—that a life spent in the service of God, and communion with Him, is the most comfortable life that any one can lead in this

present world." Rutherford: "If he should slay me ten thousand times ten thousand times, I'll trust." "I feel, I feel, I believe in joy, and rejoice; I feed on manna." "Oh, for arms to embrace Him. Oh, for a well-tuned harp!" Rev. James Hervey: "You tell me that I have but a few moments to live. Oh, let me spend them in adoring our great Redeemer! Oh, welcome death! thou mayest well be reckoned among the treasures of the Christian." His last words, "The great conflict is over: all is done." President Edwards, after bidding good-bye to all his children, looked about, and said, "Now, where is Jesus of Nazareth, my never-failing Friend?" And so he fell asleep, and went to the Lord he loved. Rev. John Wesley: "The best of all is, God is with us." Rev. Charles Wesley: "I shall be satisfied with Thy likeness; satisfied—satisfied!" Dr. Payson: "The battle's fought—the battle's fought; and the victory is won—the victory is won, for ever! I am going to bathe in an ocean of purity, and benevolence, and happiness to all eternity." "Faith and patience, hold out." (G. S. Bowes, M.A.)

Ver. 2. The Spirit of the Lord spake by me.—*The inspiration of the Scriptures*.—I. **THE INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES.** This may be shown by the combined testimony of Moses, the Psalmist, the Prophets of our Lord, and also of the Apostles and Evangelists. Consider: 1. The language of Moses. Now what does Moses say of his own writings? "Thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep His statutes and His commandments, which are written in this book of the law." 2. The language of the Psalmist. David, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, claims inspiration for those psalms which are of his own composition. "The Spirit of the Lord," he says, "spake by me." And what are his other testimonies respecting the word of God at large? Very wonderful, he says, are its properties. It is the grand instrument, he tells us, in the sinner's conversion. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." 3. The language of the prophets. What does Jeremiah say concerning his own writings? The Lord commanded Jeremiah to set down in a book certain prophecies. Those prophecies Baruch read in the audience of the king and the princes. And what is said respecting Baruch's reading? "Then read he in the book the words of the Lord in the house of the Lord." He read in the book "the words of the Lord." 4. The language of Christ. He met His adversaries with the Scripture. 5. The language of the Evangelists and Apostles. Our Lord, before His departure, promised to send to His disciples the Holy Ghost. "And when He is come, He will bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have spoken unto you." The Evangelists and Apostles, therefore, wrote under the controlling power of the Holy Ghost. "All Scripture," wrote St. Peter, "is given by inspiration of God," or, is "God-breathed." That Scripture Timothy had known from a child; and that Scripture was able to make Timothy "wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." By that term "Scripture," which was able to make its readers savingly acquainted with Christ, was meant the Old Testament writings. Now, these Old Testament books are directly quoted or alluded to in the New Testament several hundreds of times. There are more than eighty such references in St. Matthew; more than thirty in St. Mark; more than fifty in St. Luke; forty in St. John; more than fifty in the Acts of the Apostles; more than seventy in the Romans.

II. **WORDS OF COUNSEL.** 1. Beware of the sin of unbelief. God has given us a revelation. The mighty God, even the Lord, hath spoken. That revelation contains difficulties and mysteries. Our Lord was satisfied with the Old Testament, and we, therefore, should surely be satisfied. But we have, in addition, a most clear commentary on the Old Testament. We have the New Testament. 2. Cultivate a childlike spirit. Our Lord has plainly told us that, except we be converted and become as little children, we shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. 3. Receive all that the Bible reveals. In the Bible, as St. Peter tells us, there are many things "hard to be understood." This is no more than we ought to expect, when the infinite God reveals Himself to a finite being like man. Those things, however, which are necessary for our salvation—sin, death, hell, heaven, the general resurrection, the atonement of Christ, the work of the Spirit—are written so plainly "that he may run that reads." (C. Clayton, M.A.)

God the Author of Scripture.—Who built St. Paul's Cathedral? So many masons, carpenters, iron-workers, carvers, painters—and then there was Wren. Yes, there was Christopher Wren. He was not a mason, nor a carpenter, nor an iron-worker. He never laid a single stone, drove a nail, or forged a railing. What

did he do? He did it all. He planned the splendid edifice: inspired with his thought and purpose all their toil, and wrought through every worker. They were his "hands," and people flock to-day in their thousands from all over the world to see Christopher Wren's masterpiece. Who wrote the Bible? Moses, David, Isaiah, John, Paul? Yes. But the Holy Spirit did it all. "Holy men of old spake as they were borne along by the Holy Ghost." *Plenary inspiration of Scripture*:—In an interesting little pamphlet, written by the late Dr. A. J. Gordon, and called "Three weeks with Joseph Rabinowitz," there are several striking expressions uttered by the Russian Jew. "What is your view of inspiration?" we asked him, in order to draw him out concerning certain much-mooted questions of our time. "My view is," he said, holding up his Hebrew Bible, "that this is the Word of God; the Spirit of God dwells in it; when I read it, I know that God is speaking to me; and when I preach it, I say to the people, 'Be silent, and hear what Jehovah will say to you.'" "As for comparing the inspiration of Scripture with that of Homer or Shakespeare," he continued, "it is not a question of degree, but of kind. Electricity will pass through an iron bar, but it will not go through a rod of glass, however beautiful and transparent, because it has no affinity for it. So the Spirit of God dwells in the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, because these are His proper medium, but not in Homer or Shakespeare, because He has no affinity with these writings."

Ver. 3. **The Rock of Israel spake to me.**—*The voice of a rock*:—The phraseology is peculiarly dramatic and picturesque. I. **THE ROCK HAS A VOICE**; the Rock of Israel had been speaking to him ever since he had been in the kingly seat of power. David's wild and outlaw life had made him know what was the value of a stronghold, a shelter, a refuge. Rocks had been in his experience his best friends for many a year. Rocks were unchanging in their affection for him; they were immovable in their stability; they were impregnable for defence; often he had found rest under the "shadow of a great rock in a weary land." What had this Rock of Israel said to him during this wonderful career? 1. For one thing, it had told him, as a counsel of superior wisdom, that he ought to reign righteously all his life: "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." 2. For another thing, the Rock had spoken the terms and the conditions of a fine promise. A just ruler would be prospered in proportion to the purity and piety of his administration: "And he shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain." 3. And for the best thing of all, the Rock had assured him graciously of a permanent continuance of the Divine favour: "Although my house be not so with God, yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow." II. **MODERN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE**. What are the conditions of implicit trust in the Lord of our salvation, such trust as will insure peace and comfort? 1. The main condition of resting in the Lord is found in looking outside of one's self. There is a habit of morbid self-examination which needs to be shunned. The more conscientious any believer is, the more apt he is to press unnecessary scrutiny of introspection. 2. The next condition of spiritual repose is found in the avoiding of unwise counsellors. Once a Christian friend wrote a letter to me, saying that she had just, after a long struggle, come to something like peace in believing, when along came a "so-called evangelist to torment her before her time," telling her that "all we have to do is to accept salvation as we would accept a book from Christ's hand." She could not do this so easily, and hence she was informed again that her faith had no foundation upon which to be "secure." It would break up two-thirds of the business firms in the United States if an evangelist were to keep going round among the counting-rooms, telling people that they were in jeopardy every hour unless they could come to absolute confidence in their senior partners; and then they must be sure, still, that they have the right kind of confidence in them; and then they must be modest, and become surest of all that they are not becoming over-sure of anything this side of heaven. Human beings cannot get on with this; they cannot live so with God or with man. We must cultivate some measure of unquestioning trust. We must learn to trust our trust, and not keep rooting it up. No plant grows which is continually being rooted up. 3. Another condition of rest in God is found in drawing a clear distinction between historic faith and saving faith. What secures to us a perfect

salvation is spiritual trust in the Saviour, and this is the gift of the Holy Ghost. And whoever says that we receive Divine grace as we would receive a book from a man's hand, is simply mistaken in ignorance, or is misunderstood in his statement. Mechanical acts are frightfully poor illustrations of deep religious exercises. Some sort of fervour, some degree of emotion, is needed in order to appreciate Divine grace and receive it fitly. Tameless and lukewarmness are simply insipid. It is a heart-trust that God asks for, not a mere head-trust. A maiden may be told by her enthusiastic lover that it is as easy to trust him for ever with her life as it is to take a flower he offers; she knows better. It is easy to receive facts, perhaps, but not so easy to understand experiences which lie deeper than any mere outward acts. Historic faith is not necessarily saving faith. 4. Yet again: we are to cultivate confidence in the slowly reached answers to our prayers for Divine grace. 5. Yet again: we must distinguish between emotions and religious states. The one may vary, the other is fixed. Faith is a very different thing from the result of faith; and confidence of faith is even a different thing from faith itself; and yet the safety of a soul depends on faith, and nothing else. We are justified by faith—not by joy or peace or love or hope or zeal. These last are the results of faith, generally, and will depend largely upon temperament and education. 6. Finally, this unbroken courage is a condition of rest. We must not think everything is lost when we happen to have become beclouded. That faith is the best which has been tried and tested. In my study lies a little flower. It came to me long ago, by the hand of one who plucked it upon the highest ridge ever reached in the Rocky Mountains. It is of a rich purple colour, light and graceful in form, and retains yet, I imagine, a faint and delicate perfume. The lesson which it teaches me is one of endurance and patience. Away up there, where the snow lies late and the storms come early, it has held its own. The bleak solitudes had no charm for it; nay, I think that this flower was created to give a charm to a solitude which would have been the bleaker without it. To me it is the symbol of trust—absolute and implicit trust in God. It is a living thing that knows how to keep its warmth in despite of ice, and its beauty in despite of desolation all around it. (C. S. Robinson, D.D.) **He that ruleth over men must be just.**—*The importance of character in rulers*:—Mr. Stead quotes from Major Lennard's "How We Made Rhodesia," a passage to illustrate Dr. Jameson's opinions on morality and public life. "What differences can it make in a man as a legislator what his morals are, if he has genius and intellect, and can use them? . . . I cannot see how in any way morals can affect a man's intellect, and so long as he keeps his immoralities to himself, I do not see how they can affect any one else." So the Prime Minister of Cape Colony. The man who cannot see the influence of morality upon mind, how it affects motive and outlook, and his whole attitude and action in public affairs may have many gifts, but he is unfit to be Prime Minister of any colony or state. Far higher than the view of the modern Prime Minister of South Africa was that which inspired that ancient Prime Minister of North Africa, who regarded his position as a trust, and his work as a mission from God. "And Joseph said: It was not you that sent me hither, but God; and He hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt." *A righteous monarch*:—When Alfred made his laws his difficulties were only beginning. He had to depend for their execution on the Ealdermen and Thanes, most of whom were rude, uncultivated warriors, unable even to read the laws they had to administer. Many also were careless and unprincipled, either taking no pains about the matter at all, or favouring the rich against the poor. Alfred accordingly undertook the enormous labour of going over in person and in detail "almost all cases" in the kingdom. When he found, as he did very often, that the judgment given was unjust, he would send for the offending judge, and ask him why he had delivered it, taking great pains to ascertain whether this was done out of greed or partiality, or out of simple ignorance. Probably a judge who was convicted of the former would be suspended or superseded. But more often the perplexed Thane or Ealdorman, when hard pressed, would stammer out the candid confession, "An' it please you, my lord king, I did not know any better." Asser has preserved us a specimen of the reproof that would follow, which he calls "discreet and moderate." "I wonder truly at your insolence that, whereas, by God's favour and mine, you have occupied the rank and office of the Wise, you have neglected the studies and labours of the Wise. Either, therefore, at once resign your office or endeavour more zealously to study the lessons of wisdom. Such are my com-

mands." He adds that the judges, almost without exception, chose to learn their duties properly rather than to resign them. (*J. Alcock.*)

Ver. 4. He shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth.
*—King David's vision of Christ:—*It is generally allowed that the Authorised Version is not very happy here, and that the true idea of the passage is got by reading it as a vision—a bright vision of a glorious Ruler, as it rose before the entranced sight of the psalmist. The form of this Ruler is projected before him; He is one who is "righteous," and who "rules in the fear of God." A Divine radiance goes from Him, diffusing a silvery brightness on every side. "As the light of the morning!" exclaims the psalmist, recalling the welcome sight of the purple dawn after a dark and stormy night. By-and-by "the sun ariseth," rejoicing like a strong man to run a race. It is "a morning without clouds"; there is nothing to obstruct the influence of the orb of day as he scatters his treasures from his golden chariot. See how his beams fall on "the tender grass," making it sparkle with diamonds and pearls! This was King David's last vision—the vision of a ruler appearing on earth, worthy of these glorious emblems. Who can this Ruler be? Not Solomon, not Jehoshaphat, not Hezekiah: for though these and other kings were noble rulers, they did not come up to the high eulogy of David; neither were they "rulers over men" as such, but only over a small section of them—David's own kingdom, if even the whole of that. The Ruler of the vision has a wider dominion, and belongs to a nobler order. There are few things that strike the imagination more, or that dwell more vividly in the memory than a beautiful sunrise in an Alpine country. The Alpine horn wakens you in the early morning, and, flushed with the expectation of a rare enjoyment, you hasten to the spot where the view is to be seen. Your patience is somewhat taxed as the minutes slowly pass, and no sun appears. But as you look, the flush of dawn begins to brighten the sky, and now, just over the dark mountain range in the east, you see a speck of ruby peering, brighter than any gem. Quickly broadens into a slender bow, then to a golden semicircle, and in a few more seconds the round globe itself stands above the horizon. And what a glory it spreads over mountain and valley, over lake and river! What a transformation of the dull dark globe, now bright with a hundred hues and sparkling with a thousand smiles! Not only are your eyes feasted, but your soul is thrilled with a holy emotion; your mind carries you to a brighter transformation, to the thought of the new heaven and the new earth, and of the great Resurrection morn, when they that dwell in dust shall awake and sing, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads! In the imagery of the vision our Lord is compared to light; and it is interesting to note the successive touches by which the image grows in brilliancy. First, He is as "the light"—the most cheering and reviving, the most beautiful and beautifying of earthly things. Then He is as the light of "the morning," for morning light is more cheerful and reviving than any other. Then the great fountain of light, the sun, comes into view, suggesting inexhaustible fulness. And lastly, it is a morning "without clouds," there is nothing to obscure or interrupt the light in its passage to earth; it falls on the face of Nature in an unbroken flood, giving radiance and beauty to every object; and "there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." 1. It is indeed a gloomy experience when one first feels what it is to be a sinner, and first knows oneself to be a sinner—a great sinner—in the sight of God. What the Holy Spirit brings home to one may not be dark flagrant acts of sin, but the fact of one's rebellious will—one's systematic disregard of the holy will of God. Young Bruce of Kinnaid, three hundred years ago, declared that he would rather wade through a stream of boiling lead half a mile long than endure what befell him one night in the house of Airth, when the Holy Spirit was convincing him of sin. But when one apprehends the true meaning of the Baptist's call—"Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world"—is it not as if one passed into the light of the morning? 2. There is another gloomy experience to which many are subject after they have entered on the Christian life—the sense of indwelling sin, of the perpetual activity of evil desires, giving birth to a sad contrast between their souls and those saintly, angelic, Christ-like, beings whom they have sometimes met with, or about whom they have read. "Oh, wretched men that we are!" they sometimes cry, "who shall deliver us?" St. Paul was far in the depths when he uttered that groan. But hardly was it uttered when the light of

the morning burst on him—"I thank God, through Jesus Christ." He saw in Jesus Christ, over and above His atoning merit, a sanctifying grace capable of renewing him wholly, and he thanked God. 3. A third gloomy experience of Christians is that which often arises from the trials and troubles of life. There are St. Sebastians in this world whom God seems to make a target for all His arrows: all His waves and billows seem to pass over them. There is a tradition that once a great painter, seeing a rough block of white marble, said, "I see an angel imprisoned in that stone; but I will set him free." It was his way of saying that out of the rough block he would carve the form of an angel. But what an infinite amount of labour, what innumerable strokes of the hammer and touches of the chisel, were needed to fulfil the task! Certainly the task of turning the human soul into a pure unsullied spirit is not an easier one. We may be helped here by another emblem of the text—"Clear shining after rain." Heavy rain, pelting fiercely during the night, batters the tender grass, seems rude, and reckless, and destructive; but the morning sun not only makes the grass bright, but helps it to rise and helps it to grow; and in a little while the grass is stronger and richer than ever. I knew an eminent Christian, in a prominent position, who said that on looking back on his life he saw that the times of sorest trial—of trials that seemed as if they would crush him utterly were the very times when he got most spiritual good; it was out of such weakness that he was made strong. 4. We note one other gloomy experience against which Jesus is emphatically as the light of the morning—that which is bred under the shadow of death. This is probably due to that feeble faith in the unseen and eternal, in heaven and hell, in rewards and punishments, which marks the present age. But for oneself, and for all who die in the Lord, how welcome is the vision of Him who is as the light of the morning! Jesus has Himself died. O Light of the morning! how welcome is Thy rising to all who have eyes to see! Arise and shine on all the dark places of the earth. Again and again let these words be verified: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light!" (*The Quiver.*) *David's last and best song concerning Christ*:—This was a prediction of the advent of Christ uttered by David as his last words: not, probably, the last words that he ever spoke, but the last recorded of his public and inspired utterances. I. HE COMES FROM WITHOUT. The hope of the world, according to the teaching of the Scriptures, is not in itself. Just as this morning the earth's face is beautified not by any brilliancy of its own, but by the light that streams from the open heavens, and is reflected by the grateful earth, so when Christ should come He would come to a dark world in the effulgency of the Father's glory, and the brightness of heaven's own light. II. Like the morning without clouds, the revelation which He will give, and the light and joy which He will shed SHALL BE PERFECT. There shall be nothing imperfect in His personality or in His teaching or works. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, a morning without clouds. III. Christ's advent would be like the day-dawn because of THE CERTAINTY OF HIS COMING. What more certain than the morning? You have your dark nights, but then there is the counterbalancing assurance that morning cometh. Yes, the light always succeeds darkness, and day succeeds night. This is the Divine order of things. "God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night, and the evening and the morning were the first day." All God's evenings burst into mornings. God began with darkness and finished with light, that is the idea here. The evening of the world has been dark, tedious, and depressing, but "He shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth." IV. THE FULNESS OF HIS GLORY AND BLESSING CONNECTED WITH HIS ADVENT. He would come to all men alike. V. CHRIST WOULD COME WITH THE GENTLENESS OF THE MORNING. Oh, the gentleness with which the light comes to us! Have you thought of it? There is nothing so gentle. You know that the speed at which light travels is twelve millions of miles per minute. An engine that comes at seventy miles an hour comes dashing through everything in its way; but the light that comes at the rate of 200,000 miles per second has not knocked any of us down yet, nay, not even an insect in its feeble flight. It comes direct from the sun, through space, at the rate of 200,000 miles per second, and yet this sensitive eye of ours, which is hurt if you but touch it with even a feather, and is injured even if a breeze comes at the rate of sixty or seventy miles an hour, and still more if water were splashed against it with any force, receives that ray without the consciousness of being touched at all. Anything else but the light, coming at this fearful velocity, would kill us, yet the eye takes in the

light and is thankful for it. The most sensitive nerve is only gratified. Christ's advent is compared to this coming of that light. Such is the gentle grace of Christ. He comes to enlighten the world—comes with the great impetus of almighty love that began in eternity—and yet a love that falls as gentle as the day of light upon an infant's eyes. VI. HIS COMING SHALL BE ALL THE MORE GLORIOUS BECAUSE OF THE DARKNESS AND SORROW WHICH HAVE PRECEDED IT: "When the tender grass springeth out of the earth through clear shining after rain." It would not be so glorious if the darkness had not preceded it, and the rain had not come. If you would see things clearly, go out in the morning. Just when the sun rises, everything appears at its best. During the day you have the moist land sending up heated vapours, and the denser airs mix up with the rarer atmosphere, so that you see nothing clearly. But the morning light is pure and undisturbed, and it is never so pure as when showers of rain have immediately preceded the dawn. Then it seems as if the rain had cleansed the atmosphere. A shower does wonders in purifying air. That is the figure in our text. Just as when a shower has been cleansing the air of its impurity, and then the pure light of dawn reveals the landscape, there is nothing so glorious in nature; so in the spiritual realm there is nothing so charming as the revelation of Christ to the heart after its long night of darkness and grief. Oh, if He but dawned upon the darkness of many of you to-day, you would thank God for all the sorrows which have prepared the way for His more clear shining into your heart and life. (D. Davies.) *Christ's coming as the light of the morning*:—These are some of the last words of David; not the very last which he uttered while on earth, but of those, we may conceive, which he spake when he knew that he was about to close his course below, and which he would leave as his dying testimony to the truth which had been the matter of his faith, and which was still the ground of his hope. These words, as we read them, might be regarded as those which David now recalled as having been spoken to him on his elevation to the throne, conveying a lesson concerning the duties of a sovereign, which he had on the whole endeavoured to fulfil. But a greater than David is here; and the words may be more properly regarded as a prophecy, announcing the reign of that descendant of David in whom his throne was to be built up for ever. You see, that to what is here said, considered as a prediction of the Messiah and his times, the voices of the other prophets agree. But I would direct your attention to what may be suggested concerning him, and the effects of his mission and work, by the beautiful imagery here employed. I. HE IS MOST GLORIOUS IN HIMSELF. Light, you will acknowledge, is the most beautiful of all material things: Nature's resplendent robe, without whose vesting radiance all were wrapt in unrelieved gloom. Its name is associated with all that we know of what is fair and pleasant for the eyes to behold. But when we turn from its lesser sources, from the lamps which man kindles, or even from the moon and the stars which shine by night, to the light of the morning, to the sun when he riseth on a morning without clouds, what an object of splendour is before us! But who is He of whom it is said that "He shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth?" He is one of whom this sun is only a faint image. But in the application of the figure which likens the Messiah to the morning sun, we are to notice not merely the superior excellence of the things represented to those by which they are held up to view, but the truth that they are found in him in similar purity and fulness and perfection to that in which their emblems appear in the natural sun. Wisdom, holiness, benignity, equity, and truth and mercy, are not only more excellent in themselves, more worthy to be admired, more suited in their manifestations to awaken a sense of beauty and grandeur in the mind of the beholder than the most brilliant appearances of the light which is taken in by the bodily eye; but as in him, and shown forth by him of whom we speak, they have a plenitude and an exuberance which place him, we may say, infinitely farther above all created excellence than the sun is above the dim lamps that men kindle by night. He "is the brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of His person." He is the light of the heavenly world. The seraphim that worship there veil their faces with their wings before him. He is the Sun of spirits, and His beams of all-informing thought irradiate every created intellect. He is "the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." Raise your eyes, O believer, to this Sun of Righteousness. He dwelleth indeed in light to which no man can approach. II. HE CAME TO SHOW TO A BENIGHTED WORLD THE WAY OF TRUTH AND PEACE. The sun is the great fountain of light to the natural world. His absence

makes night. Though there be lesser lights to relieve the darkness, even these derive from him their borrowed lustre. The evening's twilight and the morning's dawn give us his faint diffused beams, and the moon and the planets shine with his reflected glories. But what would our earth be if he was utterly darkened in the heavens? In the coming of the Messiah, in that revelation of truth and mercy, of which He is the giver and great subject, the dayspring from on high hath visited us. "I am come," said Jesus, "a light unto the world, that whosoever believeth in me should not abide in darkness." How glorious are the discoveries which He makes to mankind, who were sunk under debasing superstition; who, in the depths of their ignorance of the true God, offered the homage due to him to dumb idols, the work of their own hands, nay, to the personified ideas of hate and lust. III. HE COMES TO PUT FORTH ON A DEPRAVED WORLD A RENOVATING INFLUENCE. The sun in the natural world not only sheds light, "there is nothing hidden from his heat." He warms and by his genial influence renews the face of the earth. We have spoken of Him as revealing the way of truth and peace, this He does not only in His external word; it is He who opens the eyes of the understanding to discern it, and inclines the heart to walk in it; to return to God in the faith of offered mercy, in penitence, grief for past wanderings, and new-born love and devotedness to his service. A willing people come to him in the day of his power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning he has the dew of his youth; under His quickening influence the spiritual life and beauty which sin had blasted revive and flourish. He purges out the gross and debasing elements of corruption, implants and cherishes the principles and affections which adorn and bless the soul, and makes it fair and bright in his own reflected image. And it is when he comes in the might of his renewing Spirit that a voice is heard, saying to the souls which He visits, "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." 1. We may observe that when he came in the flesh, He appeared in the character and for the ends here assigned. It was to this coming that the Psalmist looked forward when he said, "There shall be a ruler over men," etc. The Saviour promised long was born. He appears by the blood of whose cross peace has been made, and by whom it hath pleased the Father to reconcile all things to himself. 2. We may observe that He comes in this character, and for the ends we have spoken of, in the dispensation of His gospel, and when it is made effectual, to give "light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide their feet into the way of peace." The invitations of mercy are from him, and tell of him; and when it enters a nation or a city, when it is preached to the poor and the guilty among men, there he is evidently set forth, and the light of His salvation diffused. 3. And the time is approaching when He shall thus come in all the world. A great part of it yet lieth in wickedness. Monstrous forms of idolatry prevail in many places of the earth, and in others a false prophet has deceived the nations, or Antichristian superstitions perverted the gospel of Jesus. Even where the light shines most clearly multitudes shut their eyes on it, and show that they love the darkness better than the light. But we have a sure promise that thus it shall not always be. The everlasting gospel shall be preached to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people. "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." 4. He is to come in the end of the world, when He shall be to them that look for Him "as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain." (*J. Henderson, D.D.*) *Royal emblems for loyal subjects*:—Eastern despots fleece their subjects to an enormous extent. Even at the present day one would hardly wish to be subjected to the demands of an Oriental government; but in David's time a bad king was a continual pestilence, plague, and famine—a bane to the lives of his subjects, who were under his caprice; and spoliation to their fields, which he perpetually swept clean to enrich himself with the produce thereof. Hence, a good king was a rare gem in those days, and could never be too highly prized. So soon as he mounted the throne, his subjects began to feel the beneficent influence of his sway. He was to them "as when the sun riseth." The confusion which had existed under weak governors gave place to settled order, while the rapacity which had continually emptied the coffers of the rich, and filched the earnings of the poor, gave place to a regular system of assessment, and men knew how to go about their business with some degree of certainty. It was to them "a morning without clouds." Forthwith, trade began to flourish; persons who had emigrated

to avoid the exactions of the tyrant came back again; fields which had fallen out of tillage, because they would not pay the farmer to cultivate them, began to be sown; and the new ruler was to the land as "clear shining after rain, which makes the tender grass spring up." 1. David says of Christ, "He shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth." This he is as king, already, in His church, and as the rightful monarch in the individual heart of the believer. Wherever Christ comes into a soul, it is as the light of the morning when the sun riseth. And, how glorious is the sun when from his pavilion he looks forth at morn! Job describes the sunrise as being the stamping of the earth with a seal; as if, when in darkness, the earth were like a lump of clay that is pervious; then, as it is turned to the light, it beginneth to receive the impress of Divine wisdom; mountain and vale all stream with it, till impressed on its surface we begin to perceive the glorious works of God. So when Christ riseth upon the heart, what a glorious transformation is wrought! Where there has been no love, no faith, no peace, no joy, none of the blessed fruits of the Spirit, no sooner doth Christ come than we perceive all the graces in blossom; yea, they soon become fragrant and blooming, for we are made complete in Him. The advent of Christ bringeth to the heart celestial beauty; faith in Him decketh us with ornaments and clothes us as with royal apparel. The sunrise, moreover, is very much like the coming of Christ, because of that which it involveth. Those rays of light which first forced the darkness from the sky with golden prophecy of day, tell of flowers that shall open their cups to drink in the sunlight; they tell of streams that shall sparkle as they flow; they tell of the virgins that shall make merry, and the young men that shall rejoice, because the sun shineth on them, and the darkness of night is fled. And so the coming of Christ into the heart is a prophecy of years of sweet enjoyment—a prophecy of God's goodness and long-suffering, let night reign, elsewhere, as it may—yea, and it is a prophecy of the fulness of the river of God, for ever and ever, before the throne of God in heaven. 2. We must proceed to notice that the psalmist uses another figure: "Even as a morning without clouds." There are no clouds in Christ when He ariseth in a sinner's heart. The clouds that mostly cover our sky come from Sinai, from the law, and from our own legal propensities, for we are always wishing to do something by which we may inherit eternal life; but there are none of these clouds in Christ. (1.) There is no cloud in Christ of angry rebuke for the past. When Jesus receiveth the sinner, He chideth not. (2.) And, as there is no cloud of anger, so there is no cloud of exacting demand. He doth not ask the sinner to be anything, or do anything. That were a cloud, indeed, if he did. A sinner by nature can do nothing, and can be nothing, except as grace shall make him be and do. (3.) And, as he is without cloud of demand, so he is without cloud of falsehood. If thou puttest thy soul into his hand, there is no fear that he shall be false to the sacred charge; he will undertake to be surety for thy soul; he will bring thee to his Father's face without hindrance, when the fulness of time is come. 4. But, now, to the last figure. David says of Christ, the king, that his sway is like "clear shining after rain, whereby the tender grass is made to spring out of the earth." We have often seen how, after a very heavy shower of rain, and sometimes after a continued rainy season, when the sun shines, there is a delightful clearness and freshness in the air that we seldom perceive at other times. Perhaps, the brightest weather is just when the wind has drifted away the clouds, and the rain has ceased, and the sun peers forth from his chambers to look down upon the glad earth. Well, now, Christ is to His people just like that—exceedingly clear-shining when the rain is over. (1.) Sorrow and sadness do not last for ever. After the rain there is to come the clear shining. (2.) After times of great trouble, Christ becometh to His people more specially and delightfully sweet than he has ever been before. It is manifest in conversion. The like is true also, in its measure, after great and heavy affliction. You saw the finger of a loving Lord in all those graving lines of affliction, which the chisel had made upon your brow; you saw the great Refiner sitting at the mouth of the furnace, watching your gold that it might not be destroyed, and rejoicing over your dross, because it melted away in the flame. (3.) Why is it that God giveth to His people sweet seasons just after the bitter? One reason is to take the taste of the bitter out of their mouth. Another reason, no doubt, is lest they should be utterly destroyed by the terror of His judgment. "He tempereth the wind to the shorn lamb." Then He doth it as a sweet reward of faith. He seeth thee following Him in the garden, still clinging to Him amidst all the darkness and temptation; and, therefore, He saith:

"I will give to that soul such joy, by-and-by, that it shall be well rewarded for its faithfulness to me in the past." Is it not to prepare you for the future that, in looking back, you may say, "The last time I had trouble there was clear shining after the rain, and so I feel it will be next time?" (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The character of Christ's government*:—These words are generally understood to describe duties of civil governments and the happiness of a people righteously ruled. But they have doubtless a further reference even to Christ Himself. They designate His character most appropriately. The energetic manner in which the prophecy is introduced, and the strong profession which the dying king makes of his immediate inspiration, leave no doubt that something more is conveyed than a mere direction to magistrates. I. **THE NATURE OF THE SAVIOUR'S GOVERNMENT.** In the sacred writings peculiar stress is laid on the equity of that dominion which the Saviour exercises over His people (*Isa. ix. 7*). And who that has submitted to His government will not confirm the truth? 1. Behold His laws. Is there one which does not tend to the happiness of His subjects? They are all comprehended in one—love to God and man. And can anything be conceived more excellent in itself and more beneficial to man? Well does the apostle say of it that it is holy, just, and good. 2. Behold His administration. Is there any one point in which a righteous governor can excel, that is not found in its most perfect measure in Him? He relieves the needy, succours the weak, protects the oppressed, and executes judgment without respect of persons. II. **THE BENEFITS IT CONFERS.** 1. Illumination and joy. The sun rising on the unclouded hemisphere cheers and gladdens all who behold it. And when it shines on the earth that has been refreshed with gentle showers it causes the grass to grow almost visibly. And is it not thus with all who submit to Christ? 2. Abundant fruitfulness. What an astonishing effect, too, does the light of his countenance produce in respect to fruitfulness in good works. Let the soul watered with tears of penitence, or softened by contrition, once feel the influence of His genial rays, and there is a change in the whole deportment. Inferences: 1. How earnestly should we desire the universal establishment of Christ's kingdom. Little do men consider the import of the petition, "Thy kingdom come." In uttering it we desire that our whole souls, and the souls of all mankind, may be subjected to Christ. 2. What madness is it to continue in rebellion to Christ. It is not at our option whether Christ be our ruler or not. For God has set Him king on the holy hill of Zion. In due season He will "put all His enemies under His feet." (*Evangelical Preacher.*) *The character of the Messiah's rule genial and beneficent*:—This psalm describes the empire of the King of kings, and our text exhibits the gracious and genial character of His dominion. Some men say that Christianity is not genial, that the Christian scheme exhibits God in a most unlovely aspect, that the doctrines of Christ are dark with awful mysteries, that the promises of the Christian dispensation offer but little of present benefit, and therefore of certain and tangible advantage, that its precepts demand conduct which is too high and self-sacrificing, that its ordinances are depressing rather than elevating, and that, as a whole, Christianity promotes a narrow mind and a feeble judgment, morbid and morose feelings, an enslaved will, a too sensitive conscience, an unmanly bearing, and a character which is intellectually low, and unsocial, and melancholy. Is this charge against the religion of Jesus Christ just, and can it be substantiated? We assert that it is most unjust, and cannot be maintained. (*Samuel Martin.*) **A morning without clouds.**—*A morning without clouds*:—David is at the head of this chapter a representation of all the people of God; he is raised up on high; so every one who is born of the Spirit is raised up by the atonement and righteousness of Christ Jesus; even as the poor out of the dust, and made to inherit that life, and light, and glory, which can be only by faith in Him in whom they are complete and accepted. David was the anointed of the God of Jacob: so are all who have the spirit of Christ. This anointing means consecration to God; and in, and by which, anointing, they know all things essential to salvation. Also David is called "the sweet Psalmist of Israel." He was indeed the poet of the Hebrew nation. But all the people of God shall be sweet singers of Israel: God and salvation their theme; truly with them the bitterness of death is past, and they are passed from death unto life—a life of eternal delight. "The Rock of Israel spake to me, and showed me the way to prosper; he that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." And unto none do these words apply as unto the Son of God: He was that Just One that died for the unjust, that He might bring us to God; He feared God in perfection, and

did always those things that pleased Him. Can we say this of ourselves? We cannot, for there is not a just man upon the earth that doeth good and sinneth not: but He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth; He is, therefore, as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, and as fresh as new grass springing out of the earth; by clear shining after rain, He is "a morning without clouds;" and is thus a pattern of what all the mystic morning stars shall be. I. It was when Adam fell **A MORNING WITHOUT CLOUDS**. 1. Sin came in as a cloud, a thick cloud, a tempestuous cloud, a gloomy cloud. And this cloud of darkness is universal—all are involved therein, all are encompassed thereby; no light from any quarter, but darkness every way. And we, by nature, love this darkness, and hereby prove ourselves to be under condemnation. We cannot endure the true light! But if God, who "commanded the light to shine out of darkness," shine into our hearts, then we see and feel the desperate wickedness of our hearts, and become a terror to ourselves, and begin to be drawn by and to love the light of the bright and morning Star. 2. But not only is there the cloud of sin, but also the cloud of Sinai, where God is inaccessible. Here "clouds and tempests are round about him!" 3. But there is the cloud not only of sin, and of Sinai, but also of tribulation. The clouds of tribulation will more or less darken the path of every one whose face is truly set Zionward: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." 4. But there is also the cloud of death. It casts its shadow over everything; and this King of Terrors is, indeed, often a terror of kings. But to those who love the Gospel light, unto such the cloud of death will be but a passing shadow. II. **WHAT THE MORNING IS WITHOUT CLOUDS**. The morning without clouds is the morning of Christ's resurrection. He dieth no more. "Death hath no more dominion over him." And now let us carefully trace out how the Lord was unto David a morning without clouds. It was by a covenant. "He hath made with me a covenant." This means a testamentary will. 1. But this covenant is an everlasting covenant. This made David say, "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting." 2. But this covenant is ordered in all things and sure; there is nothing vague—nothing at random; as the ark, the tabernacle, and temple, were not made at random, so this covenant in all its arrangements, is such as shall meet, and establish, and make good all its provisions and designs. Jesus Christ is the executor of this will, "And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hands." 3. And this covenant is all our salvation; it is included in this covenant; here none are reckoned otherwise than sons, saints, and kings, and priests to God. 4. But not only is this covenant all salvation, but it answers all desires. No Christian desires anything more, yet nothing less can save, supply, and satisfy; while neither faith, nor hope, nor love, nor prayer, nor godly fear, nor good works are the rule of measurment here as to what our real standing in the covenant is, these graces of the Spirit distinguish the real Christian from others. (*J. Wells*). *Rain clouds not devoid of beauty*:—Ruskin reminds us that we habitually think of the rain-cloud only as dark and grey, yet we owe to it some of the fairest hues of heaven. "Often in our English mornings," says he, "the rain-clouds in the dawn form soft level fields, which melt imperceptibly into the blue." He describes them, too, as gathering into apparent bars that cross the sheets of broader clouds, all bathed in soft, unspeakable light, the barred masses, composed of tresses of cloud, "looking as if each knot were a little swathe or sheaf of lighted rain." **As the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain**.—*Clear shining after rain*:—The beautiful picture that David draws is produced by a combination, first, rain, and then, clear shining after rain; and the most flourishing condition of spirituality is produced by the same two causes; it comes as the result of a combination of rain and sunshine. 1. How the "clear shining after rain" is manifested **IN THE HEART OF THE CONVERT**. 1. The work of grace begins in the heart with a time of gloom. Clouds gather; there is a general dampness round about; the soul seems saturated with doubt, fear, dread. There is something coming, but the soul knows not what; it feels that it is very sinful, and deserves whatever punishment God may send. 2. After the clouds, in the next place, the rain falls. The real work of the Spirit of God often follows upon an inward depression of spirit. An Irish friend of mine once said, that he had carefully noticed that it did not rain when the sun was shining; but that, whenever it rained, there were always some clouds to keep the sunshine off. There is a great truth in what my friend said. Rain becomes doubly precious to the earth when all the surroundings are suitable for its reception. All the atmosphere becomes damp;

whereas, if rain could fall when all is dry and warm, mischief might come of it. Well, now, God's Holy Spirit loves to come and work in man a congenial atmosphere, a holy tenderness, a devout heartbreaking; then with the clouds He brings a heavenly rain. 3. Then the sun shines: "Clear shining after rain." The man perceives that he is a sinner, but that Christ has come to save him. He sees his own blackness; but he believes that Christ can make him whiter than the snow. 4. Then everything grows. The grass is sure to grow when we have mist and heat together; and when a soul, having felt its need of Christ, at last beholds the light of His countenance, then it begins to grow. II. THIS "CLEAR SHINING AFTER RAIN" OFTEN PRODUCES THE VERY BEST CONDITION OF THINGS IN THE SOUL OF THE BELIEVER. 1. Trial followed by deliverance. 2. This experience is realised in humiliation of self followed by joy in the Lord. It is a very healthy thing for a man to be made to know himself; and if he is made to know himself, he will have no cause for boasting. 3. Tenderness mixed with assurance. I like to meet with that man, whom Mr. Bunyan speaks of in his "Pilgrim's Progress," who was, above many, tender of sin. He was not afraid of lions; but he was dreadfully afraid of sins. Mr. Fearing is very tender of sin. 4. The blending of experience and knowledge. III. OUR TEXT MAKES A VERY HAPPY COMBINATION IN THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD. 1. He who would have a fruitful ministry must have clear shining after the rain, by which I mean, first, law, and then, Gospel. 2. First, repentance, and then zeal: rain, and then clear shining. 3. If your service is to be successful, bringing glory to God, there must be in it, first, prayer, and then blessing. 4. My text also means grace softening, and then shining. IV. THE CLEAR SHINING AFTER RAIN IN THE AGES TO COME. 1. And, first, times of gloom are to be expected. 2. Although times of gloom are to be expected, an age of light will follow. There will come a day when Christ shall reign amongst His ancients gloriously; when the ungodly shall hide themselves in obscure places, and the meek shall have dominion in the earth, and the sons of God in that morning shall be owned as the noblest of men. There is to come yet "a thousand years" (whatever that period may mean) of a reign of righteousness, wherein the whole of the earth shall be filled with the glory of God, and become the vestibule of heaven. Have comfort about that glorious truth. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *God causeth the grass to spring forth*:—The grass springs up; the bud opens; the leaf expands; the flowers breathe forth their fragrance as if they were under the most careful cultivation. All this must be the work of God, since it cannot even be pretended that man is there to produce these effects. Perhaps one would be more deeply impressed with a sense of the presence of God in the pathless desert, or on the boundless prairie, where no man is, than in the most splendid park, or the most tastefully cultivated garden which man could make. In the one case, the hand of God alone is seen; in the other, we are constantly admiring the skill of man. (A. Barnes.)

Ver. 5. Although my house be not so with God.—*David's sorrow and resource*:—The great and elevated among mankind have sorrows proportioned to their greatness, as the highest points of earth are most exposed to the fury of the fiercest storms. Kings have their griefs as kings. I. DAVID'S DOMESTIC SORROW: "My house is not so with God." Many were the occasions when this distinguished man had to say: "The sorrows of my heart are enlarged: bring thou me out of my distresses. All Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me. I sink in deep waters" (2 Sam. xxii. 5, 6.) Probably as a king, as a public man, David more habitually and simply cast himself upon the Lord. As a domestic man, he was less upon his guard. He expected no lion, no bear, no Goliath difficulty in his home; he therefore did not meet home temptations and troubles as he had met them: "I come to Thee in the name of the Lord of hosts." And some of you may now be drinking of a similar cup of domestic bitters. II. Let us look at DAVID'S PERSONAL RESOURCE: "Yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant." 1. In duration it is everlasting. From everlasting the counsel of peace was between them both—the Father and the Son; the Son, who as Messiah was to sit and rule upon His throne, and be a priest upon His throne (Zech. vi. 13.) It is that covenant, which, to use the forcible language of Paul to Titus, "God, who cannot lie, promised in Christ before the world began." 2. Observe its completeness: "Ordered in all things." "This is all my salvation, and all my desire." Nothing is left to capricious chance; nothing to inconstant and changeable man. There are no contingencies with God; nothing takes Him by surprise. 3. Look also at its certainty: "Sure." The uncertainty of all

earthly things is one sad ingredient in the cup of earth's bitterness. Such was David's personal resource at seventy, amidst domestic sorrow. And when we look at the sufficiency of it, we may well ask, What has the man of the world to fall back upon, when all his earthly hopes are blighted; what to be compared with the believer's resource? (*J. East, M.A.*) *David's dying song*:—How many choice thoughts have we gained in the bedchamber of the righteous, beloved? I remember one sweet idea, which I once won from a death-bed. A dying man desired to have one of the Psalms read to him, and the 17th being chosen, he stopped at the 6th verse, "Incline thine ear unto me and hear my speech," and faintly whispering, said, "Ah, Lord, I cannot speak, my voice fails me; incline Thine ear, put it against my mouth, that Thou mayest hear me." None but a weak and dying man, whose life was ebbing fast, could have conceived such a thought. It is well to hear saints' words when they are near heaven—when they stand upon the banks of Jordan. But here is a special case, for these be the last words of David. I. **THE PALMIST SAYS HE HAD SORROW IN HIS HOUSE.** "Although my house be not so with God." What man is there of all our race, who, if he had to write his history, would not need to use a great many "althoughs?" If you read the biography of any man, as recorded in the Sacred Word, you will always find a "but," or an "although," before you have finished. Naaman was a mighty man of valour, and a great man with his master, but he was a leper. There is always a "but" in every condition, a crook in every lot, some dark tint upon the marble pillar, some cloud in the summer sky, some discord in the music, some alloy in the gold. So David, though a man who had been raised from the sheepfold, a mighty warrior, a conqueror of giants, a king over a great nation, yet had his "althoughs," and the "although" which he had was one in his own house. 1. But I imagine that the principal meaning of these words of David refers to his family—his children. David had many trials in his children. It has often been the lot of good men to have great troubles from their sons and daughters. 2. What must I say to any of those who are thus tried and distressed in estate and family? First, let me say to you, it is necessary that you should have an "although" in your lot, because if you had not, you know what you would do; you would build a very downy nest on earth, and there you would lie down in sleep; so God puts a thorn in your nest in order that you may sing. It is said by the old writers that the nightingale never sang so sweetly as when she sat among thorns, since say they, the thorns prick her breast, and remind her of her song. So it may be with you. Ye, like the larks, would sleep in your nest did not some trouble pass by and affright you; then you stretch your wings, and carolling the matin song, rise to greet the sun. Trials are sent to wean you from the world; bitters are put into your drink, that ye may learn to live upon the dew of heaven: the food of earth is mingled with gall, that ye may only seek for true bread in the manna which droppeth from the sky. Your soul without trouble would be as the sea if it were without tide or motion; it would become foul and obnoxious. But, furthermore, recollect this, O thou who art tried in thy children—that prayer can remove thy troubles. There is not a pious father or mother here, who is suffering in the family, but may have that trial taken away yet. Faith is as omnipotent as God Himself, for it moves the arm which leads the stars along. II. **DAVID HAD CONFIDENCE IN THE COVENANT.** Oh! how sweet it is to look from the dulness of earth to the brilliancy of heaven! How glorious it is to leap from the ever tempest-tossed bark of this world, and stand upon the *terra-firma* of the covenant! So did David. Having done with his "Although," he then puts in a blessed "yet." Oh! it is a "yet," with jewels set: "He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure." 1. David rejoiced in the covenant, because it is Divine in its origin. "Yet hath He made with me an everlasting covenant." 2. But notice its particular application. "Yet hath He made with me an everlasting covenant." Here lies the sweetness of it to me, as an individual. 3. Furthermore, this covenant is not only Divine in its origin, but it is everlasting in its duration. 4. But notice the next word. "It is ordered in all things." "Order is heaven's first law," and God has not a disorderly covenant. It is an orderly one. When He planned it, before the world began, it was in all things ordered well. 5. That word things is not in the original, and we may read it persons, as well as things. It is ordered in all persons—all the persons whose names are in the covenant; it is ordered for them, and they shall come according to the promise: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." 6. To

wind up our description of this covenant, it is sure. We cannot call anything "sure" on earth; the only place where we can write that word is on the covenant, which is "ordered in all things and sure." III. **THE PSALMIST HAD A SATISFACTION IN HIS HEART.** "This is," he said, "all my salvation, and all my desire." 1. He is satisfied with his salvation. 2. Then, the Psalmist says, he has all his desire. There is nought that can fill the heart of man except the Trinity. God has made man's heart a triangle. Men have been for centuries trying to make the globe fill the triangle, but they cannot do it; it is the Trinity alone that can fill a triangle, as old Quarles well says. There is no way of getting satisfaction but by gaining Christ, getting heaven, winning glory, getting the covenant, for the word covenant comprises all the other things. "All my desire"—says the Psalmist. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The everlasting covenant, the believer's support under distress*:—Now there are three parts of this last prophecy of David: The first of them concerns the subject of all prophecy and promises, that he had preached about and declared, and that is Christ himself, in the third and fourth verses. The second of them concerns himself, as he was a type of Christ (ver. 5.) The third part concerns Satan and the enemies of the Church, in opposition unto the kingdom of Jesus Christ. I. **A GREAT SURPRISAL AND DISAPPOINTMENT**; "Although my house be not so with God." I have looked that it should be otherways, saith he, that my house should have a great deal of glory, especially that my house should be upright with God; but I begin to see it will be otherwise. The best of the saints of God do oftentimes meet with great surprisals and disappointments in the best of their earthly comforts: their houses are not so with God. The reasons hereof why it may be thus, are: 1. Because there is no promise of the covenant to the contrary. There is no promise of God secures absolutely unto us our outward comforts, be they of what nature they will, be they in our relations, in our enjoyments, in our persons, of what kind they will, why yet we may have a surprisal befall them in reference to them all; because there is no promise of God to secure the contrary, therefore it may be so. 2. Sometimes it is needful it should be so, though we are apt to think the contrary; and that for these three reasons: (1.) To keep continually upon our hearts a due awe of the judgments of God; of the actings of God's providence in a way of judgment; which otherwise we should be apt to think ourselves freed from. (2.) It is needful to keep us off from security in ourselves. (3.) They are sometimes actually needful to awaken the soul out of such deep sleep of present satisfaction, or love of this world, which nothing else will do. That which we should learn from hence, by way of use, is: 1. Not to put too great a value upon any contentment whatever we have in this world, lest God make us write an "although" upon it. 2. Let us be in an expectation of such changes of Providence, that they may not be great surprisals unto us. II. **THAT THE GREAT RESERVE AND RELIEF FOR BELIEVERS**, under their surprisals and distresses, lies, in betaking themselves to the covenant of God, or to God in His covenant. "Although my house be not so with God." Why do they so? 1. They do it because of the author of the covenant. 2. The second reason is taken from the properties of the covenant; what kind of one it is: and they are three. It is an everlasting covenant. It is a covenant that is ordered in all things. And it is a covenant that is sure. (1.) It is the great relief of our souls, because it is "an everlasting covenant." How is this everlasting? It is everlasting in respect of the beginning of it; it is everlasting in respect of the end of it; and it is everlasting in respect of the matter of it. (2.) The second property of this covenant is, "That it is ordered in all things." What is order? Order is the disposition of things into such a way, such a relation one to another, and such a dependence one upon another, as they may all be suited to attain their proper end. This is order. Now, saith he, this covenant is ordered. These are the heads of the glorious order of this covenant, that gives it its life, beauty, and glory. Its projection was in the wisdom and love of the Father. It had a solemn confirmation in the blood of the Son: hence the blood of Christ is called "the blood of the covenant." But when all this is done, how shall this covenant be executed? That is the work of the Holy Spirit. He hath undertaken two things. (1.) To assure our souls of all things on the part of God. And (2) to undertake on our parts to give us hearts, that we shall love Him, and fear Him. There is an addition of order, in reference to the matter of it, here expressed. (1.) It is ordered in all the things "of grace on the part of God." 2. It is ordered in reference unto sin. There was a great deal of glory and beauty in the first covenant;

but there was no order taken about sin; that, if any sin came in, the first covenant was gone and broken, and of no use any more. (3.) The last property of this covenant is, that it is sure. It is "ordered in all things, and sure." If it had not been sure, it would not have been a relief unto us. The springs of the security of this covenant are two: 1. The oath of God; 2. The intercession of Christ. (*J. Owen, D.D.*) *Household religion*:—Last words of dying David. As the dying are sometimes visited with a wave of physical strength to which they were strangers in life, so often in death the believer is blessed with a mental and spiritual vision, he rises to a state of exultation in which he feels, sees, comprehends things altogether beyond his usual ken. "At evening-time there" is often marvellous "light" for the child of God. To King David it took the form of a vision of the ideal King that one day should arise (see marg. R.V.) No contemporary suggested it, no history fanned a recollection; it was an inspiration of God. (ver. 2.) Nothing else was sufficient to explain how a warrior of those brutal days came to conceive of a kingdom that should be as morning light after darkness. Not even yet has a kingdom of earth appeared that might be so described. Where is the realm to-day whose working-classes, *e.g.*, would say it was as "a morning without clouds?" David, like Abraham, saw afar off the day of Christ. Then, turning from the vision of the ideal future to the actual present, the bitter confession of the text is made. I. We have here the confession of THE DISAPPOINTED IDEALIST. Compared with others, David, easily first of the kings, gave peace from enemies round about, established religion, and by his hymns and personal character made it popular, and made internal order and justice sure. The secret of his success was the secret of his acknowledgment of failure, viz., that he had a very lofty standard which he felt he had failed to reach. The explanation of many a believer's depression, and of many an earnest worker's discouragement. II. We have here the confession of THE DISAPPOINTED GODLY PARENT. We know what had happened in the matter of Absalom, and what subsequently transpired between Adonijah and Solomon. Coming events which cast their shadows before upon the dying father's heart. He saw there was no likelihood that the ideal he had failed to attain would be attained by any of his house. And this, although a father's hope will linger longer than anyone's respecting his children. We have then, here a dying father's pillow stuffed with thorns because his family is not right "with God." In the dying hour it is our own kith and kin we want around us—fortune, fame, etc., are of little moment—and if believers ourselves the all-consuming anxiety is how do they stand "with God?" What explanations or warnings may we get from David's instance? (1.) The mothers of his children were, for most part, Godless mothers. His marriages were either marriages of convenience (neighbouring princesses) or the outcome of inflamed passion. (2.) David apparently gave all his time and strength to his kingdom, and neglected his family. (3.) David's own life must have been a sore hindrance to his influence. (*R. Bevan Shepherd, M.A.*) *David's distress, consolation, and experience*:—I. A DEPTH OF DISTRESS. "My house," says David, "is not so with God." He had many trials; but with regard to the affliction before us, we may observe two things; that it was domestic; and that it was principally, though not entirely, of a moral nature. II. AN ALL-SUFFICIENCY OF CONSOLATION. "Although my house is not so with God." 1. And first it tells us that this "covenant" is everlasting. Its counsels and its contrivances were from eternity. 2. Secondly, he tells us that this "everlasting covenant" is ordered in all things. Nothing in it is left to any contingency, nothing left to the intermeddlings of men. 3. Thirdly, he tells us that this "covenant ordered in all things" is sure. The covenant of works made with Adam was soon destroyed; the national covenant of the Jews was soon destroyed; and the people, dispersed over the face of the earth, remain to this day a proverb and a by-word. But this covenant is unchangeable; it is as sure, as the truth of God, as the faithfulness of God can make it. 4. Fourthly, the importance he attached to it. "It is all my salvation," says he. All my salvation requires to be done is here, and all my salvation requires to be given is here. And how much is required? Is the pardon of our sins necessary? There it is. Is holiness necessary? There it is. Is strength necessary? He will put strength in us. Is grace necessary? This covenant gives it. Is glory necessary? It provides it. Is God necessary Himself, with all His relations and attributes? This is the grand provision in the covenant—"I will be their God, and they shall be My people." They have all of them a God, each a God for himself: a God to guide them, a God to guard them, a God to supply all their need from His riches in

glory by Christ Jesus. 5. He tells us also of the love he bare to it. It is "all my desire." What can I wish for besides? III. AN INSTRUCTIVE EXPERIENCE. 1. This experience of David calls upon you, in the first place, and says, see what variations there are in the views and the feelings even of the Godly. If it is now day with them, the day is neither clear nor dark, as Zechariah says, it is a mixture of both. Every thing with regard to them now is a chequered scene. The image of the Church now may be a bush burning with fire, and not consumed; and the motto of the Church should be, "Perplexed, but not in despair; cast down, but not destroyed." 2. This experience admonishes you, in the next place, and says, do not look for too much here. There are some persons, who idolize life; but after all, what is it found to be? In what condition, and at what period of it, does it effectually belie the language of Young, who says that, for solid happiness—

"Too low they build who build beneath the stars?"

They are "walking in a vain show," they are "disquieting themselves in vain;" they are seeking the living among the dead. 3. This experience admonishes you how to improve your afflictions; and how to render them, not only harmless, but even beneficial. And this will be the case, when, like David, we are turned towards Him, and ask, "Where is God my Maker, who giveth songs in the night?" "Though no affliction for the present is joyous, but grievous, nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby." The ploughman is not angry with the ground; but he drives the ploughshare through it to prepare it for the reception of the seed. The husbandman is not angry with the vine; but he cuts it, and prunes it, in order that it may bring forth more fruit. As constantly as the ox is in the field of labour, he must have the yoke on; and Jeremiah compares affliction to a yoke, and says, "It is good for a man to bear the yoke." Let but the Lord impose it upon us, and it will sit easy, and it will bear well. 4. This experience of David admonishes you not to cherish discontent, nor to dwell principally on the dark side of your condition, but to cherish cheerfulness, to look on the bright side. 5. What you are principally to derive from this experience is to see what resources genuine Godliness has. From what you have heard, you learn that it does not exempt its votaries from afflictions; but then, you see, it sustains them under those afflictions; it turns them, at least, into a blessing. (IV. *Jay.*) *The covenant of grace, a support under sorrow*:—Standing on the borders of the eternal world, David looks back to his humble original, and blesses that goodness which God had displayed to him, in elevating him to eminence both in the Church and the state.

I. EVEN THE CHILDREN OF GOD, THOSE WHO ARE WITHIN THE BONDS OF HIS COVENANT, MAY HAVE TO CONTEND WITH DOMESTIC AFFLICTIONS, MAY HAVE TO LAMENT THEIR ERRORS AND THEIR FALLS, AND MUST BE EXTENDED ON THE BED OF DEATH. II. THE NATURE OF THIS COVENANT. It was primarily made with the glorious Redeemer, as the head and surety of believers; but it is also made with all those who, by faith, accept that Saviour who has ratified it with His blood, and who make of this covenant thus sealed, "all their salvation and all their desire." 1. It is everlasting; it is, in the language of the apostle, "The eternal purpose which the Father purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." All the manifestations of it in time, and all the blessings which constantly flow from it, are only the accomplishment of the gracious designs that were formed infinite ages before a creature lived. 2. It is "ordered in all things;" planned and arranged by Him whose knowledge is infinite, and whose wisdom is unerring; by Him rendered so comprehensive that "all things," all possible exigencies, all conceivable events that can befall the Christian, are provided for; every difficulty, every trial, every tear, and every struggle, were foreseen; together with the effects to be produced by them. 3. This covenant is sure. If there be any truth in the promise and in the oath of Jehovah; if there be any strength in that mighty Redeemer, who is its surety, or any virtue in that blood which sealed it, then those who have a personal interest in it, may triumph in the stability of their hopes. (H. Kollock, D.D.) *A sure covenant*:—I. THE DESCRIPTION WHICH HE GIVES OF THIS GREAT COVENANT. 1. The time it is to last. It is "an everlasting covenant"—strictly everlasting—never, never to expire. 2. The completeness of its arrangements. It is "ordered in all things, and sure." The covenants of men are often very incomplete. Something, perhaps, hath been forgotten or lost sight of in the drawing of them up, which makes them almost good for nothing

to the parties they are made with. Some case, some circumstance, is unprovided for, which, as soon as it occurs, makes the covenant of none effect. Not so in respect of the covenant of grace made with sinners through a Saviour. No, that is all complete in its provisions. Complete in reference to God's requirements. For it satisfies His justice; it fulfils His truth; it displays His holiness; it magnifies His love; it sets forth His wisdom; it commends His mercy; it shows forth at once all His glorious perfections, and puts a song of praise into the lips of men and angels. And it is complete, again, in reference to man; nothing, nothing is there wanting in the salvation of Christ Jesus to make it everything poor sinners want. II. THE INTEREST WHICH DAVID STATES HIMSELF TO HAVE IN THIS EVER-LASTING COVENANT. "God hath made it," saith he, "with me." He had an assurance, then, that he was personally interested in this covenant. He could lay his hand on it and call it his—a covenant made particularly with himself. And, brethren, there is little comfort otherwise. It is a poor thing to look upon salvation, and to say, "This and that man have a part in it. The comfort is when we can bring it nearer home; when we can think, upon good grounds, 'I have a share in it.'" III. DAVID'S FEELINGS. 1. "All my salvation." Why that, in other words, is to tell us that he could most comfortably rest upon it, rest upon it altogether. 2. "This," saith he, this everlasting covenant of grace, "is all my desire." (*A. Roberts, M.A.*) *Consolations of the covenant of grace*:—"Yet"—this little word "yet" wraps up a great and sovereign cordial in it. "Though Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah be gone, and gone with many smarting aggravations too; yet hath He made with me a covenant; yet I have this sheet anchor left to secure me: God's covenant with me, in relation to Christ, this underprops and shores up my heart. As all the rivers run into the sea, and there is the congregation of all the waters; so all the promises and comforts of the Gospel are gathered into the covenant of grace, and there is the congregation of all the sweet streams of refreshment, that are dispersed throughout the Scriptures. The covenant is the storehouse of promises, the shop of cordials and rare elixirs, to revive us in all our faintings; though, alas, most men know no more what are their virtues or where to find them, than an illiterate rustic put into an apothecary's shop. (*Flavel.*) *Divine covenant compensates earthly disappointment*:—"It is wise, when we are disappointed in one thing, to set over against it a hopeful expectancy of another, like the farmer who said, 'If the peas don't pay, let us hope the beans will.'" Yet it would be idle to patch up one rotten expectation with another of like character, for that would only make the rent worse. It is better to turn from the fictions of the sanguine worldling to the facts of the believer in the Word of the Lord. Then, if we find no profit in our trading with earth, we shall fall back upon our heart's treasure in heaven. We may lose our gold, but we can never lose our God. The expectation of the righteous is from the Lord, and nothing that comes from Him shall ever fail.

Ver. 10. **His hand clave unto the sword.**—*A heroic sword-grasp*:—"In the roll of honour of King David's army, there was one, Eleazar by name, who was counted worthy to stand with the first three mighty men of David, because 'he arose and smote the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clave unto the sword, and the Lord wrought a great victory that day, and the people returned after him only to spoil.'" In this account we see that his heroic sword-grasp was looked upon as a proof of his valour, and was made the mark of his honour and of his reward. I. WE OBSERVE THAT ELEAZAR'S GRASP SHOWS HIS APPRECIATION OF THE SWORD AS A WEAPON BOTH FOR DEFENCE AND FOR AGGRESSION. 1. We cannot do much with a weapon in which we have little or no confidence. 2. The sword of the Spirit is the only weapon by which we can gain a great victory. 3. The efficiency of God's Word does not consist in the mere letter, but in the doctrines and duties which it teaches, and in the virtues which it commends—such as truthfulness, justice, purity, benevolence, holiness. Our grasp of these shows our appreciation of them. II. ELEAZAR GRASPED HIS SWORD FIRMLY, AND DID NOT RELAX HIS HOLD. 1. The enemy, knowing the power of the sword, will seek to wrest it from one's grasp. If the grasp be weak, a sly thrust at the "Mistakes of Moses," or a bold, materialistic blow at the "Miracles of Jesus," may break the grasp, and then we are helpless. 2. Worldliness, or avarice, or appetite, or lust, or malice, may so loosen our grasp upon the principles of the Word that we shall be compelled to surrender. 3. It requires true heroism to hold on to principle when "the men of Israel are gone away," and "the Philis-

times are arrayed against "us. 4. A true soldier will die rather than lose his sword. III. ELEAZAR'S GRASP WAS MADE FIRMER BY THE CONFLICT. 1. Heroic conflict requires and produces an heroic sword-grasp. 2. A true hero does not stop to count the enemy nor to consider a compromise, nor to hide himself through fear of ridicule or other evil weapons; but putting his strength into his sword he rushes on to victory. 3. Christian conflict is not controversy, but an heroic Christian life which requires and produces a firm grasp on the words and the principles of the Gospel. 4. Jesus with this sword met and repulsed Satan. (Matt. iv. 10.) 5. When we are alone, as Jesus was, and as Eleazar was, we can gain our greatest victories. IV. ELEAZAR'S FIRMNESS OF GRASP, AND FIERCENESS OF CONFLICT, MADE HIS SWORD CLEAVE UNTO HIS HAND. 1. Whatever we cling to, shapes the grasp, and will, in proportion to the strength of the grasp, cleave unto the hand. 2. The more firmly we grasp, and the more efficiently we use, the words and the principles of the Word, the more deeply will they be impressed into our nature and cleave unto us. 3. When the sword cleaves unto the hand, and the hand grows weary, we can still fight on. 4. The sword of the Spirit has adhered so firmly to the hand of many a hero in God's army that even death could not break the grasp. V. ELEAZAR'S HEROIC SWORD-GRASP WAS MADE THE MARK OF HIS HEROISM AND OF HIS REWARD. 1. The true marks of honour are obtained through conflict and suffering. 2. The cleaving of the sword unto the hand is the mark of God's greatest heroes: the prophets, apostles, martyrs, reformers, missionaries, and others. 3. Clinging to the true and the right until the true and the right cleave unto us, is as heroic in the peculiar temptations of our day as was Eleazar's conflict. 4. The marks of our sword-grasp will be our badge of honour in eternity. Let us, then, be assured that if we rightly appreciate the sword of the Spirit, grasp it firmly, and use it efficiently until it cleave unto the hand, we also shall gain a great victory in the conflicts of life, and in the kingdom of heaven a glorious reward. (*J. Saxtell.*) *The warrior's scars*:—I want you to hold the truth with undetachable grip, and I want you to strike so hard for God that it will react, and while you take the sword, the sword will take you. Soldiers coming together are very apt to recount their experiences, and to show their scars. Here is a soldier who pulls up his sleeve and says, "There I was wounded. I have had no use of that limb since the gunshot fracture." Oh, when the battle of life is over, and the resurrection has come, and our bodies rise from the dead, will we have on us any scars of bravery for God? Christ will be there all covered with scars. And all heaven will shout aloud as they look at those scars. Ignatius will be there, and he will point out the place where the tooth and the paw of the lion seized him in the Coliseum; and John Huss will be there, and he will show where the coal first scorched the foot on that day when his spirit took wing of flame from Constance. McMillan, and Campbell, and Freeman, American missionaries in India, will be there—the men who with their wives and children went down in the awful massacre at Cawnpore, and they will show where the daggers of the Sepoys struck them. The Waldenses will be there, and they will show where their bones were broken on that day the Piedmontese soldiery pitched them over the rocks. And there will be those there who took care of the sick and who looked after the poor, and they will have evidences of earthly exhaustion. And Christ, with His scarred hand waving over the scarred multitude, will say, "You suffered with Me on earth; now be glorified with Me." (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *The sword of the valiant*:—Of the old hero the minstrel sung, "With his Yemen sword for aid, ornament it carried none but the notches on the blade." What nobler declaration of honour can any good man seek after than his scar of service, his losses for the cross, his reproaches for Christ's sake, his being worn out in the Master's service. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The sword for use*:—The glittering sword with its keen edge and jewelled hilt is an object of beauty as a work of art, yet it is harmless. But in the muscular grip of a soldier's hand and swung with a purpose and an aim, it is a dread weapon. So with truth wielded with skill and power by the consecrated preacher. *Hitting hard*:—It is told of Abraham Lincoln that once, when quite a young man, he saw men and women put on the block, exhibited for sale, and bought like cattle. He saw the humbling and degrading familiarities which the buyers took with the human chattels, saw the looks of dumb and piteous agony which stole across the poor black faces as wives were sold away from their husbands, and children torn from their mother's arms; and he forced his way out the ring and with flaming eyes, and voice husky

with suppressed passion, said to a companion, gripping him by the arm, "If ever I get a chance to hit at this thing I'll hit hard, by the Eternal God." "My chance has come," he exclaimed, later in life, "and I mean to hit hard."

Ver. 11. Shammah the son of Agee the Hararite.—*Shammah*:—I wish you to look at the deed of this man Shammah, who stood in the midst of the plot of lentils and defended it, and slew the Philistines. The one idea that leaps up from this narrative is that which you often find through Scripture, that in the day of defeat and disaster all God wants is one whole-hearted man. If the Lord can only get a beginning made, if He can, amidst all the disgraceful stampede and rout, get but one man to stop running, one to stop flying, one soul to cease from unbelief and panic and fear, and begin to trust in Him, there and then the tide of battle shall be turned. Shammah did, that is to say, the unexpected. Fleeing had been the order of the day for Israel, and pursuing had been the order of the day for Philistia. A very pretty game, truly! We shout and you run. We appear, and you disappear. You sow in the spring—it was very kind of you, Israelites—and we step in in the autumn and take the harvest. It is a wonderfully nicely arranged system for Philistia, whatever it may be for Israel. And, just so; don't we seem to make nothing of our Christianity (meaning by that, Christ), as against the powers of Philistia? Look at them in London to-day. What are we doing? Where are we gaining? Speaking broadly, it is invisible. Where are we defeated? Everywhere. The world laughing at us, scandal upon scandal, tale upon tale, wreck upon wreck, ruin upon ruin. Drink, lust, uncleanness, commercial dishonour, everything that belongs to the Devil, strong and vigorous, successful and sweeping; and everything that belongs to Jesus Christ, like those dispirited Israelites, weak and scattering as a flock of sheep. It is bad enough. But just as then, so I believe still, if here and there some man would only understand that in all this there is a trumpet being blown for rallying, times for the individual and for the community might be mightily changed. There is Shammah, and what seems to be sweeping through the breast of—I was going to say the poor man, the noble man—was this: "This is too bad! I am sick and tired of this. Are we for ever to sow in the spring, and are these Philistines to reap our crop in the autumn? Are we for ever to be at their mercy? Are we for ever to be trodden under foot and scattered like sheep? Death is preferable to this running and running and running; and in God's great name I stand to-day—Death or Victory! If some of us would do that we would be big Christians before night. Just where you have always yielded, my hardly beset brother or sister, try how it will work to stand to-day. Resist this onset that always before has made a clean sweep of you, and what will happen? It will be what always happens: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you"—he is a bigger coward than you are. "Whom resist steadfast in the faith." Then, it was a big fight for very little. "He defended a plot of lentils." Not much to fight for, a plot of lentils! But, coarse horse-food after all, as I believe it was, it was Israel's lentils, and Philistia had no right to them. It was God's, and not theirs; and little as it seemed to be to make a fight for, Shammah stepped into the middle of the plot, like one who would say, "It is mine, it is my countrymen's, it is my God's, and ye shall not have it if one man can prevent it." I wish some one here, young or old man, would, like Shammah, stand in the middle of the wreck that is left, and have one fight for it. Although what is left may have no more proportion to what used to be or what might have been than a patch of lentils has to a broad-acred farm, yet in God's name stand in the middle of the wreck, and see what will happen. That is all God asks: Stand, stand in the midst, and then see! If the Church of Christ would only get possessed of Shammah's spirit, and in all the howling wreck that is at home and abroad, if she would stand and fight, there would be such a central victory as would tell to the furthestmost circumference. I think I see him. He is a sight for dispirited Christians, a sight for all poor backsliders. You are defeated, overcome, overborne. Old sins, like Philistines, have come back on you; redeemed though you call yourself, old sins have come back for the last month or year and more, and they have been driving you before them pitifully, somewhat contemptuously—secret sins, or open sins, or both combined. You have lost heart, the roaring flood in its strength has swept you away, especially the weakest thing that ever dared to call itself Christian man, believing man, redeemed man. Now, what are you to do? In God's name let us all try it, let us all do what Shammah did—stand in the

middle of what is left. What shall you do? My brother, late in the day as it is, and although night is coming near, although you are not now the man you used to be, and a hundred voices in your ear say to you, "It is too late to retrieve the past," those hundred voices are a hundred lies and liars. It is not too late: stand in the middle of the wreck left, in God's great name. Stand, stand! you might die more than conqueror yet. Over you, there may yet be heard in Heaven the shout of victory: Stand! Shammah stood in the midst of it, and though it was not worth two half-crowns of any man's money, he defended it, and slew the Philistines, and God came down from heaven to win a patch of lentils! For the Lord loves victory, and the Lord hates defeat, and the only thing He wants is to get at His adversary through some faithful, upright, believing soul. (John McNeill.)

Vers. 13—17. **And three of the thirty chiefs went down.**—*The dear-bought draught*:—I do not think that this was what you might call a mere sentimental longing. David was strong in true and real sentiment; but I do not think that when we have him pictured here longing and sighing, that he was, as some have supposed, merely suffering from passing home-sickness. Some take that view, and imagine that he just momentarily gave way to one of those whims or morbidities that come across the spirits of otherwise brave and earnest men, and make them as weakly sentimental as their neighbours. When I read that "David longed," and I hear his longing set forth, I like to think of him as showing here something of his deepest and best. The Spirit of God would make us know that He understands us when we are like David. There is a depth in us; a deep below, perhaps, what we ourselves, in our commonplaces, were unaware of. The hard-beaten bottom or floor of our soul sometimes gives way. Many a time and oft, when we are not thinking, or ever we are aware, these common, ordinary, worldly hearts of ours are cleft as by a great chasm and depth, through which there comes, like the breath of the mountain wind sighing through a gorge, a great, inexhaustible "Oh!" Like David, we long! "Oh, for youth; oh for renewal; oh for freshness; oh to get rid of what is making me tame, and flat, and dull; of the earth, earthy; and of the world, worldly!" You see, there was a great deal in that water. There is no water like the water we drank at home, when we were young. Is that sentimental? Is not that feeling derived from something deep and true within the soul? It is more than ordinary water. What memory brings into mind of all the years that have come and gone between! And this "water of the well" is the type, and symbol, and picture of it—the rush of the spring, with the sheen and the bubble of the water. We are not so utterly dead, and dark, and given up as we seem to-day. God can open rivers in dry places. He can pierce down, down through all the mortification and all the corruption; through all the sand and sawdust; all that is earthly and carnal—down to the quick. Then up there comes that burdened sigh—"Oh for living water! oh for cooling streams!" Rightly used, it leads the longing soul back to more than original purity. And this is also a type of the cry of the backslider who once knew the joys of salvation; who once lived in Bethlehem, the House of Bread; and drank of the well that bubbles up from beneath its walls. Ah, yes, we repeat it again, there is a great deal in a drink, in what it suggests. Oh, may you get that suggestion and the satisfaction of it to-day. "Oh! that I could get back to God, the living God!" Do not go easily over that word: David longed. Oh that God would give us to-day longing hearts, to find Him out. For you will never find out God by greater intellect; never by wider reading and deeper study. This is the road to God; this is the "new organ" by which we receive the truth that alone can satisfy. "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." May it be given us to-day to taste, and see that God is good. David's desire was gratified. The three mighty men said, "He shall have it." Shall I say one had wisdom, and the other love, and the other power; and these three together scattered the powers of Philistia? Oh! don't you see how the Gospel breaks out upon us? You yearn for something the possession of which would be the renewing of your youth; the lack of which is decay; and your longing is heard, and your prayer answered before you know it. The Three Mighties, the Blessed and Glorious Three, Wisdom, Love, Might, have broken the host of the Philistines, and have brought to us—right to our parched lips—before our sighing is done, that bubbling spring for lack of which we die. I knew the Gospel was there. I knew it when I read the story. I felt it more deeply the longer I

studied it. Do not accuse me of dragging things in—of putting the Gospel where it is not. The grand key to open the Old Testament is Christ—put Him in wherever He will fit, and certainly He will fit here. Still further, the story deepens in interest. “Nevertheless, he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord.” Here we have the very crown and flower of Gospel teaching. What ought this great love of God to produce in our hearts? What did this great love of these three mighty men produce in David’s heart? It begot in him a like spirit again. They flung themselves away for him; he flung himself, and them with him, back upon God, the Fount and Spring of all. So with us: Christ has brought us pardon, and peace, and everlasting life. But let Christ’s sacrifice produce a self-sacrificing spirit in you—as Christ flung Himself away for you, so fling your life away for God—and you will enjoy it. It has been brought to you; lay yourself, body, soul, and spirit, on the altar—it is your reasonable sacrifice. Give now your money, for money is a covenant blessing. It is one rill of the fountain that comes from the well—the spring of Bethlehem. (J. McNeill.) *Longing for the water of the well of Bethlehem*:—It must have been a rare and imposing assembly that came to crown David king of all Israel. The Chronicles record the names and numbers of the principal contingents that were present on that memorable occasion. The Philistines, however, were watching the scene with profound dissatisfaction. So long as David was content to rule as a petty king in Hebron, leaving them free to raid the northern tribes at their will, they were not disposed to interfere; but when they heard that they had anointed David king over all Israel, all the Philistines went down to seek David. They probably waited until the august ceremonial was over, and the thousands of Israel had dispersed to their homes, and then poured over into Judah in such vast numbers—spreading themselves in the Valley of Ephraim, and cutting off David’s connection with the northern tribes—that he was forced to retire with his mighty men and faithful six hundred to the hold, which, by comparison of passages, must have been the celebrated fortress-cave of Adullam (2 Sam. v. 17 and xxii. 13, 14.)

I. A SUDDEN REVERSAL OF FORTUNE. It was but as yesterday that David was the centre of the greatest assembly of warriors that his land had seen for many generations. With national acclaim he had been carried to the throne of a united people. He realised that he was fondly enshrined in the hearts of his countrymen; but to-day he is driven from Hebron, where for more than seven years he had dwelt in undisturbed security, back to that desolate mountain fastness, in which years before he had taken refuge from the hatred of Saul. It was a startling reversal of fortune, a sudden overcasting of a radiant noon, a bolt out of a clear sky. Such sudden reversals come to us all—to wean us from confidence in men and things; to stay us from building our nest on any earth-grown tree; to force us to root ourselves in God alone. Child of mortality, such lessons will inevitably be set before thee to learn. In the hour of most radiant triumphs, thou must remember Him who has accounted thee fit to be his steward; thou must understand that thy place and power are thine only as His gift, and as a trusteeship for His glory. This contrast between the anointing of Hebron and the conflict of Adullam presents a striking analogy to the experiences of our Lord, who, after His anointing at the banks of the Jordan, was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness of Judæa to be forty days tempted of the devil. It is the law of the spiritual life. The bright light of popularity is too strong and searching for the perfect development of the Divine life. Loneliness, solitude, temptation, conflict—these are the flames that burn the Divine colours into our characters; such the processes through which the blessings of our anointing are made available for the poor, the broken-hearted, the prisoners, the captives, and the blind.

II. GLEAMS OF LIGHT. The misty gloom of these dark hours was lit by some notable incidents. The mighty men excelled themselves in single combats with the Philistine champions. What marvels may be wrought by the inspiration of a single life! We cannot but revert in thought to that hour when, hard by that very spot, an unknown youth stepped forth from the affrighted hosts of Israel to face the dreaded Goliath. Thus the lives of great men light up and inspire other lives. They mould their contemporaries. The inspiration of a Wesley’s career raises a great army of preachers. The enthusiasm of a Carey, a Livingstone, a Paton stirs multitudes of hearts with missionary zeal. Those who had been the disciples of Jesus became his apostles and martyrs. His own life of self-sacrifice for men has become the beacon-fire that has summoned myriads from the lowland valley of selfishness to the surrender, the self-denial, the anguish

of the Cross, if only they might be permitted to follow in his steps. III. A TOUCHING INCIDENT.—Adullam was not far from Bethlehem. One sultry afternoon he was a semi-prisoner in the hold. Over yonder, almost within sight, a garrison of Philistines held Bethlehem. Suddenly an irresistible longing swept across him to taste the water of the well of Bethlehem, which was by the gate. Almost involuntarily he gave expression to the wish. How often we sigh for the waters of the well of Bethlehem! We go back on our past, and dwell longingly on never-to-be-forgotten memories. Oh to see again that face; to feel the touch of that gentle hand; to hear that voice! Oh to be again as in those guileless happy years, when the forbidden fruit had never been tasted! Oh for that fresh vision of life, that devotion to the Saviour's service, that new glad outburst of love! Oh that one would give us a drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is beside the gate! They are vain regrets; there are no mighties strong enough to break through the serried ranks of the years, and fetch back the past. But the quest of the soul may yet be satisfied by what awaits it in Him who said, "He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but he that drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst: but it shall be in him a spring of water, rising up to everlasting life." Not in Bethlehem's well, but in Him who was born there, shall the soul's thirst be quenched for ever. IV. THE OVERTHROW OF THE PHILISTINES.—Prosperity had not altered the attitude of David's soul, in its persistent waiting on God. As he was when first he came to Hebron, so he was still; and in this hour of perplexity; he inquired of the Lord, saying, "Shall I go up against the Philistines? Wilt Thou deliver them into mine hand?" In reply, he received the Divine assurance of certain victory; and when the battle commenced, it seemed to him as if the Lord Himself were sweeping them before Him like a winter flood, which, rushing down the mountain-side, carries all before it in its impetuous rush. Again the Philistines came up to assert their olden supremacy, and again David waited on the Lord for direction. It was well that he did so, because the plan of campaign was not as before. Those that rely on God's co-operation must be careful to be in constant touch with Him. The aid which was given yesterday in one form, will be given to-morrow in another. In the first battle the position of the Philistines was carried by assault; in the second it was turned by ambush. Sometimes we have to march, sometimes to halt; now we are called to action, again to suffering; in this battle to rush forward like a torrent; in the next to glide stealthily to ambush and wait. We must admit nothing stereotyped in our methods. What did very well in the house of Dorcas will not suit in the stately palace of Cornelius. Let there be living faith in God. Then shall we know what God can do as a mighty co-operating force in our lives, making a breach in our foes, and marching his swift-stepping legions to our succour. (F. B. Meyer, B.A.) *The well of Bethlehem*.—This incident, which is strangely unlike the ordinary records of history, and has about it the air of an old-world romance, is here narrated, not in chronological order, but in a review of David's life, when that life had well-nigh reached its close, and its leading events stood out in their true proportions. It occurred immediately after David had been made king at Hebron, where there was war between him and the Philistines, who had pushed their way to Bethlehem, and threatened still further advance. In times of deprivation and danger, in great crises, which life itself is hanging in the balance, the mind reverts to early and familiar scenes, and invests them with a strong and pathetic charm. The man, whose boyhood was spent at the seaside, longs for a breath of its bracing air. The Swiss mountaineer, far away from home, listens to the songs of his early days, and is seized with a restless impulse to return. The old Highland woman, dying in the Red River settlements, surrounded by miles of prairies, can find no comfort save in remembering the bens and glens which she loved so well. "Oh, doctor dear, for a wee bit of a hill!" Surely we can understand it. Heaven lay about us in our infancy, and, from the rough world in which we dwell it is pleasant to look back and revive the vanished glory. David's wish seemed foolish and vain, for the foe was encamped between him and the well. To reach it was all but impossible. David no doubt knew that, and his longing was the keener in consequence. We often fail to value our privileges until we have lost them. We know their worth only when they are beyond our reach. But the expression of the king's longing was heard. They listened to his faintest wish and made it their law. It was a noble and heroic act, a deed of splendid daring,

the mere recital of which rebukes our selfishness and covers our cowardice with contempt. 1. The incident affords a remarkable instance of David's power to inspire devotion. He could have been no sordid, common-place, self-seeking usurper for whom they did this; no slave of greedy ambition, awayed only by the lust of power. He was manly, trustful, and chivalrous, as a king should be, and the enthusiasm and fidelity of his soldiers were but the answering reflection of his own nobility and grace. 2. The incident exemplifies the power and inventiveness of love. Love will laugh at impossibilities. It is quick to devise means of fulfilling its desires, and though it be tender it is also courageous. It is gentle, but full of power, and can set its face like a flint against all opposition. Love to Christ will make us pure, strong, brave and victorious. We shall scorn to serve Him with that which costs us nothing, and for His sake we shall count all things as loss. When David had in his hand the water, which only love strong as death could have secured, he refused to drink it, and poured it on the ground unto the Lord. How fickle and capricious! we have heard men say. Not so! Far other feelings prompted the refusal. There is a higher law than self-gratification. David was the very soul of chivalry, and felt that he had no right to the water which had been brought as by priestly hands and in a cup that had on it the marks of sacrifice. To have drunk it himself would have been sacrilege. There was but One Being worthy of it—He who had inspired the heroism and devotion which secured it. David saw in the act of the captains who had jeopardised their lives for him a love, a courage, and a self-surrender of which no mortal was the fitting object. 4. The action of David's friends is a witness on both its sides to the unselfishness and grandeur of our nature. It shows that we have other than material instincts to satisfy, that we live not by bread alone. Physical gratification, bodily ease and comfort, prosperity in all its forms leave untouched vast spaces of our worldly thought and aspiration and need; and if we possess only what they can yield, the noblest elements of our nature will be feeble and impoverished, aye, and will become the means of our acutest suffering and most dreaded retribution. When the depths of our being are stirred, we think of God and our relation to Him. We live by admiration, love, and hope. There is something dearer than material pleasure, personal safety, and even life itself to the man who has been entranced by the vision of the Divine. He reveres the majesty of truth and duty, fidelity, honour, God. It is not necessary that we should be at ease, with an abundance of pleasure and of wealth. It is not even necessary that we should continue to live, but it is necessary that we should be true, pure, upright, godly; and to fulfil this great law of our being there is absolutely no sacrifice which we should not be prepared to make. (*J. Stuart.*) *Courage*:—When the brave and ill-fated English envoy, Cavagnari, was warned by the Ameer of Afghanistan that his life was not safe at Cabul, he coolly replied that if he were shot down, there were others ready to take his place. Whilst one cannot but honour the courage of such a man, and feel a desire to throw a wreath upon his grave, it would be the greatest possible error to imagine that the commonest spheres of civil and prosaic life, do not, many and many a time, yield instances of an equally noble, though less showy heroism. (*J. Thain Davidson, D.D.*) *Energetic Men*:—We love upright, energetic men. Pull them this way, and then that way, and the other, and they only bend, but never break. Knock them down, and in a trice they are on their feet. Bury them in the mud, and in an hour they will be out and bright. They are not ever yawning away existence, or walking about the world as if they had come into it with only half their soul; you cannot keep them down, you cannot destroy them. But for these the world would soon degenerate. They are the salt of the earth. Who but they start any noble project? They build our cities and rear our manufactories; they whiten the ocean with their sails, and they blacken the heavens with the smoke of their steam vessels and furnace fires; they draw treasures from the mine; they plough the earth. Blessings on them! Look to them, young men, and take courage; imitate their example; catch the spirit of their energy and enterprise, and you will deserve, and no doubt command, success. (*Christian Weekly.*)

Ver. 15. And David longed, and said, Oh, that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem.—*Craving to enjoy a past comforter*:—The scene in this chapter was one of the remarkable events in David's life. While hiding in the cave he saw from its rocky cliffs, across the

green landscape, the place of the dear, familiar well whose cooling beverage had often quenched his parched lips when a youth. The picture so revived cravings of his heart that he gave expression to the innermost feelings of his life.

I. THE GRAPHIC DESCRIPTION WHICH DAVID GAVE OF THE WELL. 1. The right appellation was truly stated. "The well of Bethlehem." It is the most noted, and appears to have made a deep impression on his mind, which the lapse of years had failed to erase. Is not this illustrative of "the well of Bethlehem" sunk at the birth of Christ? Before this time men had drunk of impure water, but when God was manifest in the flesh He became the well without an equal. It is the well of mercy, peace, consolation, and love. 2. The distinctive mark was clearly given. "Which is by the gate." We need in our longings to do the same, as there are many wells—science, arts, philosophy, and literature, and the well of salvation. We must be distinct, as our lives can only be satisfied with the "well of Bethlehem," whose bubblings are ready to give heavenly refreshment. We find it by the Holy Communion table, the spiritual devotion meetings, etc. 3. The proper occupant was fully proclaimed. "The water." Some wells are useless, being filled with rubbish or polluted streams; but the well named by David was faithfully doing its mission. Many wells with us are of no service—empty or impure.

II. THE EARNEST LONGING WHICH DAVID EXPRESSED. 1. The sight rekindled the thought of his heart. We wish to recall hallowed seasons and comforts. The sight of parent, teachers, and friends rekindle our hearts afresh with comfort and joy. We sigh to taste of the old streams, to sit by the side of loving parents, to hear the faithful entreaty of our teachers, to walk with the companions whose society we prized. 2. He gave utterance to the thought of his heart. David had keen aspirations and passionate longings, so that what he felt readily passed into words. He gave vent to his pent-up feelings. In the midst of the worry and battle of life the scenes of our past days are so vividly portrayed to the mental sight that we crave for the times and enjoyments that are gone. At such seasons we cannot contain our feelings, but give expression to them. In things spiritual it is the same; when we have gone from all the comforts and happiness of religion a time dawns when we cannot any longer keep the state of mind to ourselves. We cry out to be satisfied with the living water from the well of Bethlehem. 3. The unconscious entreaty for brave help. David knew that Bethlehem had been taken by the enemy. There were great obstacles in the way of obtaining a drink from the well of his ancestors. Probably he little thought that his pathetic wish was heard. We often imperil the lives and characters of others by unconsciously speaking what we feel. 4. The deep craving was of a personal character. David knew what he wanted. It was not that common, foolish wish for something fresh and new, but he sought to taste of that which he had often been refreshed with before. The reason why we have not much enjoyment in this life is because our cravings are indefinite.

LESSONS:—1. We never realise the worth of our best comforts until we are separated from them. 2. After a season of spiritual declension how anxiously we crave to drink again of the eternal spring. (*Alfred Buckley.*) *The well by the gate:*—**I. THE GOSPEL A WELL OF BETHLEHEM.** David had known hundreds of wells of water, but he wanted to drink from that particular one; and he thought nothing could slake his thirst like that; and, unless your soul and mine can get access to the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, we must die. That fountain is the well of Bethlehem. It was dug in the night. It was dug by the light of a lantern—the star that hung down over the manger. It was dug not at the gate of Cæsar's palaces—not in the park of a Jerusalem bargain-maker. It was dug in a barn. The camels lifted their weary heads to listen as the work went on; the shepherds, unable to sleep because the heavens were filled with bands of music, came down to see the opening of the well. The angels of God, at the first gush of the living water, dipped their chalices of joy into it, and drank to the health of earth and heaven, as they cried: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace." Sometimes, in our modern times, the water is brought through the pipes of the city to the very nostrils of the horses or cattle; but this well in the Bethlehem barn was not so much for the beasts that perish as for our race—thirst-smited, desert-travelled, simoom-struck. Oh! my soul, weary with sin, stoop down and drink to-day out of that Bethlehem well.

II. THIS GOSPEL IS A CAPTURED WELL. David remembered the time when that good water of Bethlehem was in the possession of his ancestors; his father drank there, his mother drank there. He remembered how that water tasted when he

was a boy, and came up from play. We never forget the old well we used to drink from when we were boys or girls. There was something in it which blessed the lips and refreshed the brows better than anything we have found since. As we think of that old well, the memories of the past flow into each other like crystalline drops, sun-glinted; and, all the more, we remember that the hand that used to lay hold of the rope, and the hearts that beat against the well-curb, are still now. We never get over these reminiscences. George P. Morris, the great song writer of this country, once said to me that his song, "Woodman, spare that tree," was sung in a great concert hall, and the memories of early life were so wrought upon the audience by that song, "Woodman, spare that tree," that, after the song was done, an aged man arose in the audience, overwhelmed with emotion, and said, "Sir, will you please tell me whether the woodman really spared the tree?" We never forget the tree under which we played. We never forget the fountain at which we drank. Alas! for the man who has no early memories. David thought of that well, and he wanted a drink of it; but he remembered that the Philistines had captured it. And this is true of this Gospel well. The Philistines have at times captured it. When we come to take a full, old-fashioned drink of pardon and comfort, don't their swords of indignation and sarcasm flash? Why, the sceptics tell us we cannot come to that fountain. They say the water is not fit to drink anyhow. Depend upon it that well will come into our possession again, though it has been captured. If there be not three anointed men in the Lord's host with enough consecration to do the work, then the swords will leap from Jehovah's bucklers, and the eternal three will descend—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost—conquering for our dying race the way back again to "the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate." III. THE GOSPEL WELL IS A WELL AT THE GATE. Do you know that that well was at the gate, so that nobody could go into Bethlehem without going right past it? And so it is with this Gospel well—it is at the gate. 1. It is at the gate of purification. We cannot wash away our sins unless with that water. 2. This well of the Gospel is at the gate of comfort. There is life in the well at the gate. "All things work together for good to those who love God." 3. This Gospel well is at the gate of heaven. After you have been on a long journey, and you come in all bedusted and tired to your house, the first thing you want is refreshing ablation; and I am glad to know that after we get through the pilgrimage of this world—the hard dusty pilgrimage—we will find a well at the gate. In that one wash away will go our sins and sorrows. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *Memories of childhood*:—The incident belongs to that period in David's life when he was an outlaw, when Saul was hunting him and he was hiding with his ragged followers in various mountains and caves. I. THERE ARE TIMES IN EVERY LIFE WHEN WE ARE REMINDED OF THE WELL OF BETHLEHEM, and wish in vain that we could drink of that well again. A children's anniversary always brings one of these times to grown-up people. I mean times when our thoughts are carried back to early days, and we almost sigh as David did because we cannot cross over to them again. We have visions of happy wells of which we drank in the dear young days, and from which we are now separated by a barrier of years and other things. And there are other things which we should like to return to if it were in any way possible—the leisure, the golden opportunities, the school days, and the wells of knowledge, the hours which we thought so little of and for the most part wasted when we had them, the books we might have read, the things we might have learned, the fitness for life's work we might have gained. Most of us would be glad to have those chances repeated. And we have all longings and regrets sadder than these. All of us, I say, though some have reason to feel them more than others. Certain other things have left us which the child had—a certain stock of happy innocence and purity and simple faith. There were days when we knew little of evil; when we had no thought which we wished to hide, when our feet had not been in any crooked ways; when our minds were not defiled; when no chains of habit held us bound, and no fierce passions within drove us to wrongdoing. It was our Garden of Eden, and the angel with the flaming sword stops our return. This is what we mean by the wells of Bethlehem. Or, as Tennyson expresses it—

"The tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me."

II. We are reminded by this story that **THERE ARE BETTER THINGS IN LIFE THAN THE WELL OF BETHLEHEM.** David here was crying for his vanished childhood, and in a moment certain things happened which proved to him that he was richer as a man than he had ever been as a child. For one thing, he had won friendships that were faithful to him even unto death. There are better things than the glory of childhood, just as the gnarled, strong, winter-worn oak is nobler than the slender sapling with its first shoots of green. God did not send us into the world to be always children, but to be strong, long-suffering, serviceable men and women; to make friends and deserve their friendship; to learn patience through sorrow and courage, by facing difficulties, and take a real soldier's part in the great battle of life. And if we are doing that in a measure there is no need to sigh for our Bethlehem days. (*J. G. Greenhough, M.A.*) *The memory of boyhood*:—David was feeling the strong pressure of memory. He was living again in his boyhood days. What he said was no doubt only a sentiment. Other wells were just as refreshing, and their waters as cool as this well of his old home, but for the moment David was living in the past, and his thirst for water, which he drank in childhood could be taken, I think, as a longing for a draught of the purity and the abundance of all that which went to make life happy when he was a boy. Life is not all plain sailing for anyone, and so for a brief hour, amid the pressure of your daily business and toil, you step aside from the hurrying crowds and stop to rest awhile in the presence of God and to think. 1. The old simple faith. The water may be taken as typifying and standing for faith, the faith which the child always seems to drink in from any religious-minded teacher. Those were the days when faith came simply and easily to you; but you have been out into the world since then. 2. The dangers of young manhood. Is there any secret sin in your life, some temptation to impurity, some yielding to that degrading sin of intemperance, some playing with that modern vice of gambling which spoils and mars and destroys so many lives? Is there anything which you know is fouling the purity of that religious youth that you had as a boy, which is clogging up the stream and making it, alas! very muddy indeed? Well, do you sigh and long to-day like David, for that pure stream, so fresh, so abundant, which satisfies, that deep thirst for God which you had in the days gone by, before sin and doubt had crept in? Thank God if you do, it shows your heart is still in the right place, and that your life is not turned away so much from God as perhaps at times you may have suspected. Will you renew that faith to-day? 3. The one standard. Remember, there is only one standard put before us all, the highest of all standards—the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." (*W. F. J. Robbards.*) *Costly water*:—This gift of water was associated with memories of early days. It is wonderful how little sometimes will bring back old times to those who have wandered far, in time or place, from the scenes of childhood's years. It is always so. "To this day," says a French writer, wearied with his work in Paris, and thinking longingly of a quiet holiday he once spent in Algeria, "to this day I cannot think of that siesta in the tent without regret and longing; but on that afternoon, I must own, in that country, I thirsted for Paris." When in Paris he thirsts for Algeria, and when in Algeria he thirsts for Paris. So David, when in Bethlehem as a boy, hoped likely for better days, and now, looking back, he thinks there could not be anything better than those old times over again. Cherish your dreams by all means, but, at the time time, learn to prize the present, and to make the most and best of your opportunities now. Try to see the present—its beauty and its value—as you will be sure to see it if you are spared to look back from after years. 2. This gift of water would always be associated in David's mind with the love that brought it. What a splendid gift it was! Only a drink of water, but it was turned, as it were, into sacramental wine by the love that brought it. Just so is it that God values our gifts. The best of earthly gifts is poor, but if it is given with a hearty spirit it will be graciously accepted. Some one has said that God cares more for adverbs than for verbs; that is, more for how a thing is done than for what is done. "Do it heartily as to the Lord," says St. Paul. The important word is not the verb "do," but the adverb "heartily." 3. David felt that he must associate this gift in a special way with God. It was one of the finest things he had ever had done to him in his life. Men's lives had been in jeopardy to get it. It was too rich an offering to make use of only for his own gratification, and he poured it out unto the Lord. (*J. S. Mauer, M.A.*)

Vers. 16, 17. **Nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out before the Lord.**—*The sacredness of life*:—This event is probably to be referred to the time which immediately succeeded David's accession to the throne over an undivided people. (2 Sam. v. 3, 17.) I. **THE SACREDNESS OF LIFE.** To the Hebrew the blood was the vital principle (Gen. iv. 4.) Hence it was not to be eaten. Even the blood of a hunted animal or bird was to be reverently covered with dust (Lev. xvii. 13.) Because of its sacredness it was used in the temple worship in acts of consecration (Exod. xxix. 20), and in acts of propitiation (Lev. iv. 6), and in its Divine sacredness, as flowing from the Incarnate Word, it was poured out for that "full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world." So, too, the solemn act of David expressed the fact that life is a sacred thing. 1. With what mysteries is it linked, and mankind has ever associated the mysterious with the sacred. In what manner did life, in its most rudimentary form, enter into a world that till then had been lifeless? How wondrous is the chain of life—each following link made of more precious material and more "curiously wrought"—that runs up from its first appearing to man, to the angels, and to the Eternal! 2. How strangely is life interwoven with life, husband and wife, child and parent, brother and brother, friend and friend. Weakness is linked to strength, and folly to wisdom; while the weakness that is wise is helped by and yet delivers the strength that is foolish. "No man liveth to himself" in the economy of God. 3. What possibilities lie undeveloped in life. The child that slumbers in its cradle may be a Cræsus, a Raphael, a Napoleon, a Shakespeare, a Luther. Even when life's first stages may seem to justify a forecast of the future, what possibilities remain to us in virtue of diligence, application, fortitude, or through that overruling of things which we name fortune. 4. The everlastingness of its issues makes life sacred. The character it fashions lasts. Any chord once made to vibrate—be it of feeling or thought, or word, or act, or influence—may vibrate for ever. Death far from ending rather reveals life's issues. 5. Yet in the fact that the Son of God took to Himself a human nature, lived a human life in its varied stages as babe and boy, as youth and man, has life obtained its weightiest and indelible sanctity. II. **WHAT IS GAINED BY LIFE'S RISK PARTAKES OF LIFE'S SANCTITY.** Unharm'd the three returned bearing with them a draught of water for which their king and captain had longed. It was the Balaclava of Israelitish history—an act of fruitless bravery, a blunder only possible to heroes—though less fatal in its consequences. Had a warrior been lost then regret for the foolish wish might have prompted the libation. But though no evil had overtaken them the "jeopardy" had made the water blood-like and sacred, and he "poured it out unto the Lord." 1. Things necessary when purchased by life's risk partake of this sacredness. Every life sacrificed in the service of mankind makes man a debtor, and sets the seal of sanctity upon the survivors. The substitute for the conscript who dies upon the battlefield, the fireman who perishes at his task, the lifeboatman who falls a victim to the raging sea, the physician and nurse who die saving the patient, should make these whom they ransom at so great a cost feel that every breath they draw is no common but a most sacred thing. 2. But things of convenience, hardly of necessity, are purchased at the same cost, and obtain a like sanctity. Our boasted and elaborate civilisation is costly in lives. To some it gives comfort and days, for others it shortens the span of existence. And the civilisation which lengthens life is largely dispensable; life without these blessings would be possible, though far less enjoyable. Men could still live in wattle huts and warm themselves with a wood or turf fire. There need be no coal fire, no steam engine, no railway travelling, no great engineering works such as we are accustomed to. Yet, how many and terrible are the disasters to life and limb, which have given us these advantages, and to our nation so much of her wealth. Very costly are many of the comforts and conveniences of our modern civilisation. The cutlery which, bright and sharp, lies upon our dining table, has meant a reduction of the years of life to the grinders who gave it edge. In many of the chemical and mechanical processes which furnish us the conveniences of modern life there is a similar sacrifice of the health and life of the workers. We should shrink from doing without these things; deprived of them men would question if life be worth living; but in the use of things purchased at such a cost let us remember that cost; it would give an earnestness to much of the morally relaxed life we live, could we see these things bedabbled with the blood that procured them. 3. Still more must we feel our responsibility when

whims are gratified by the risk of life. That water from the well by the gate was not a necessity; it was the gratification of a sentiment. And it was the sense that life had been jeoparded for a sentiment that made David treat it as he did.

III. There are two directions in which these words have **THEIR BEARING UPON MODERN LIFE**. 1. Employment means employment of life, the hiring of blood. To say a man employs so many "hands" is to mention the least important of the powers he gets a claim upon. He employs lives, hearts, characters; souls that must live for ever, destinies that never become spent. But these lives must be regarded as sacred things, and every employer should bear with him the solemn sense of responsibility. If he feels as David felt, "Is it not the blood of those men who jeoparded their lives?" he will give in respect of those who serve him every care for life and for health. Such a man would never send men to sea in an unworthy ship, or to work with deficient apparatus, or expose them to the peril of a risky boiler. Neither should the moral perils of employees be forgotten. No man can justly retain as foreman a man of good ability but bad morals. No clerk should be asked to pen a letter that goes against his moral convictions; no traveller should be permitted to feel he must get orders by means which are not "as the noonday clear." The wealth that comes from ruined health, lost lives, seared consciences, damned souls, "is it not the blood of these men?" 2. Perhaps it is well to remember that most persons are the employers of those who afford amusement. The stern Puritan days are largely past, and the average Christian man does not refrain from public spectacles on the high principle that "the world passeth away and the fashion thereof." But dare men believing in the Bible countenance amusements involving the risk of life; did not the early church bring to an end the cruel sport of the Roman amphitheatre? should not such sports as to-day involve the health and lives of those who afford others pleasure be discountenanced, and by moral influence suppressed by the followers of Christ? When we see in the coveted water from the well that is by the gate, in the gratification we have or craved, the whim we have indulged, the needless convenience we have thoughtlessly enjoyed—"the blood of men who have jeoparded their lives"—then will a solemn sense of life's sacredness steal upon us, and we shall pray, "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God." (*J. T. L. Magga. B.A.*)

Waste:—We speak of things being wasted when they are not used, or when they are used for an inferior purpose to that which was originally intended. But waste is a relative term; and in these economic days some of the most valuable products have been obtained from substances that used to be thrown out as utter refuse. The most brilliant colours are got from the waste of gas manufacture; the sweetest perfumes and most delicate flavourings from the offal of the street; and the mounds of rubbish excavated from the placer mines of California have formed ever since the most fertile soil, in which have grown harvests far more valuable than their richest gold. That which is said to be wasted is often more precious than that which is employed for some utilitarian purpose. The well of Bethlehem was associated with the happiest days of David's life, when, as a shepherd boy, without any care or trouble, he drank of it, and went on his way rejoicing. The heat and burden of the day had consumed him in the beleaguered garrison, and the thought of that water was to him like the beautiful mirage—the desert's dream of dewy fields and sparkling streams. And yet, when a goblet full of the clear cold water was put into his hands, and he was free to drink and slake his burning thirst, he would not take it. His spirit rose above his languid frame and asserted its superiority. He nobly denied himself what his body weakly craved. Some might call such spilling of the water upon the ground an uncalled-for waste, and might blame David severely for appearing to lightly esteem the act of the brave men. What though the water had been procured at the cost of so much trouble and danger, did not that circumstance enhance its value? Was it not the very reason why it should not have been thrown away? The worst use to which it could be put was surely to pour it upon the dry ground, where it would do no good to living thing, but would speedily evaporate into the hot air, and leave no trace behind. We have all heard such selfish reasonings, and witnessed such penurious prudence in regard to similar acts of apparently rash generosity. But though the narrow-minded, capable only of the most short-sighted policy, may condemn it, every enlightened conscience, every generous heart, must deeply feel that David's act of seeming wastefulness was in reality one of the noblest in his life. It would have been selfish in him to drink the water; but it was the height of unselfishness to refuse to drink it. By

not using it, he put it to the highest use. By pouring it out upon the ground, seeming to waste it, he put a far greater value upon it than could possibly have been done if it had been used only to slake his thirst. Drunk, it would have refreshed the parched lips of David for a moment, and then the incident would have been forgotten. The draught of water would have accomplished its purpose, and that would have been the end of it for ever. But by being refused, by being wasted upon the ground, and offered as a libation to the Lord of heaven and earth, its use remained unexhausted, its memory would be for ever cherished. To all generations the deed will be spoken of as one of the finest examples of generous self-denial and pious gratitude; and it will have an inspiring effect upon all who come to know of it, inducing them to practice similar self-denial and devotion in their own lives. The water spilt upon the ground in this way, which could not be gathered up again, rose up to heaven, a beautiful cloud gilded by the sun, to adorn the sky, to be seen and admired of all eyes, and to fall again in fertilising rain and dew upon ground that, but for it would have been for ever barren. (*H. Macmillan, D.D.*)

Ver. 19. **Howbeit he attained not unto the first three.**—*The might of mediocrity*:—Everybody just now is deploring the singular dearth of genius which marks our immediate era. Some historic periods are remarkable in consequence of the brilliant constellations of extraordinarily gifted men which illuminate them; but the current age threatens to resemble those starless spaces of the firmament which perplex astronomers. In the musical world no one remains to play the first fiddle. The dropped mantle of Macaulay lies unclaimed. A modern commentator warmly protests against the custom of describing certain prophets as "minor prophets"; but no one proposes to abolish the designation "minor poets"—they are very much to the fore, and there is no forehead worthy of Tennyson's laurel. Epoch-making scientists like Darwin and Faraday, and masterly expositors of science like Huxley and Tyndall, have left no successors. As to great singers like Lind and Titiens, we feel the silence that Israel felt on the day and in the place of which the sacred historian wrote: "Miriam died there, and was buried there." No artist appears competent to take up Millais' fallen pencil. No orator like Bright charms the nation. We might think that the forces of nature were spent. The greatest souls are rarer than ever. This is the age of democracy, and it would seem as if it were going to justify Amiel's dictum that "democracy is the grave of talent." The nineteenth century ended without leaving a single really great figure on the stage. We rather welcome this parenthesis in the annals of the sublime; it gives a rare opportunity to mediocrity to demonstrate its great merits, and to show that it is not without considerable glory of its own. Nothing may compare with the Divine virtue of genius; it is a direct gleam of the eternal light: and there is little danger in our day that any real greatness will suffer depreciation and neglect. The danger always is lest we should disesteem faithful mediocrity. Victor Hugo regrets the English victory at Waterloo because it was "the victory of mediocrity." We do not care to attempt any refutation of this epigram; let us allow that Wellington was not a brilliant adventurer like Napoleon, and that, as poets reason, the victory of Waterloo was the triumph of mediocrity. It must be acknowledged also that the victory of mediocrity is quite a feature of the world's general affairs and history. Ages ago the author of Ecclesiastes wrote: "I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happened to them all." This keen observer discerned what Victor Hugo regretted, that there is a place in the government of the world for the triumph of mediocrity. We ourselves constantly observe the same thing. The brilliant preacher conspicuously fails to create a church, whilst the plodding pastor ministers through years to a flourishing congregation. The brilliant speculator dies poor, whilst the homespun shopkeeper leaves an inheritance to his children's children. The fable of the hare and the tortoise never grows obsolete. Said Diderot, "The world is for the strong." But the world is not altogether for the strong, neither are brilliant men permitted to ride roughshod over the simple. The world is also for the faithful, the artless, the industrious, the modest, and the meek. All things are not delivered over into the hands of William the Conqueror, Lorenzo the Magnificent, and Peter the Great; strugglers destitute of original power and brilliant parts have a trick of coming out at the top and shar-

ing the spoils with the strong. We may honestly rejoice that this is so. It may affront the romantic critic to see the soldier of genius banished to St. Helena whilst the soldier of patience stands before kings; but the fact is comforting and inspiring to the faithful many. Intense, decisive faithfulness has the character of the sublime, and it sets the virtuous man of ordinary intelligence on a level with the most gifted. Commonplace talent united with high moral qualities is certainly one of the most precious factors of civilisation. We must not permit ourselves to be browbeaten by towering greatness; we too have possibilities. Faithful mediocrity may enter hopefully into all social competitions; it often turns out to be genius in undress; it has a good chance of the prizes of life. We are not equal to daring assaults, far-reaching speculations, dazzling manœuvres; but simple truth and perfect patience possess mysterious efficacy, and they as well as genius bring riches and honours, power, and fame. In our struggle against gifted and splendid wickedness let us remember the victory of mediocrity. The New Testament frequently calls attention to the power and magnificence of the kingdom of evil. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." "And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels." The Apocalypse brings out very strikingly the glory and power of the evil with which the saints contend. Wickedness is seen with many heads, eyes, and horns; she is arrayed in purple and scarlet, decked with precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand; force, fire, and fury are attributes of the awful power. This picture is not mere rhetoric. In the actual world we find these gigantic and lurid poetic images distinctly and powerfully reflected. A thousand times over wickedness is seen identified with royal magnificence, luminous intellect, immense learning, fabulous riches, indomitable courage, and resources all but infinite. Now it seems simply impossible for good, plain, honest, spiritual souls to make headway against the devilry thus leagued with might, magnificence, and stratagem. Men smile pitifully when they read on the page of history of clowns going forth with scythes, pikes, and pitchforks to do battle with panoplied hosts; but it seems unutterably more absurd for simple men and women to dare the rampant wickedness of the universe, boasting as it does this strength and splendour. In the natural world we daily witness the victories of mediocrity, and we may be sure that in the spiritual universe these victories are not less wonderful. The conflict of simple souls with the dash and guile of the demoniac powers appears a battle of doves with eagles; but tiny humming birds are said to attack the eagle with impunity, ignominiously driving it away. So wickedness in its utmost pride is strangely vulnerable, and sinks vanquished by very weakness. There is a haste in wickedness which threatens its overthrow; it is feverish, premature, precipitate, and in its hurry comes to grief, despite the greatest advantages. Goodness, on the other hand, is deliberate, tranquil, patient, and herein finds a source of strength and victory. "Here is the patience and faith of the saints." All hell in its wrath and pride makes shipwreck on this innocent-looking rock of simple faith and steadfastness, as at Waterloo the glittering, impetuous legions of France were worn out by the sheer patience and confidence of the duke. There is a blindness in wickedness which frustrates its designs. Brilliant, crafty sinners fall into egregious mistakes; they are guilty of surprising lapses, oversights, miscalculations. There is also in wickedness a pride and presumption which work its confusion, and in strange ways turn its pomp into shame, its boastings into failure. Napoleon is reported to have said on the morning of Waterloo that he would "teach that little English general a lesson." Such pride cometh before destruction. How utterly wrong are they who capitulate to temptation from the notion that evil is overwhelming, that it is necessarily victorious! We too often forget the penetration of sincerity, the depth of simplicity, the cleverness of uprightness, the strategy of straightforwardness; we forget that patience is genius, that persistence is the most unequivocal sign of force, that there is a conquering awfulness in real goodness, an all-subduing loveliness in the form of simple virtue. Mediocre as we are, we are destined to great victories. Entrenched in nature, exalted on thrones, defended by literature and eloquence, wickedness shall be vanquished by plain, good men. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *The value of second-rate:*—To the student who asked, "What is the good of second-rate art?" Ruskin replied: "I am glad you asked me that question. Fifth rate, sixth rate, to a hundredth rate art is good. Art that gives a pleasure to any one has a right to

exist. For instance, if I can only draw a duck that looks as though he waddled, I may give pleasure to the last baby of our hostess, while a flower beautifully drawn will give pleasure to her eldest girl, who is just beginning to learn botany, and it may be useful to some man of science. The true outline of a leaf shown to a child may turn the whole course of its life. Second-rate art is useful to a greater number of people than even first-rate art—there are so few minds of high enough order to understand the highest kind of art. Many more people find pleasure in Copley or Fielding than in Turner. Most people only see the small vulgarisms in Turner, and cannot appreciate his grander qualities." (*Christian Weekly*.)

Ver. 20. **He went down also and slew a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow.**—*A lion in the snow*:—Perhaps, like me, you have at times found yourself wondering how it was that Palestine was chosen to be the land of the Bible? There is a reason, if we did but know it. Perhaps because, so far as I know the world, there is no other country which for climate and other things is so much of a world in itself. For instance, we read of a man who slew a lion in time of snow. Now we don't often think of lions and snow in the same place, but the Holy Land was a place where you could get all sorts of weather and all sorts of beasts. The fact is, the old Book was written for all the world; and, live where you like, you find it speaking of something which you see every day. Whoever reads the Bible should, however, use his imagination. For instance, in this story, as we read, we must think of that old quarry, and how it would look when the snow was falling. Was the hero of the tale a farmer, and had he gone out to look after the stock, and did he see, to his horror, the footprints of a large beast? The marks on the snow are like those of a cat's feet, but very much larger. We can hear him say, "There's a lion down there! He has gone for shelter. Won't he be hungry? When the snow-storm is over, he will have my calves or sheep. No, he won't! if I am the man I ought to be, there shall be a dead lion or a dead man in five minutes;" so he went down and slew the great cat that would have otherwise robbed his flock or his family. I. **GOD ALWAYS DID LIKE COURAGE**, especially the sort that is not afraid of great odds. He who always waits to count his enemies will never wear the Victoria Cross. If you are the only Christian in the shop, there's a chance for you to distinguish yourself. When I was a lad, elections were much rougher than they are nowadays. You could get your head broken without any trouble. A man I knew was electioneering, and strayed into the wrong committee-room. However, he found out his mistake in time, and pulled off his ribbon, put it in his mouth, and swallowed it. That is what some fellows do with their religion when they are in the midst of God's foes. II. **DIFFICULTIES AND DANGERS WHICH GIVE THE CHANCE OF PROMOTION.** If you will follow this man to other parts of the Bible, you will find him at the head of four-and-twenty thousand men. Now David did not make men captains because their fathers before them were officers; they had to rise by merit; and King David's greater Son, the Prince of Peace, lifts privates into captains when they have shown their mettle. They tell a tale in Lancashire of an Oldham man enlisting with the distinct understanding that he was to be an officer; but next morning, when he woke from his drunken slumbers, he found himself a full private. I am afraid if he ever got a stripe it was only one of many, and they were on his back and not on his arm! Distinguish yourself, and ignominy cannot claim you. The higher you get up the hill the less crowding you will find. When a collection is taken, and some one drops in a piece of gold, it may be hidden by penny pieces while in the box, but when counting begins they will soon see. This man Benaiah little dreamed that three thousand years after he killed the lion somebody would think it worth his while to talk of what happened that snowy day. The fact is, we are making history every day, and it is for ourselves to settle whether it is to be sheen or shade. (*T. Champness*.) **Benaiah**:—Benaiah went down also and "slew a lion in the midst of the pit in the time of snow." That is a man worth looking at! It is a snow day; think of it. It is difficult to be brave on a day like that. But that was the day when Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man of Kabzeel, who had done many mighty acts, went and did another. Did it ever occur to you that that man was wonderfully like another Benaiah? Did you ever think he was wonderfully like the Lord Jesus Christ, who, on one of the dullest and darkest days that ever the world saw, went down into the pit, and encountered, face to face, the devourer and the

destroyer of men. And He had nobody to encourage and nobody to cheer. All His disciples forsook Him and fled; and single, unaided, and alone, He went down into the pit, and slew the lion, the dragon, the devourer. He fought and He won. There is a lion-like strength of evil in every one of us, and we are not saved till our foot is upon its neck, and its power is broken. With some, the lion is out, ranging and roaring, as that lion might be supposed to have been before this snowy day when he fell into the pit. No, the big work is to be done yet. Go down into the pit; go down into the depths of your own fallen nature, the depths of Satan in you; go down there quick, in the strength of Benaiah, and win that fight, or you are not saved yet. None of us, old or young, ignorant or learned, has a right to feel safe until he has done Benaiah's deed, and gone down into the depths of sin that are in himself with the lamp of God and the sword of God, and stabbed to the heart the life of sin that is in the very deep places of his soul. What does Benaiah mean? Benaiah means, literally, the man whom God built. There is something in a name, after all! The man whom God built from the protoplasm upward and onward, the God-built, God-strengthened, God-nerved, God-sustained man. May God grant that all of us shall have that pedigree! "Born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of man, but born of God." Born again! Spiritual men, whose foundations God hath laid in Christ Jesus; and out of whom God is making strong, stalwart, heroic, spiritual men, because He has built them and founded them on the Eternal Rock of His own dear Son. (J. McNeill.) *Possible achievement of a man plus God*:—The Rev. F. B. Meyer had been shown a wonderful collection of chrysanthemums. The horticulturist said to him, "And all these glorious blooms come from a common field daisy." In response to Mr. Meyer's questions, the expert told how, by long processes of patient cultivation pursued through a number of years, the simple wild-flower had become a triumph of scientific development. "I see," he said, "the chrysanthemum is a field-daisy, plus a man." "Yes," said the gardener, "that is it." "And," said Mr. Meyer, with impressive intensity, "A Christian is a man plus God—God in Christ, who came to give us life, abundantly." *Possibility of great achievements*:—There is a wonderful power in honest work to develop latent energies and reveal a man to himself. I suppose, in most cases, nobody is half so much surprised at a great man's greatest deed as he is himself. They say that there is dormant electric energy enough to make a thunderstorm in a few rain drops, and there is dormant spiritual force enough in the weakest of us to flush into beneficent light, and peal notes of awaking into many a deaf ear. (A. MacLaren, D.D.) *Enterprise essential to success*:—Success is the reward of endeavour not of accident. Rufus Choate, when someone remarked that great achievements often resulted from chance, thundered out, "Nonsense! as well talk of dropping the alphabet and picking up the Iliad."

CHAPTER XXIV.

Vers. 1—25. **Go, number Israel and Judah.**—*David numbering the people*:—I. **THE SIN COMMITTED BY DAVID.** It is possible that David dwelt with satisfaction upon the thought of his ample resources and numerous armies, and calculated that he was possessed of a power to repel aggression, and attempt fresh conquests. He may have forgotten that God alone, who had made him great, could preserve to him his greatness, and thence he may have longed to reckon up his forces, as though he could thence learn his security, or compute the extension of his kingdom. And let no man think that, because he occupies a private station, he cannot sin after the exact manner in which David sinned, who filled the throne of a flourishing empire. The very same offence may be committed in any rank of life, and is probably chargeable, in a degree, on most in this assembly. What! to take one or two instances—is not the proud man he who delights to count up his monies, and catalogue to himself his cargoes, and his stock, and his deposits, and his speculations—is he not doing precisely what David did when taking the sum of his forces?—ay, is it not with the very same feeling that he prepares the inventory; the feeling that his wealth is his security against disaster; that the having large possessions will comparatively place him and his

family beyond the reach of trouble? The wish to be independent of God is natural to us in our fallen condition. This rigidly virtuous man may be all the while pluming himself on his excellence, and employing the captain of his host in summing up the number of his righteous qualities and actions, that he may certify his power for winning immortality. There may be freedom from gross vices, with a growing strength of pride which puts more contempt on the crown of the Redeemer than an open violation of every moral precept. II. **THE PUNISHMENT INCURRED.** No doubt there is something strange, which it is hard to reconcile with our received notions of justice, in the declared fact that sins are often visited on others than the perpetrators. Who will think that David escaped with impunity because the pestilence smote down his subjects and touched not himself? It is evident from his passionate imprecation—"Let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me and my father's house"—it is evident that the blow would have fallen more lightly had it fallen on himself and not on his subjects. In what manner should he be visited for his sin? So visited that the penalty may best indicate the offence it resists. Under what shape must vengeance come that it may touch him most closely, and most clearly prove by what it is provoked? You will admit at once that, forasmuch as it was the thought of having many subjects by which David had been puffed up, the most suitable punishment was the destruction of thousands of those subjects; for this took away the source of exultation, and stripped the boastful king of the strength on which he vain-gloriously rested. Certainly this was adapting the penalty to the fault; for not only was David punished, but punished by an act of retributive justice, from which himself and others might learn what it was which had displeased the Almighty. But, perhaps you will say that it is not enough to show that the king was punished through the death of his subjects; you will say that this does not touch the point of the innocent being made to suffer for the guilty. We allow this; but it is of great importance to establish that David himself was not left unpunished. One of the chief objections which seem to lay against the justice of the crime being in one creature and judgment in another, arises from the supposition that the guilty escape while the innocent suffer. Now we do not believe that this is ever the case; it certainly was not in the instance now under review. We believe that those who are punished deserve all which they receive, though they have not committed the precise fault of which they bear the penalty. It is evident enough that David regarded himself as the sole-offending party, and had no suspicion that the penalty had any other end than that of his own chastisement. The exclamation, "Lord, I have sinned; I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done?"—this is sufficient proof that the king thought of no criminal but himself, and of no punishment but that of his own wickedness. But it is equally evident that David was mistaken herein, and that God had other ends in view, besides that of correcting the monarch for his pride. It was in order that there might be occasion for the punishment of His subjects that God allowed Satan to tempt the ruler. For it is this—"And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, 'Go, number Israel and Judah.'" In the Book of Chronicles, where the instigation is ascribed to the devil, the people are actually spoken of as the objects aimed at through the king—"And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel." So that it is put beyond doubt that the people had moved the anger of the Lord before the king moved it by his worldly confidence and pride. And if David had not offended, and thus made an inlet for Divine vengeance, another occasion would have been found, and wrath would have come down on Israel. We are not, indeed, told what the precise and particular sin was by which, at this time more especially, the chosen people had moved the indignation of God. Possibly their frequent rebellions against David, their ingratitude, their fickleness, and their growing dissoluteness of manners, which is a too common attendant on national prosperity, exposed them to those judgments by which God is wont to chastise an erring community; but it is of no importance that we ascertain what the offence was of which the penalty was the punishment. We are at least certain that the people were really smitten for their own sins, though apparently for the sins of David; and that, therefore, there can be no place for the objection, that the innocent were made to suffer for the guilty. III. **THE EXPIATION THAT WAS MADE ON THE THRESHING FLOOR OF ARAUNAH.** So soon as the destroying angel had stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem, and, therefore, before any altar had been reared, or any burnt-offering presented, the Lord, we are told, "repented Him of the evil, and said to the angel—It is

enough; stay now thine hand." We sufficiently gather from this, even if it were not on other accounts evident, that the plague was not stayed from any virtue in the sacrifice which was offered by David. Even had the sacrifice preceded the arrest of the pestilence, we should know that it could not of itself have procured it, whereas now that it follows, none can dream of ascribing to it a solitary energy. But though the burnt-offering would not of itself have been efficacious, it would not have been commanded had not the presenting it subserved some great end; we may believe, therefore, that it was as a type, figuring that expiatory sacrifice, by which the moral pestilence that had been let loose on the globe would be finally arrested, that the offering was required from the contrite and terrified king. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *David's numbering of the people*:—The boldness of the expression is startling. "He moved David against them." Can it be that Jehovah stirred up the king of His choice against the people of His choice, to conceive and execute a design which so speedily called down upon them a deadly punishment? Or can we smooth away the difficulty by recourse to the parallel account in the book of Chronicles, and read the text as the margin of our English version suggests—"Satan moved David against them?" Such an explanation is, I believe, untenable. If we had only the book of Samuel before us, we should not think of proposing it. The problem must be faced, that, in some sense or other, God is said to have moved David to this sin; while, on the other, hand, it was due to the instigation of Satan. Can we harmonise these divergent statements? We tread here on the skirts of that most mysterious problem, the relation of the Divine sovereignty to the human will. We approach here, also, and that still more closely, another problem wrapt in a thick cloud of mystery: the relation of the Divine will to the causation of evil. God never compels a man to sin. If that were possible, God would cease to be God; sin would cease to be sin. The moral consciousness of man revolts instinctively from such an idea. The teaching of Holy Scripture gives it no countenance whatsoever. 1. He purposely leads His saints into circumstances of trial, that their faith may be proved and tested, and coming forth from the furnace triumphantly, shine as a witness before the world. 2. God sees a man's heart turning aside from Him, and withdraws for a time His restraining grace and presence. He deserts the sinner who has deserted Him. 3. God is said to harden the hearts of men. But not until His mercy has been set at naught, not until His long-suffering has been defied to the uttermost, does He finally pronounce this sentence. Not until a Pharaoh has hardened his own heart against judgment after judgment, is God said to harden His heart. Not until a Saul has mocked His calling and despised repeated admonitions, does the Spirit of the Lord leave him, and an evil spirit from the Lord trouble him. Not until mercy has been tried and tried in vain is a judgment pronounced in this world. And who shall dare in any case to say that it is final? But we not unnaturally ask, Why was David allowed to sin? There was, it seems, some national transgression which roused God's wrath and demanded punishment. Nor was this the first occasion of the kind. We read, "Again the Lord's anger was kindled against Israel." Once before they had been smitten with famine for the unexpiated sins of Saul and his bloody house: what the offence was now, we are not told. The king's sin was in some way the culmination and representative of the nation's sins. It was the final offence which filled up the cup of wrath, and the punishment smote the nation, and through the nation its ruler. A still more perplexing question meets us next. Wherein lay the guilt of David's Act? The answer must be that the motive which inspired the act was sinful. 1. He designed, say some, a development of the military power of the nation with a view to foreign conquest. He wished to organise the army, and visions of self-aggrandisement dazzled his brain. 2. It was the outcome of pride: pride at the growth of the nation. He wished to satisfy the foolish vanity of his heart; to know to the full over how vast a kingdom he ruled. It may be said that the sin of the people was in essence the same: that here on the very threshold of their national existence as a powerful kingdom, they were tempted by visions of worldly glory to forget that they were not to realise their vocation to the world in the guise of a conquering secular state, but as Jehovah's witness among the nations. If this was so, if already Israel was in peril of a virtual apostasy, no wonder that Jehovah's wrath was kindled. Yet in such a case wrath is in truth but another phase of love; chastisement is mercy in disguise. Judgment is mercy when it leads unto repentance. Wisely wrote St. Augustine of this fall of David: "Let us remember

how that a certain man said in his prosperity, 'I shall never be moved.' But he was taught how rash were his words, as though he attributed to his own strength what was given him from on high. This we learn by his own confession, for he presently adds, "Lord, by Thy favour Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: Thou didst hide Thy face and I was troubled." He was deserted for a moment by his guide in healing Providence, lest in fatal pride he should himself desert that guide" ("Works," vol. vi. p. 530). Observe in this history:—1. The hidden motive determines the character of the action. 2. If it was pride which was Israel's transgression and David's sin, mark how heinous an offence it is in the sight of God. (*Homiletic Magazine*.) *Numbering the People*:—One spot on earth there is, which, for four thousand years, has had more of human annals and human interest concentrated in it, by providential suggestion, than any other in the world. For a while, it was only a threshing-floor, owned by Araunah the Jebusite. This thrifty husbandman had selected an area on the top of Mount Moriah. We do not know that his imagination was ever awakened by the thought that here once was the thicket, in which the ram was caught that Abraham substituted for Isaac as a sacrifice. Nor, though Abraham saw the day of Christ afar off, and "was glad," have we any reason to think that Araunah's faith ever gained a glimpse of the fact that the cross on which Jesus Christ suffered, was to be planted there in the future ages. To-day, that spot lies covered with a canopy of silk, underneath a Mohammedan dome in Jerusalem. Years have passed since the temple of Solomon disappeared in its ruins, though for generations its matchless splendour rendered the ridge of Moriah historic. Thus forty centuries of fame have made that floor one of the centres of the world. We are to visit it to-day in our studies, and it may be expected that question after question will seek an answer. 1. What was this act of David, which brought on the catastrophe and the pestilence, that was happily stayed there? At first sight, it seems almost impossible to explain the transaction; for up to this time it had never been considered a crime to take a census in Israel. Indeed, it was one of the requirements of the Hebrew law, that each tribe and each family in it, and all the persons in the households, should be enrolled openly and regularly. Except for these disastrous circumstances detailed afterwards, we should never have conjectured any wrong had been done. It was one of the most rational things in history, that the ruler of any great nation should wish to be exactly informed concerning the military resources of the people. 2. But now we ask again: what was the moral character of this act in numbering the people? How do we know that it was one of the most sinful that King David ever committed? (1) Even Joab, the unscrupulous warrior, pronounced it dangerously wicked from the start (verses 3, 4). Over-ruled by the king he went about his work reluctantly, and to the last he persisted in his protest by refusing to count the two tribes of Benjamin and Levi, "for the king's word was abominable to Joab." (2) Consider the origin of the suggestion (ver. 1, compared with 1 Chron. 21, 1). (3) But the strongest proof of the guilt of this action of David, is found in his own confessions. The census was scarcely completed, before the monarch seemed suddenly to become aware of his wickedness, and fell on his knees before God (ver. 10). 3. Still our question remains: what was there in the action of David that made it so guilty in the sight of God? (1.) For one, I would just as lief say, "I do not know," as anything else. The story is silent almost altogether. The commentaries are full of nothing but conjecture. (2.) But some things can be surmised, if that will furnish any help. For one thing, there must have been a pride of power moving the king: the language of Job (1 Chron. 21, 3), as he sternly exostulates, seems to touch on this; he intimates his hot contempt for a vanity so childish. Then, also, the greed of gain may have been in the heart of David: this may have been his first step towards the liberties of the people, a plan of augmenting the power of the crown. We feel safe in saying that distrust of God was in the wrong: he knew that Israel was not to be so strong because of a large standing army; many a prosperous year had rendered it sure that the nation's strength was in God. Then there was the possible lust of conquest: if David was thus appealing to the ambition of his people, his sin was greater, in that he was teaching them positive unbelief, also. 4. Now in the next place, we come to the dreadful punishment which this sin brought on; what was the course of it? (1.) First of all, there came a revelation from heaven to awaken David's conscience. (2.) Then there was a choice offered that would test the devotion of David's

heart. For always the main question is, Does a penitent man retain his confidence in God, or is he wholly under the sway of selfishness, and fixed in disobedience? (3.) Next, there was a humble selection made, which showed David's piety and unbroken faith, still held true in the midst of his perversity. (4.) Then there was a sharp infliction of penalty (ver. 15.) Over that land went the wild wail of bereaved men and women and children, from Dan to Beersheba, where the census-gatherers had just been ordered to go by this presumptive monarch. 5. But was there to be no limit to this affliction? That leads us forward to our final question: what was it that arrested the hand of God, and brought relief to dying Israel? (1.) Observe now the hopelessness of regrets after sin has been committed, and is rushing on (ver. 17). It is plain that David's heart is wrung with pity and indescribable anguish for the multitudes, who gasp and grow black and die, and make no sign. But he could not take back the sin he had set floating on the currents of God's providence; it was sweeping out in wider circles. (2.) Observe also the uselessness of offering any vicarious atonement for sin as a release from its retributions. In his sad sincerity, David says: "Oh, spare these sheep! take me, and my house!" But this is not God's way (Psa. 49, 7, 8). Paul said the same (Rom. 9, 3). So did Moses (Ex. 32, 31-33). (3.) Observe the availability of effectual prayer in arrest of God's judgment (ver. 16). (C. S. Robinson, D.D.) *David numbering the people*:—In what, then, did the sin of David consist? It appears to me that the answer to this is exceedingly plain: it is an answer which we derive from the account itself; it is an answer, too, full of very deep and profitable instruction. David's command was, "Go, number Israel and Judah;" and when Job brought the sum to the king, it was divided under the two heads, Israel and Judah. Israel, i.e. the ten tribes (excluding Levi and Benjamin), numbering 800,000 men; and Judah, 500,000. Here, then, we see the secret of David's sin. He wanted to know, not so much the number of the whole people, as the number of Judah, the royal tribe—David's own tribe—compared with the rest of Israel. God had made him king over the whole people; and Satan tempted him to consider himself the king of the one tribe, so that he should endeavour to ascertain whether the tribe, upon whose strength and affections he could always rely, would not be a match for all the rest; and so be should be at ease in governing in the interest of his flesh and blood, rather than in the interest of all his people. David's sin, then, was not the sin of pride, but the sin of division and party spirit. God, as far as we can judge from the Bible, Himself ordained the right of primogeniture, or the right of the first-born, and generally upheld it. God assigned to Judah this pre-eminence, when He expressly commanded that the standard of Judah should go the first before the tabernacle in the vanguard of the children of Israel (Num. ii., 1, 2). But God had prepared the tribe of Judah, by His Providence, for this pre-eminence which He assigned to it: for you will find that the tribe of Judah was, in point of numbers, by far the most powerful of all. Its numbers were nearly double those of the greater part of the other tribes: the next tribe, that of Dan, does not come within twelve thousand of it. Then, when the tribes were settled in the promised land, the same design of God is apparent. Reuben, the actual first-born, has his portion assigned to him on the east side of Jordan, and so is removed out of the way. Simeon at once sunk to be the lowest tribe in point of influence; and, in fact, soon disappears altogether. Levi, by having the priesthood, could not have the civil and military pre-eminence; so the field is left, as it were, to Judah. Then he had by far the largest and the most compact portion of the promised land assigned to him. Such was the tribe. But what was the first family in this tribe? Beyond all doubt the family of Jesse. Throughout the whole history of the people the first was that from which David sprung. David's ancestors were the first family in point of blood of the first tribe of Israel. I believe that David, as a man of God, governed with a faithful and true heart, as the King of all Israel; but in the best of men there is a mixture of motives. In the most just line of human temporal policy there is that which is crooked and time-serving, and David, in this instance, gave way and succumbed to the temptation of the god of this world. He numbered the people for the purpose of ascertaining the strength on which he felt sure that his family could, under all circumstances, rely. David was right in his surmise. The census was taken, and the extraordinary fact came to light, that God had so increased and multiplied the tribe

of Judah, that it was more than half as strong as all the rest of the tribes put together: for the single tribe of Judah showed 500,000 fighting men to the 800,000 of the other ten tribes. But the gratification of family or party pride, as opposed to national exultation at the prosperity and numbers of God's people, was short-lived. With the sum of the numbers came the smiting of the heart—the precursor, in this case, of immediate and signal punishment. 1. The account of David's punishment is exceedingly instructive. God, to try what was in David's heart, gave to him the choice of three evils—the sword, famine, and pestilence; and David, by his choice, showed plainly that his heart was right with God. But another very instructive fact is that the moment David surrendered to God those private family feelings and partialities that had been the real root of the mischief, then God at once turned and remitted the punishment. 3. And now let us say something respecting the punishment which God inflicted. There seems, at first sight, a difficulty about the persons whom God intended to punish. Throughout the chapter, however, David appears to be the sinner, and the punishment is evidently directed against him, though it falls on his people. Then, with reference to the effect of the punishment, it was inflicted, as all God's punishments are, in far-seeing mercy. For, if future princes of the House of David—Solomon and Rehoboam—had learnt the lesson which God intended them to learn, the disastrous rebellion in the time of Rehoboam, which entailed centuries of idolatry and civil war and its attendant miseries, would, humanly speaking, have been avoided. For the punishment inflicted by God was intended to show God's just displeasure at partial government. I must now, in conclusion, make two or three practical applications of the foregoing remarks. 1. First of all, the Bible deserves to be well and carefully studied, as a book full of the deepest insight into human nature—fallen and crooked human nature. 2. Let us see how hateful division, party-spirit, partiality, or a spirit of schism, is in the sight of God. 3. Let us also learn from this, that those who have the right to the first social place may have this evil spirit, as well as those who have not. (*F. M. Sadler, M.A.*) *The Church's resources*:—Too much dependence may be placed in elements of power in the Church which are secondary and inferior. There is power in numbers. We should not despise numbers. It should awaken alarm and inquiry when the number of Church members does not steadily and rapidly increase. God will not deal with us when we make up the statistical tables as He did with David when he numbered the people. But there is something more important than multitudes. A Church with one hundred members may be stronger than one with a thousand. There is power in wealth when wisely used. In the promotion of education, in the supply of money to print Bibles and build churches and carry the Gospel to all parts of the world, wealth is a mighty agent. But there are more potent elements than wealth. A Church whose members are not worth one thousand pounds sometimes excel in usefulness Churches whose members represent many thousands. *In what respect the census was sinful*:—An ordinary census was perfectly legitimate; it was expressly provided for by the Mosaic law, and upon three occasions at least a census of the people was taken by Moses without offence. It was not then the census which was displeasing to God, but the motive which inspired David to take it. Some suppose that he intended to develop the military power of the nation with a view to foreign conquest; others that he meditated the organisation of an imperial despotism and the imposition of fresh taxes. The military character of the whole proceeding, which was discussed in a council of officers and carried out under Joab's superintendence, makes it probable that it was connected with some plan for increasing the effective army, possibly with a view to foreign conquests. But whether any definite design of increased armaments or heavier taxation lay behind it or not, it seems clear that what constituted the sin of the act was the vain-glorious spirit which prompted it. (*A. F. Kirkpatrick, M.A.*)

Ver. 10. And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people.—*David's confession*:—I. DAVID'S CONFESSION:—"And David said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done." It is an unreserved confession. There are no excuses made by him for the sin he has committed. If we would confess our sins acceptably we must confess, as David did, without reserve—without any attempt to dissemble or to cloak them. II. **THE**

PETITION. "And now, I beseech Thee, O Lord! take away the iniquity of Thy servant." To "take away" means something more than to forgive. To "take away iniquity" is not only to pass it over, but to clear the soul of it; so that, though it should be sought for, it should not be found. And this is the Blessed Saviour's office. It is "the Lamb of God," and He alone, "that taketh away the sin of the world." III. THE PLEA. For I have done foolishly." When we want to get a pardon from a fellow-creature, we are not apt to lay a stress upon the greatness of our fault, but to catch rather at something that may take a little from its guilt. "Take away," saith he, "I beseech Thee, the iniquity of Thy servant;" and why? what is the argument he brings to give weight to his petition? You might have thought he would have said, "for I did it in my haste; it was no intentional offence." But no; "Take away my iniquity," says he, "for I have done very foolishly." It reminds us of a similar petition in the 25th Psalm. Why, what could David mean, when he names the greatness of his sin as the ground on which he asks for pardon? His meaning probably was this: "My sin is great—I have acted very foolishly, and therefore Thou wilt shew the riches of Thy grace the more abundantly in taking my iniquity away." O! blessed be the God of our salvation that such an argument as this can be adopted! If the efficacy of the blood of Jesus had been limited—why then we should have been afraid to say to God, "My sin is great." (A. Roberts, M.A.) The "afterward" of sin:—Lord, before I commit a sin, it seems to me so shallow that I may wade through it dry-shod from any guiltiness, but when I have committed it, it often seems so deep that I cannot escape without drowning. Thus I am always in extremities; either my sins are so small that they need not any repentance, or so great that they cannot obtain thy pardon. Lend me, O Lord, a reed out of thy sanctuary, truly to measure the dimension of my offences. But O! as thou revealest to me more of my misery, reveal also more of thy mercy; lest if my wounds, in my apprehension, gape wider than any tents (plugs of lint), my soul run out at them. If my badness seem bigger than Thy goodness but one hair's breadth, but one moment, that is room and time enough for me to run to eternal despair. (Thomas Fuller.)

Ver. 13. **Now advise, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me.**—Christians exhorted to consider what answer their ministers will have to return to God concerning them:—I. CHRISTIAN MINISTERS ARE THE MESSENGERS OF GOD, AND SENT ON AN IMPORTANT ERRAND. 1. They are sent of God. 2. They are sent on an important errand. II. MINISTERS ARE TO RETURN AN ANSWER TO HIM THAT SENDETH THEM. 1. They are to return to their Master. 2. They are to answer as to their own fidelity. 3. They are likewise to return an answer concerning the reception which they themselves met with. III. IT BECOMETH THE MEMBERS OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES SERIOUSLY TO CONSIDER WHAT ANSWERS THEIR MINISTERS WILL HAVE TO RETURN CONCERNING THEM. Application. 1. This subject affords some useful instruction to Christian ministers. It should lead them to "magnify their office," as "the messengers of God." It should excite their warmest gratitude that they are employed under Christ, on the same errand which brought him into the world. Further, they may learn to deliver their message with all plainness, seriousness, and fidelity. 2. Christian people may derive some useful instruction from these particulars. Learn, then, to be thankful that messengers are sent to you on so kind and gracious an errand. (J. Orton.)

Ver. 14. **I am in a great strait; let me fall now into the hand of the Lord.**—David's choice of a national calamity:—The scene before us, while it is pregnant with interest on its own account, develops two opposite classes of principles, and furnishes a lesson both of seasonable direction and solemn warning. I. It presents us with a SIN INTO WHICH DAVID FELL at the close of his life, and a judgment denounced upon him in consequence of that sin by the Almighty. He was at peace in his kingdom; he had recovered from all the troubles of his house, and his victorious sword had been lifted up above the heads of all his enemies round about. The state of his affairs, after long agitation, had subsided into a condition of peace and serenity, calling loudly for thankfulness to God for His favours. But such seasons of temporal prosperity, alas! are not favourable to the preservation of humility and good principles. Through the weakness and cor-

ruption of our nature they are apt to soften and enervate, to secularise and pollute, and thereby to render us accessible to the most perilous temptations. If the prosperity of fools destroys them, the prosperity of good men often does them incalculable injury. David, therefore, though so wise and pious, is now off his guard. His conscience, however, which had been enlightened by Divine grace, soon awoke out of the slumber into which it had fallen, and upbraided him. "His heart smote him" for what he had done, before he was left to prove his weakness by any outward disaster. It was well for him that his own ways reproved him, and that conscience sounded the first trumpet of alarm. This is characteristic of the regenerate. Thus Samson's heart smote him in the midst of the night for what he was doing, and he arose and carried away the gates of the city. Men who have no light of grace, no tenderness of conscience, must have their sin recalled to them by the circumstances which at once reveal its enormity and visit it with punishment; but the regenerate have an inward monitor that awaits not for these consequences to rouse its energy, but lights up the candle of the Lord within them, and will not let them rest after they have done amiss, till they have felt compunction and made confession. Their sin and their sorrow are near together. No circumstance can keep them long apart. Let us not wonder at a judgment so severe for a sin that appears to us so comparatively trifling. It is only to us that it seems trifling. We are apt to be more terrified at outward sins, and individual acts of atrocity between man and man; but sins of the heart and of the spirit committed against the majesty, and the purity, and the goodness of God, for which we feel but little conscious guilt, are surely of far greater enormity and more especially offensive to God. We are, moreover, to bring into account David's relation to God. He was a man after His own heart; he stood high in His favour: when he was a child, God loved him and brought him into covenant with him; adopted him into His family, made him most magnificent promises, and poured His favours upon him. And does the near relation in which a man stands to God and the surpassing favours which he has received, lessen his sin? It is rather heightened in its enormity, aggravated in its guilt, by such considerations. II. OBSERVE THE EVILS WHICH THE HISTORY REPRESENTS TO US AS PROPOSED TO THE KING'S CHOICE. They are three of the most dreadful that can befall a country or a nation. But yet in the permission of a choice among them, a singular test was presented of the return of David's heart to a proper sense of dependence and submission. Each of them is a terrific scourge, but united, as they sometimes are, and naturally may be, they form a three-fold plague, whose horrors are indescribable. But the one which David chose, brought him and his people more immediately into conflict with the sovereign hand of the Almighty than either of the others would have done. Nothing could be here ascribed to second causes. Against God directly and exclusively had David sinned, and from God's hand visibly and directly, and by sad preference, must come the punishment. If famine spread extensively among nations, affecting more countries than one at the same time, the condition of that which is its chief seat, or which, from other circumstances, is shut out from foreign aid, will soon become desperate. New and disgusting modes of supporting existence will be resorted to; the natural instincts will be overpowered; all feelings will be subdued before the cravings of hunger and the love of life. War, accompanied with defeat, is an equally dreadful calamity to a country that is the seat of it. The most diabolical passions of human nature are awakened and stimulated by war. But pestilence, in some respects, is yet a more dreadful calamity than either. It is more silent in its approach, and less horrible in its outward array; but it is an evil preying upon the heart of a nation. It is the destruction of its soul and spirit. Other evils may be seen at a distance, and be guarded against; there valour may hope to defend, prudence to resist, flight to escape. But no place exempts from the attacks of this enemy; he gives no notice of his approach; his motion is silent and sure; he steals upon us in the dead of night, as well as in the day; triumphantly and secretly he rides upon the wings of the wind, and treacherously destroys us by the breezes which we court for refreshment, or the air which we inspire for life. We are not sensible of his presence till we feel his fangs, and are inevitably within his grasp. At one and the same moment he is heard of by us at the distance of leagues, and felt in our own bosoms. We are unconscious that the shaft has flown, or found its mark, till we feel its venom boiling through our veins. III. But we have here THE CHOICE HE MADE, WITH THE REASONS OF IT. Let us attend to the wisdom and piety that dictated it and to

the merciful relief afforded him under it, in consequence of it pleasing God. 1. But we may see in this preference the most exalted patriotism. David, though a king, was too much identified with his subjects to think of saving himself at their expense. If it must be a calamity, let it be one that shall involve me with them. I and my people will survive or perish together. Noble resolution, full of magnanimity, and demanding our admiration! 2. There was penitence also in this preference. Slight thoughts of his sin, in comparison with the sins of his people, would have dictated the choice of a calamity that might have left him free, while for them there was no possibility of escape. But he was too sensible of the guilt of his preposterous pride and presumption not to choose a judgment to which himself might be as liable as any of the inhabitants of the land. 3. Nor is the piety that led to this preference less evident and operative. There was piety in consulting by it the honour and interests of religion, which in either of the other calamities would have very much suffered. And there was piety in David's choice, from the confidence it evinced in the Divine compassion. He knew that God was provoked, but he could expect mercy from Him in that state, sooner than from man whom he had not injured at all. Conclusion: 1. In attempting some improvement, our desert of the judgments of the Almighty because of our secret sins first occurs to us. A judgment worse than war, pestilence, and famine awaits every such sinner. He stands exposed to wrath that will destroy both body and soul in hell. 2. There is a retributive Providence. The punishment of God's people often grows out of their sin, and that so conspicuously and so instructively as to convince them of it, and induce them to denounce and renounce it. (*J. Leifchild.*) *Choice of David under anticipated judgments*:—What comparison is there between the evils that moral creatures can inflict upon us, and those which we have to fear from a God immortal and omnipotent? What comparison between those who kill the body, and after that have nothing else that they can do, and him who can cast both body and soul into hell? But if we consider the woes of the present life, if we compare the compassions of God with those of men, then we must change our language, and the penitent sinner, even at the moment when he sees heaven angry for his crimes, will exclaim, "Let me fall into the hands of the Lord, for very great are His mercies, but let me not fall into the hands of men." But, you ask, did David reason justly? When we are suffering under war, or any other calamity whatever, are we not in the hands of God? Are not the different agents of the universe, men, angels, elements, equally the ministers of His justice, or of His mercy? Yes; and no one more fully or explicitly acknowledged this universality of Providence than did David. He always, without justifying the wickedness of the instruments, bowed submissively to the disposals of God in all His persecutions. But still, there is a wide difference between those afflictions which come to us directly from the hand of God, and those which come by the intervention of men. When men are the immediate authors of our sorrows, though it is always true that it is God who permits them; that it depends only upon His pleasure to arrest them; still, in the sufferings which they cause us to endure, it is they whom we first behold; it is their unkindness or enmity which first strikes us; and this view irritates the wounds of our souls, and agitates our afflicted hearts. It is often with difficulty that we elevate our eyes to the Supreme Governor of all, to acknowledge His sovereign justice in those same sufferings that are unjustly inflicted by our fellow men. Besides, the malignity of the principle whence our woes proceed, when they come from men, permits us to hope neither for bounds nor mitigation to them, because the hatred and passions which produced them still may continue. The heart then feels the present with bitterness, while it beholds no resource in the future. All these visible causes affect our senses and our mind, and hide from us more or less the invisible hand of God. What a difference when our afflictions proceed immediately from heaven! Then the believing soul sees only its God; it adores with submission the paternal hand which chastens it. Through His just anger, it discerns His infinite goodness. Penitent sinner! how many motives are there to induce you to adopt this language, and imitate this example. 1. "Let me fall into the hands of God," for He is my Owner and Proprietor; to Him I unreservedly belong. 2. Because mercy is His darling attribute: He loves to glorify it in the forgiveness of the penitent. 3. Because he reads my heart. He has beheld my secret groans, and prayers, and tears. 4. Because He mingles with the strokes of His rod the consolations of grace, and chastens as a Father. 5. For the design of His chastisements is merciful; they are intended not to destroy, but

to benefit. 6. From reflecting on the advantages that myself, that thousands of the redeemed, have experienced from His chastisements. Let such be your language and your feelings when penetrated by a sense of guilt. Bend to that hand which supports while it smites. LESSONS: This subject, in connection with the history of which our text is a part, teaches us that sin may be pardoned, and yet punished with temporal afflictions. 2. This subject should excite in us the tenderest love to God. 3. This subject teaches us where the soul may find a refuge from the unkindness and cruelties of men. (*H. Kollock, D.D.*) *In the hand of God*:—David had learned from the history of his nation and his own personal experience the blessedness of all who put their trust in the living God. Let us notice a twofold train of thought, suggested by our text, peculiarly appropriate for the new year. I. WHY FEAR MINGLES WITH OUR GREETING OF THE NEW YEAR. We are confronted by sorrowful memories of the past. Frailties, failures, sins of omission and of commission, broken vows, ideals not reached, prayer restrained—"unprofitable servants"; we have fallen short of the glory of God. 2. Painful consciousness of present feebleness. No reserve of strength, imperfectly equipped, hands hanging down, knees feeble, heart faint, mind weary. We cannot pierce the impenetrable veil and see what battles we may have to fight, what storms we may have to encounter, what burdens we may have to bear, what sufferings to endure. Our only refuge is to fall into the hands of the Lord. II. HOW FAITH MAY SUBDUCE FEAR IN OUR GREETING OF THE NEW YEAR. 1. Faith in the unseen God. In His (1) Power; that is, He is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think. (2.) Wisdom—to guide as well as guard amid the vicissitudes and mystery of our earthly pilgrimage. (3.) Faithfulness—that He will never leave nor forsake, never falsify His Word. (4.) Goodness—To supply our ever returning wants, to withhold from us no good thing and make all things work together for our good. (5.) Mercy—to bear with our ingratitude and proneness to forget and wander from Him. Such faith in God stimulated and sustained the Old Testament heroes and New Testament saints; they all endured as seeing Him, who is invisible, realising His glorious and gracious presence ever with them. III. FAITH IN THE UNSEEN WORLD. David felt that if desolation and death overtook him he would be safe if, when leaving this life, he fell "into the hand of the Lord." With home in view, pilgrimage will be cheered, the heart will be calmed and comforted. With the eternal God for our refuge and the eternal arms underneath us, "forward" may be our fearless watchword. Into the infinite, unfailing "hand of the Lord" let us commit ourselves. (*Homilist.*) *David's choice of the plague*:—War would place the nation at the mercy of its enemies; famine would make it dependent on corn merchants, who might greatly aggravate the miseries of scarcity; only in the pestilence—some form of plague sudden and mysterious in its attack, and baffling the medical knowledge of the time—would the punishment come directly from God, and depend immediately upon his will. (*A. F. Kirkpatrick, M.A.*) *The stroke of God preferred*:—David prefers what was usually designated "The stroke of God." "Let us fall," says he, "now into the hand of the Lord; for his mercies are great; and let me not fall into the hand of man." A saying of Gordon (it was among his last) may be recalled—were not the two men in many respects moulded alike? "I have the Shekinah, and I do like trusting to Him and not to men." (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) *The greatness of God's unfailing mercy*:—A well-known minister tells us he once visited the ruins of a noble city that had been built on a desert oasis. Mighty columns of roofless temples stood in unbroken file. Halls in which kings and satraps had feasted two thousand years ago were represented by solitary walls. Gateways of richly-carved stone led to a paradise of bats and owls. All was ruin. But past the dismantled city, brooks, which had once flowed through gorgeous flower gardens and at the foot of marble halls, still swept on in undying music and unwasted freshness. The waters were just as sweet as when queens quaffed them two thousand years ago. A few hours before they had been melted from the snows of the distant mountains. And so God's love and mercy flow in ever-renewed form through the wreck of the past. Past vows and past covenants and noble purposes may be represented by solitary columns and broken arches and scattered foundations that are crumbling into dust; yet through the scene of ruin fresh grace is ever flowing from His great heart on high.

Vers. 15—25. **So the Lord sent a pestilence.**—*The plague stayed*:—It was a time of peace and prosperity in Israel. King David's rule had been blessed,

and the people dwelt in safety. In the midst of this happy quiet, David was moved to order a numbering of the people. I. **SIN OVERTAKEN BY JUDGMENT.** What was the sin? Outwardly it was in the numbering already referred to. But what wrong could there be in taking a census? It is now found to be useful. It had before been done in Israel, and with Divine approval. The wrong could not have been in the census itself. The real sin, then, like all sin, was in the heart; and plainly its root was pride and vain-glory. King and people forgot their dependence upon God, and the allegiance due to him. The pestilence struck directly at the pride of people and ruler. It crippled their power. It thwarted military ambition. It smote that of which they were ready to boast into feebleness and death. Are we, of these later ages, to look upon like visitations, as of fire or famine or war or pestilence as judgments for sin, or corrections for moral transgression? Never are we to be in haste, or too confident, in interpreting Divine Providence. But when we are told that devouring flames consuming great cities, famine depopulating broad lands, and pestilence which walketh in darkness, and destruction which wasteth at noonday, mean wiser building, better agriculture, more careful drainage—just this and nothing more, at least nothing moral or spiritual—we are sure that one great part of the Divine purpose has been overlooked. Doubtless God does mean that the lower lessons should be learned. He does mean to correct neglect of maxims of prudence. He does so order His laws and dealings as to make us studious, watchful, and faithful in all that pertains to physical life. II. **JUDGMENT DEEPENING REPENTANCE.** Our Saviour has taught us that the angels shall be God's ministers in the final judgment (Matt. xiii. 41.) Here we find that they are His messengers in present ills. It was as one of these had reached Jerusalem, and had outstretched his hand for its destruction, that he became visible to the king. What true humility, what deep repentance is here! There is no syllable of complaint that the Divine stroke is too heavy. There is no word of personal justification; no shielding of self under another's fault. The sin was not all his; but he saw only his own. "My sin, my transgression!" Such was the language of his crushed, repentant heart. Such is the language of true repentance always—when its work is deep and thorough. III. **REPENTANCE MET BY MERCY.** "The Lord repented Him of the evil." The words are startling, as applied to God. And yet they need not be obscure. Note three things with respect to this mercy:—1. It followed upon the deepened repentance. 2. It came in connection with expiation. 3. Then it did not straightway remove all the consequences of the sin; but, as we may believe, did convert them into means of disciplinary good. One thing only is required from us as the condition of restored Divine favour. That is trusting repentance. IV. **A TRUSTFUL RECONSECRATION.** Observe the prompt and cheerful obedience which now marked the king's conduct. No sooner did the Divine message reach him than he "went up as the Lord commanded" (v. 19). Nor did he find the way closed before him. Clearly the Lord, as He is wont to do with contrite souls, had gone before to prepare it. Observe, the Lord is now "the Lord my God!" Here is nearness, trust, love. There is no longer distance or aversion; but such peace as assured pardon always brings. Men who have had great deliverances felt to be from God have always delighted to make them occasions of fresh consecration. With all the more of humble, swelling joy will this be done when the deliverance is from what is seen to be the effect of personal sin—mercy arresting deserved judgment. In his description of the distress of Harold, the last of England's Saxon kings, on account of his false oath, the novelist, Bulwer, has said: "There are sometimes seasons in the life of man when darkness wraps the conscience as sudden night wraps the traveller in the desert, and the angel of the past with a flaming sword closes on him the gates of the future. Then faith flashes on him with a light from the cloud; then he clings to prayer as a drowning wretch to a plank; then that mysterious recognition of atonement smooths the frown on the past, and removes the flaming sword from the future. He who hath never known in himself, nor marked in another, such strange crises in human fate, cannot judge of the strength and weakness it bestows; but till he can so judge, the spiritual part of all history is to him a blank scroll—a sealed volume." There would seem to be many of whom this is true. Is there now any one of us to whom any part of the truth brought to view in this Scripture has not some application? 1. Searching our own hearts, we should surely find some form of sin there—perhaps the very spirit which provoked the displeasure of God against Israel. 2. In His patience God may not as yet have made His displeasure felt by us in pains and ills seen

to be traceable to it; and yet He may have sent sorrow, loss, hardships, intended to bring us to Himself; it is certain that He has faithfully forewarned us that for every unpardoned sin He will at some time bring us to judgment. 3. To escape in the evil day no way is offered, none is to be found, save the old way of humble, trusting repentance. 4. For those who thus come the door of His heart is wide open; expiation has already been provided; pardon will be instant and complete; and, while to life's end many painful effects of sin may remain, these, in their case, will be changed to means of good, to chastisements whereby He will perfect us in His own image and for His everlasting kingdom. 5. The proof of our repentance and trust and acceptance will appear in prompt obedience, child-like thought of God as our God, and a heart ready, nay, eager to serve in any, however costly, service He may appoint. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *The plague stayed*:—1. In this lesson we have, first, an account of the judgment: "So the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel; and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men." Here is judgment following repentance and confession. There are some sins which, though truly repented of and forgiven, still bring retributive consequences from which the transgressor cannot escape in this life. He must wear them as brands of condemnation set upon sin by Divine justice for his own and others' good. These consequences, while they come in just retribution, are also sent in mercy as God's barriers against the progress of sin. It is here affirmed that the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel. Plagues and pestilence have various national and physical causes. But it is equally plain that they are connected with the sins and follies of men. They are the penalties of violated law. In other words, they have a place in the righteous government of God, and so come to execute His will. Here the pestilence is attributed, instrumentally, to angelic agency. 2. This lesson furnishes an example of true penitence. Here is a case of genuine repentance which is accepted with God. David's confession was not extorted from him by the pressure of the Divine judgment. Before it came he saw his sin, and said unto the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in that I have done." Divine judgments are often, indeed, instrumental in arousing men to see the enormity of their guilt. They are used as goads to prick a dull and sleeping conscience. But true penitence is not the result of fear. It springs from seeing the hatefulness and wickedness of sin as done against the wisdom, justice, holiness and love of God. Sin is folly, and brings ruin to the transgressor, but its chief enormity lies in the fact that it is done against a God of holiness and love. So true confession is confession to God. 3. This lesson also shows us how saving mercy was obtained for Israel. The judgment of God was righteously destroying the people, and His mercy, though free, sovereign and ready to save, could not ignore His righteousness. There must be a way opened for its manifestation if Jerusalem is saved. This is secured through the Divine appointment. David is directed by Gad, a prophet of the Lord, to build an altar unto the Lord, that the plague might be stayed from the people. It was not by David's tears of penitence and confession of sin that the plague was stayed. In like manner, not our tears or prayers or confessions, but the blood of Christ shed for us, furnishes the only ground for the removal of the sentence of death which the broken law of God has passed upon us. He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. 4. This passage presents another feature of spiritual life worthy of attention. It is the spirit of generosity and unselfishness manifested by David in fulfilling the command of God. Here was royal liberality; and it is set down to his everlasting honour in the Word of God that he gave "like a king." He stands before us as a noble representative of those large-hearted, generous men who are ever ready, when the occasion demands, to sacrifice their private interests for the public good. And never did David make a better investment of his means than when he bought Araunah's threshing-floor. It was the building-lot for the temple which for a thousand years prefigured Christ, and so became a fountain of blessing to the nations. Money invested in such a cause is not lost, but laid up in store for the life to come. (*S. D. Nicolls, D.D.*) *God's judgment on pride*:—See the power of the angels, when God gives them commission, either to save or to destroy. Joab is nine months in passing with his pen, the angel but nine hours in passing with his sword, through all the coasts and corners of Israel. See how easily God can bring down the proudest sinners, and how much we owe daily to the Divine patience. David's adultery is punished, for the present, only with the death of one infant, his pride with the death of all those thousands, so much does God hate pride.

(*M. Henry.*) *Divine justice in national retributions*:—Famine, pestilence, revolution, war, are judgments of the Ruler of the world. What sort of a Ruler, we ask, is He? The answer to that question will determine the true sense of the term, a judgment of God. The heathen saw Him as a passionate, capricious, changeable Being, who could be angered and appeased by men. The Jewish prophets saw Him as a God whose ways were equal, who was unchangeable, whose decrees were perpetual, who was not to be bought off by sacrifices, but pleased by righteous dealing, and who would remove the punishment when the causes which brought it on were taken away; in their own words, when men repented God would repent. That does not mean that He changed His laws to relieve them of their suffering, but that they changed their relationship to His laws, so that, to them thus changed, God seemed to change. A boat rows against the stream; the current punishes it. So is a nation violating a law of God; it is subject to a judgment. The boat turns and goes with the stream; the current assists it. So is a nation which has repented and put itself into harmony with God's law; it is subject to a blessing. But the current is the same; it has not changed, only the boat has changed its relationship to the current. Neither does God change—we change; and the same law which executed itself in punishment now expresses itself in reward. (*G. Brooke.*) *The pestilence*:—Death on the Pale Horse—the Black Death of mediæval times (1348) in some one of divers forms, issued forth now. "Appearing in the heat of the summer months, aggravated by the very greatness of the population which had occasioned the census, spreading with the rapidity of an Oriental disorder in crowded habitations, it flew from end to end of the country in three days." (*Dean Stanley.*)

Ver. 17. And David spake unto the Lord when he saw the angel that smote the people.—*The problem of undeserved suffering*:—David's sin in numbering the people was want of confidence in God. At any rate, it is certain that for a time he lost his faith, and was in open rebellion against God. Then came his punishment—a grievous punishment for the king who has the welfare of his people at heart. One man sins; his sin is punished; but the punishment falls on the innocent—that is the strange problem which rises before us on reading this chapter, and it is a problem which very often presents itself in the facts of human life. The problem is forced on our notice every day we live. A careless shipwright does not send his bolt or rivet home properly, and, in a storm at sea, a gallant ship founders, carrying with it many precious lives. A man commits a great crime; he is found out and punished, but the punishment does not stop with himself: it falls also on his family, who have to bear the shame and the reverse of fortune. A husband and father becomes a drunkard; the sin brings its inevitable punishment; but the punishment is as heavy on the wife, who is never free from anxious care, and on the children, who grow up weakly, uneducated, and wilful, for the lack of parental guidance. Two or three men combine in a gigantic fraud; they are detected and punished, and utter ruin falls on them; but the consequences of the fraud, in a thousand ramifications, affect the happiness and prosperity of a whole nation. A sovereign does not feel himself secure on his throne, and, in order to surround himself with military glory and strengthen his position, declares war against a neighbouring people. The punishment of his ambition is disastrous to himself; but still worse are the calamities which come on thousands of his unoffending subjects. Is not the suffering of the innocent with the guilty, and for the guilty, one of the most familiar facts in human life? We would think it fair and right that each one should start in life with the same chance of good and evil, and should have it in his power to carve out his fortunes as seemeth good to him; but it is only too plain that such is not the case. Some are overweighted from the very first; some spend all their lives in reaching the point from which others start; some struggle on for a few years, and die in the bloom of youth, through inherited feebleness of constitution. And even if we did all start with the same chances, it is evident that we do not work through life freely and independently; our aims are defeated, our efforts crushed by events over which we have but little influence. Job, sitting among his comforters and bemoaning his unhappy fate; Prometheus, chained to the rock and defying the unjust power that chains him; Philoctetes, left behind in his misery on the desert island—these present, in the highest flights of tragic poetry, what many a one feels bitterly in his own thoughts—the truth that wrong-doing and suffering do not always go together; and to those who believe in a Governor of the universe

they present also some apparent justification for the complaint of mankind, which is most briefly expressed in the words of Solon to Cræsus, King of Lydia, "The Deity is altogether envious and full of confusion" (Herod 1, 32.) So long as the facts are put in this way, I do not think it possible to explain or palliate them. It is of no use to say that, looking to the whole experience of human history, sin is punished and righteousness prospers. The doctrine of averages, however true and consoling to the philosophising observer, does not make the individual wrong lighter. Nor is it of much use, I fear, to point out that suffering is not always a misfortune, nor prosperity a gain; for the man who has been ruined by others' guilt, the wife who has been bereaved through another's folly, the youth who finds himself cramped and fettered by the circumstances of his birth, does not cry out against the suffering so much as against the seeming injustice and unfairness. But let us look at all these facts from another point of view. Our difficulty hitherto has been, that the innocent have often to suffer for the guilty, that punishment often falls on those who have not deserved it. But what are we to say about the enjoyment of benefits for which we have not laboured, the reaping of reward where there has been no desert on our part? Is there not such a thing as receiving good where we had not earned it? And, when we talk of the innocent suffering with or for the guilty, should we not also speak of the undeserving being blessed with prosperity along with the deserving, or even instead of the deserving? We cry out passionately against receiving less than justice in the arrangements of the universe; but do we not sometimes receive more than our just share? To go back to the case from which we started: the people were suffering in Israel on account of the sin of their king; but had they not derived great benefit from the same king's good government, or success in war? If they did not deserve to share in his punishment, can we say that they deserved to share in his prosperity? But the same is true of life generally. If we suffer where we have not sinned; do we not also prosper where we have not proved worthy? If, after all our toils and honest exertions, our hopes are defeated through the fault of others, do we not also reap where we have not sowed, and gather where we have not strawed? If the wrong-doing of others sometimes brings an undeserved retribution on our heads, is it not true that every day some happiness is added to our lot, through the right-doing of others? The fraud of two or three men causes a national calamity; but the honest dealing of a thousand others, with their conscientious discharge of duty, makes the nation prosperous, secures to very many the advantages of an easy income with little trouble to themselves, and preserves the country from bankruptcy, moral and commercial; and if the calamity is undeserved, surely we cannot say that we have deserved all the prosperity. Just think how, in a hundred ways, we reap the benefit of other men's labour; how our enormous material prosperity during this century has been chiefly due to James Watt's invention of the steam-engine, so that thousands have now the opportunity of culture and refinement, who otherwise would have been toiling in the fields all day, with dulled senses and faculties of thought disused. Think how many lives are saved every year in our coal-mines by Sir Humphrey Davy's lamp; think how much physical suffering has been spared us, in the practice of surgery, by the discovery of nitrous oxide and chloroform; think how many pure and pleasant thoughts have come to us through the work of some great poet, or painter, or musician—and say, is it not emphatically true that, if we suffer by the sins of our fellow-men, we benefit also by their virtues? Here, again, it would be easy to furnish examples; it is sufficient to observe the general principle that the influence of other men on our fortunes is for good as well as for evil. But look further at the problem of hereditary evil—"the sins of the fathers coming on the children"—is there not also such a thing as hereditary good? We have not all inherited feeble constitutions from our ancestors, or the race would come to an end; we are not all placed in circumstances where we cannot lead an honest life, otherwise society would cease to exist. As an actual fact, hereditary evil is the exception; and what we have to consider, in most cases, is the great fact of hereditary good, which is as little deserved by us as the evil. Is it not the case with many of us that the patient industry, the upright conduct, and the virtuous lives of our fathers and forefathers, have surrounded us with advantages from the very moment of our birth—advantages which they perhaps were morally bound to secure for us, but which we have in no sense earned by our own merit? If our fathers and forefathers were only discharging their duty, none the less have they, in such ways, conferred great blessings upon us. Thus far our considera-

tions have involved no principle distinctively religious. We are dealing with facts which are facts to the Atheist or Agnostic quite as much as to the Christian. Up to this point, we have only reached this conclusion—that our weal and woe are indissolubly linked with the actions of our fellow-men, that from this connection there come to us both good and evil, and that we must be content to take the evil with the good. Now, how does the gospel of Christ stand to all this? Does it help us further in solving the problem? It does give a complete solution, but in a very unexpected way. So far from regarding this problem of undeserved suffering as a part of the universe to be explained or defended, Christianity takes it up as the starting-point of its moral teaching. Now, see how all this bears on our problem. The universe is so ordered that we live in the closest relations to one another; we exercise an immense influence over one another's fortunes, both for good and evil. We accept the good without acknowledging it with gratitude; we receive the evil with loud complainings against fate, and passionate upbraidings against Providence; but all the time we think only of ourselves. Christ bids us think of others. While we complain because we suffer from others' wrong-doing, Christ says to us, "Take heed that others do not suffer from your wrong-doing. You live in close relation with your fellow-man; then see to it that, from this relation, nothing but good flows to him; love even your enemies, bless even them that curse you, do good even to them that hate you; in all things strive to make your fellow-man better, happier, nobler, by loving him with all your heart." In short, while we cry out about our rights, Christ bids us think of our duties; while we think only of the claims we have on others, He calls us to consider also the claims which others have on us. In this there seems to me to lie the true solution of the problem. We must cease to look at it with purblind selfishness of vision; we must not continue to ask the one question, "Why should I suffer, being innocent?" but we must also ask, "Why should I receive benefit when I have neither laboured nor deserved?" and above all, we must ask, "How can I live and act, so that my life and actions shall bring good, and good only, to my fellow-men?" We utter passionate complaints about our own wrongs and woes, about the evil influences which our fellow-men exercise on our fortunes; but we should utter heartfelt acknowledgments of boundless good received from the good offices of those who went before, and those who are living now. We are related to one another, not as Alpine peaks rising from a cold sea of mist—divided, solitary; but as stones which help each other in building up the great fabric of God's world. God has clearly meant it to be so. Not one of us lives to himself or dies to himself; the living or dying, even of the humblest man, has its influence on some other fellow-creature for evil or for good. What a changed world it would be if all such influence—if the influence of every man's living and dying—were an unmixed good to others! Where, then, would be the undeserved suffering which at present seems such a grievous wrong? But Christ's command has, for its practical result, the direction of every man's influence for good; and the whole essence of Christian morality lies in the words of St. John, "Little children, love one another." If we could only adopt, in its entirety, the principle of Christ's commandment, we would be vexed no more by perplexing doubts and anxious fears—we would find, in this solidarity of the human race, our greatest strength and our best educator. Suffering, whether deserved or undeserved, can always be traced to sin; and sin has its root in the selfishness of our thoughts, feelings, and actions. If love were to take the place of selfishness in every human heart, sin would be unknown, its consequent suffering unheard of, and earth be changed from a purgatory into a paradise. In spite of the centuries which are completed since Christ lived and died in the world, Christianity, as a moral force among men, is little more than in its infancy. Whatever power it may have had over individual hearts, in cleansing them from sin and widening them to some comprehension of God's love, the full significance of its teaching has been little felt on society as a whole. But more and more, as men become possessed by this intense feeling of sympathy with their fellows, this single-hearted desire to make all their influence on them tell for good, this death of all selfishness, this regenerator of the moral nature which Christ called forth, and which we denominate love—more and more the evils under which the race of men now groan will disappear. (*D. Hunter, D.D.*)

Ver. 24. **Nay, but I will surely buy it of thee at a price.**—*The unselfish offering*.—Then David had not learned the now commonly approved

methods of piety. It was surely very strange for one who could offer a sacrifice without expense, to prefer to offer a purchased sacrifice, and, instead of embracing a presented opportunity of costless worship, to insist upon paying for the materials of his service. It was a generous impulse which prompted the refusal, and David had generous impulses. With all his faults, he could be quite at home with the noble in sentiment and spirit. I. **THE REAL SPIRIT OF DAVID'S CONDUCT.** We must keep in mind this fact, that David would not do what he might have done. It was not compliance with a hard necessity; it was not a reluctant submission to what could not well be helped; he might have acted otherwise without inflicting any injury or causing any offence. Araunah could well afford to make the gift, and he wished to make it. Had David accepted it, his offering would not have been at all deficient; in place and matter and instruments it would have been complete. He had a fine opportunity, as some would esteem it, of reconciling self-interest with godliness, prudence with principle; of doing a good thing for nothing: what would multitudes give for such an opportunity? Why, then, did David forego it? The answer is, that he felt that which would not have been represented by the acceptance of Araunah's present. He wished to sacrifice, did not wish another to do it. Acting otherwise, the materials of the sacrifice would have been the same, but the virtual offerer would have been different. It would have been no fit expression of David's spirit, no full gratification of the feelings that now filled his heart. An illustration may be taken from some of the old sacred buildings. You will find them "finished with the most circumstantial elegance and minuteness in those concealed portions which are excluded from public view, and which can only be inspected by laborious climbing or groping," a fact explained by saying, "that the whole carving and execution was considered as an act of solemn worship and adoration, in which the artist offered up his best faculties to the praise of the Creator." These men of "the dark ages," as we love in the pride of our compassion to call them, had in this a true and grand idea: what would they say of our veneered and gilded modern life, in which everything is for show and nothing from reality, everything for a purpose and nothing from a principle? Everything depends on the predominant principle and purpose. If a man's prime feeling be that of self, he will go to the easiest and most economic way to work and worship; if a man's prime feeling be that of God, he will rebuke all thoughts of cheapness and facility. In the first case, he will seek the largest possible results from the least possible expenditure; in the second, the expenditure will be itself the result. Now it is the end and essence of all religion to turn the mind from self to God; to give it absorbing views of the Divine beauty and glory; to fill it with Divine love and zeal; to make it feel honoured in honouring God, blessed in blessing Him; to make it feel that nothing is good enough or great enough for him: and when the mind is thus affected and thus possessed, it will understand and share the spirit of David's resolve, not to offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord God of that which doth cost nothing. II. **SEE HOW THIS SPIRIT WILL ACT AND MANIFEST ITSELF.** 1. It will make our service, whatever it is, a living thing. What we do, even when it is the same that others do, will be animated by another and a loftier principle and passion. Whether it be worship or labour, it will be an end and not a means. It will not be the driving of a bargain with God, not compliance with terms and conditions of favour and recompense, but the pouring out of a loving and reverential heart; not the result of a careful calculation, but of sympathy with the goodness and glory of the Lord. A man thus inspired will no more think of inquiring the advantages, the probable gains of his deeds and his adoration, than he would think of the profitableness of gazing with admiration on a lovely landscape, or regaling his soul with the noble qualities of a hero or a martyr. But this spirit will not only affect what we do, not only make a reality of our service, but it will make us do more, far more, than would otherwise be possible. The language of the man who feels as David felt will be, What can I do to glorify God? what modes and methods of honouring him are within my power? There are two questions asked consciously or unconsciously by men in relation to religious service: one is, How little may we do? The other is, How much can we do? These questions involve different principles and ends. He who puts the first thinks only of safety; he who puts the second thinks only of duty: in the first it is interest that sneaks; in the second it is gratitude, love, reverence, and zeal. And if these inspire us, we need not repeat David's act; there is no necessity to insist on making costly what might be without price. It would be easy to illustrate the operation of this spirit

in connection with every department of human service. It must, for instance, influence the study of truth. We are satisfied with our religious faith; we have no doubt at all that the great and life-giving principles of the Gospel are understood and held by us; we can afford to look with profound pity on those who think otherwise, to commiserate the paucity or erroneousness of the articles of their creed. We have learned to distinguish between things necessary to be believed in ordered to salvation and things unnecessary; the first we maintain with rigorous fidelity, the last occasion us no concern: we meet every suggestion or solicitation to inquiry and examination, to deep and extended thought, with the response that it is not needful, a man may be saved without it. Is that the spirit of the text? Is that giving God our best? Far from it. Let us lose sight of the question of mere salvation, and be fired with a zeal for the honour of the God of truth; let us love truth for its own sake, and not for the sake only of the profit of believing it; and, whatever our present convictions, we shall bring to its pursuit and its contemplation our keenest investigations and finest thought, and, irrespective of all considerations of gain or safety, shall "follow on to know." It will influence us in connection with the more difficult and least popular morals. We are not only to do good, but not to let our "good be evil spoken of;" not only to avoid evil, but "the appearance of evil;" not only to work that we may not steal, but to work that we may "have to give;" not only to resist temptation, but to flee from its scenes and instruments; to forbid the impure and wrathful thought and desire, as well as the outward act; to be "without offence," to "think" upon whatsoever things are "lovely and of good report," to deny ourselves, to love our enemies; in one word, to be "imitators of God," and walk "even as Christ also walked." 3. This spirit will affect certain forms of religious profession. When the duty of a formal acknowledgment of Christ, an identification with His people, and the commemoration of His death in His Supper, are urged, the reply for substance is frequently made: "It is not absolutely necessary to join a church: you cannot maintain that only those who belong to religious societies will enter the kingdom of heaven. It may be very good and profitable as a rule, but I am left at liberty to do it or leave it alone as I think proper. You cannot pretend that there is no salvation out of the church." The answer to this is not far to seek. We suppose that there is no fixed and universal rule of necessity in such things. Necessity is not in the subject but in the man. We can conceive of great things not being necessary sometimes, and of very little things being necessary sometimes, on this ground. Is it necessary for a man to do, or safe to leave undone, what he knows to be according to the will of God? Is persistence in disobedience compatible with a state of spiritual security? But why talk at all of necessity? Necessity in relation to what? Your salvation? But, conceding what you assume, is that the only light in which to regard the Divine will? Is personal profit the only thing that gives that will power over your nature? Do you really mean that you will do only what you are obliged to do, that you care nothing for law and love, that you are indifferent to a Maker's pleasure and a Saviour's grace, but that you do want to get to heaven? Is that the offering you make to God, an offering dictated by no sense of his claims and favours, no passion to serve Him worthily, but a mere calculation of spiritual profit? 4. This spirit will prompt us to labour to do good, and not to refuse even the more arduous and self-denying services of benevolence. III. THE CONSIDERATIONS BY WHICH THE SPIRIT OF THE TEXT SHOULD BE EXCITED. 1. Consider what God is; how worthy of your utmost zeal and love and honour in Himself, in His ineffable perfections. How "glorious" He is "in holiness"; "how great is His goodness, how great is His beauty." To give to him the best is a necessary fruit of any true, however inadequate, conception of His infinite worth. 2. Think, again, that every offering you make to God is already His own. The materials of service are His, the power to use them is His; His are the outward instruments, and His the moral faculties. 3. But, lastly, remember that God does not offer to us that which cost him nothing. (*A. J. Morris.*) *A test of sincerity*:—A free salvation does not necessarily imply a religion which costs us nothing. If the text were to be translated into New Testament language, it would read thus: "I will not make a profession of being a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ which involves no necessity for self-denial or self-sacrifice." Now, in illustration of this subject I would observe, that both in the type and in the fulfilment of the type the Lord Jehovah has set before us salvation as that which on His part is free and gracious, "without money and without price." See how

the graciousness and freeness of salvation were pointed out here. The sinner might have been expected to be consumed himself, and that a sacrifice was accepted as an atonement for him must only be attributable to the rich grace and kindness and love of God. The sinner could never have expected that in such a way as this, without anything that he had done to deserve favour, God should have provided for him a way of escape; but it is even so in the fulfilment of the type. But there was one circumstance, in the typical institution, which tends still further to show the freeness of God's salvation. This burnt-offering was placed within reach of even the poorest; but in each case the man was required to give something, in order that he might come before God in the prescribed way of acceptance. Even so is it, when we come to look at the fulfilment of these typical institutions, as set forth in the Gospel of salvation. The Lord Jesus Christ is not only a Saviour for the rich man, but a Saviour for the poor man; and the poor man may come to God with as great a welcome as the richest and the most honourable. But then it is very possible for men to deceive themselves, and to suppose that they are coming before God in His appointed way of acceptable worship, when "a deceived heart hath turned them aside," so that they cannot ask themselves, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?" It becomes necessary, therefore, to show the second part of this proposition—that although God's salvation is free, it does not necessarily imply a religion which costs a man nothing. Salvation itself costs him nothing. In order that we may see this, observe the circumstances referred to in the text. Now, the sacrifice might have been offered—the burnt-offering, God's appointed way of coming before Him acceptably under that dispensation, might have been consumed on the altar—David might have been present, and ostensibly have been the man to offer this sacrifice—and yet Araunah might have borne all the cost of it; but, if so, would not David have been proved to have been a hypocrite in his worship? For what was the signification of presenting a burnt-offering to the Lord in this manner? Was it not an acknowledgment of the sinner's guilt, a thankful acceptance of God's mercy, and at the same time a dedication of all he had to the Lord's service? See how this truth is brought out clearly in New Testament language. "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price," says the apostle Paul, "therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." So that the result of redemption received into the heart by faith is the determination to "glorify God in our body and our spirits, which are His." Now, when there is this dedication of ourselves to God, I ask whether it is possible to imagine a case in which there will be no manifestation of it by some practical and self-denying acts. An act of my mind may be connected with a thought known only to God, but the dedication of my body as well as my spirit to God implies an outward act of which my fellow-creatures can judge, though God Himself, who reads the heart, can alone discern the motive from which that outward action proceeds; and inasmuch as it is the duty of believers in Jesus Christ not merely to dedicate their spirits unto God, which have been "redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without spot," but their bodies also, which have been redeemed at the same precious price, it follows that such act of self-dedication must be attended with the giving up of some things which we might have selfishly enjoyed—connected with the making of sacrifices which perhaps would have been displeasing to flesh and blood, but which we are now thankful to make, because under the constraining power of the love of Christ—connected, in short, with the manifestation of the feeling which makes us determine that while we serve God we will not serve Him of that which costs us nothing. Now, let this truth be applied to two or three individual characters, in order that we may see its importance. Take the case, for example, of the worldling, the man who is following the customs and the habits of the world. Perhaps, if he have a respect for religion, manifested by occasional attendance upon God's ordinances, he will tell you that he serves the Lord—that although he does not care for being righteous overmuch, and although he makes no profession such as many hypocrites do, yet that he means what is right. But the question is, does that man offer burnt-offering to the Lord of that which costs him something? Where is his self-denial? Where is his self-sacrifice? There must be a devotedness of spirit and devotedness of life; there must be both acts of the mind, and outward acts which his fellow-creatures can judge of, to denote his devotedness to God, if he be indeed serving God as an acceptable worshipper of our Lord Jesus Christ. Or take the case of the more determined professor of religion, I allude to the case of the man

who professes to value those great doctrines of the Gospel concerning a full and free salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. But every privilege is connected with a corresponding duty; every blessing received from God involves responsibility on the part of the man who receives it. For example, Christ's presence with His people to the very end of the world is a privilege; but it is connected with the duty, that they should observe all things whatsoever He has commanded them, and that they should be making constant efforts to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He who would be sincere in this matter must show his sincerity by the determination which David manifested—that whilst his burnt-offering shall be presented in the way God has appointed, it shall not be at other people's cost, but at his own—that he will not serve God of that which costs him nothing. And now the point to which I am come is, that whether as to money, or time, or influence, if we are really under the power of Christ's constraining love, our religion must be that which costs us something. Has your religion ever cost you anything in this respect? (*W. Cadman, M.A.*)

The true principle of Divine service:—On the place over which the angel of God had stayed his hand of judgment, the king resolved to erect an altar, and to offer a burnt-offering. That spot where judgment halted was the threshing-floor of Araunah. The point in the transaction which will fix our attention is that of the king's refusal of Araunah's generosity; not because so princely a nature as David's could not appreciate such generosity, but on principle. "I will surely buy of thee." There you have the principle which I desire to illustrate.

1. The principle was the expression of the true feeling of the greatest, the devoutest, the most remarkable man of his day—a man whose many-sidedness of nature links him with the highest; a man whose influence has been felt in all ages, from his own till this, and in an ever-widening circle, in the ratio of the missionary zeal of the Church of Jesus Christ, for there is no religious poetry equal to David's psalms. It received the Divine endorsement. "The plague was stayed."
2. The principle applies to the minister's dedication, and preparation for his work. He should resolve, "Neither will I offer to the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing."
3. The principle further applies to intellectual and heart preparation for the work of the ministry.
4. Apply the principle to personal dedication. It will cost something to offer yourself to the Lord your God. If it cost nothing, the enjoyment of God's favour would be little esteemed. The dedication of the person to God involves the dedication of all that belongs to him. (*R. Thomas.*)

Genuine service for God:—This subject is connected with that of "The Three Temples of the One God," not only because the event transpired on the very spot that became a few years afterwards the site of the Temple, and so the centre of the worship of Judea, but because of its association in motive and principle with Him who was the Second Temple, and because of its practice in the erection of the third temple throughout the world and the ages. The principle that comes out in these words of David to Araunah is one that will sweep the whole circle of worship, and work, and gifts, and personal religious life.

1. Worship. For in our buildings, in our service of praise and prayer, preaching and hearing, we are to give our best in effort, in intelligence, in all things, facing and resisting every temptation to the contrary, with the words, "Shall I offer," etc.
2. Work—not to schemes only that are pleasant, and in times that are convenient and by proxies that are easily obtainable will the true worker for God devote himself.
3. Gifts. Not with careless gifts, almost covertly given, or the smallest coin doled out niggardly, can he give who says, "Shall I offer," etc.
4. Personal religion. There is meanness and ingratitude in the spirit that relegates all religious care to the leisure of Sunday, or of the sick-room, or the infirmities of old age. Why should we not offer to God that which costs nothing? Three questions may throw light upon it.

1. How far what costs you nothing is any benefit to yourself? Such may be of some benefit. But only what "costs something" calls out (1) highest motives, and employs (2) all faculties.
2. How far what costs you nothing has much influence upon the world? Sacrifice is the subtle and tremendous element needful in all great influence. In the home, in the Church, in the state, they only climb true thrones, and wear real crowns, who have the spirit of sacrifice. The Saviour Himself relied on that—"I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." So does the Eternal Father of men, for He has made "Christ," who is incarnate Sacrifice, "the power of God."
3. How far what costs you nothing is acceptable to God? Christ's praise of the poor widow's gift, God's acceptance of the sacrifice of Christ, sufficiently indicate the Divine esti-

mate of self-denial. And since that service which costs us something has the pulses of reality, the glow of love, and the reflection of Christ, it surely is acceptable to God. (*U. R. Thomas.*) *The principle of giving*:—I. THE TRUE MOTIVE TO BENEVOLENCE, "offering unto the Lord." His offerings were gifts to the Lord; and our offerings, too, must be gifts to the Lord. There may be a sense in which we can give nothing to Him, and there are times in which He reminds us of His sublime and eternal independence of us. We give to each other what we may happen to need. God needs nothing. Into the infinite ocean of His nature no streams are ever seen to run. Unlike the oceans of the earth, it is never supplied, but always supplies. Streams flow from it, but never to it. They flow with a ceaseless and unflagging volume and speed. They flow to angels and to men. They bear life, and strength, and wisdom, and grace, and love. These streams are carrying to-day light to unnumbered worlds, health to unnumbered living things, comfort to unnumbered weary ones, hope to unnumbered despairing ones. A father gives to his son a plot of ground that he may turn it into a garden. He gives him the tools with which to prepare it. He gives him the seeds from which he is to raise the fruits and flowers. He gives him a home to live in. He gives him his daily food. At length, the father finds on his table the richest fruit and fairest flowers which the garden has produced as a loving acknowledgment from his son. What is this acknowledgment? It is a gift, and yet it is only a gift of what is his own. In this manner, and in this only, we can give to God. To offer to the Lord; this expression lies at the root of all true service. To the Lord was a sort of touchstone, which the Apostle carried with him everywhere, and by which he tested both his own doings and those of others. You know that in life everything depends upon the motive from which it springs. Man is what his motives are, and he is no better and no worse. The outward, visible deed we may perform, or the audible word we may speak, have no meaning to us, until we have first ascertained the motive which incited them. It is only too common to think of the giving of money as a lower branch of Christian duty. On the contrary, that giving may be the highest and most religious act of the godly man. Generosity may be one of their constitutional peculiarities. It is so with many, and it may be so with them. They were born with it. But there are others of a very different character, in whom the generous giving of their means would be the sublimest shape in which their religion could make itself manifest. II. THE MEASURE OF CHRISTIAN LIBERALITY. "I will not offer unto the Lord of that which costs me nothing." This was but the negative form of David's noble principle. He meant that he would give to the Lord of that which cost him something. This principle, interpreted widely, and under the inspiration of a grateful love, would yield a sufficiency of means for carrying on without embarrassment every Christian agency in the world. The spirit of Christian liberality is evermore a spirit of self-denial. It is prompted and fed by the thought of Him who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich. The vital nerve which runs through it is one of gratitude for infinite mercy. And those whose Christianity has cost them the most are the men who will be faithful unto death. Will Luther, will Melancthon, will Zwingle, will Calvin, will Latimer, will Knox, will Ridley, will Hooper, forsake the reformation? Nay; they will go for it to prison if needful, or even unto death, but they will not deny it. Having love as the impulse to our benevolence, its measure will be determined by the nature of the case which appeals for our help, and also by the means which God has placed at our disposal. Here is false measure! It is stamped with the words, "What have I given before?" This carries with it a double falsehood. It may be too heavy, or it may be too light. This weight will be condemned at the last day. There is another weight, stamped with the words, "How little can I give?" Of this weight I say nothing, nor of the man who uses it, except this, that he that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly. Gratitude demands that we give to the Lord. Giving to the Lord is as Christian a work as prayer or the avoidance of sin. Giving must always be tending towards sacrifice and self-denial. (*E. Mellor, D.D.*) *A religion that costs nothing*:—The doctrine of sacrifices, as under the old dispensation, is not easy to fathom completely. Of course one purpose was to foreshadow the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross. But there must have been much more lying behind the system than this typical teaching. Such elaborate directions as are given as to the value, the composition, the way of celebrating these burnt-offerings, were no doubt intended to serve a more direct purpose of teaching than what was merely typical. There

was one eternal principle of God, a principle which has been running all through the ages, which these burnt-offerings did teach. A burnt-offering meant the giving up of a certain amount of pleasure, or trouble, or possessions, and was essentially, in the literal sense of the word, a sacrifice. The man who presented a burnt-offering to God was bound to take a certain amount of trouble before he could do so. Wealth, or property, then, was far more equally divided than it is now. Much of it was in kind. In fact, these old sacrifices were an instance of that irrevocable law which prevails all through the universe, the necessity of taking pains. This was the old principle, so well put by Carlyle, "It is only with renunciation that life, properly speaking, can be said to begin." Renunciation, but of what? Of all that is satisfactory in life? By no means, but renunciation of the self-spirit in man. One of the most favourite maxims which we now hear quoted, and which has been quoted so often that we have almost come to believe it is true, is that we should not, as a rule, force ourselves to do anything. Wait till the desire comes—till the spirit moves you—till you are in the humour for it—say many of our advisers. Forced work, say they, is not good work. Sit down quietly, or take a walk, until you feel more disposed to attack your difficult task. Which, in other words, means this, wait until it is easier for me to do it. Wait until it costs me less exertion to perform it. And this principle seems to be an entirely false one, and it is at the root of a great deal of the mischief in the world. Every daily duty is, or should be, a duty done to God—for God, whether it be wielding the workman's hammer, or presiding on the judicial bench. This plan, then, of not forcing ourselves to do a disagreeable duty, when reduced, means, offering unto the Lord that which costs me, not perhaps nothing, but at any rate not very much. Can you conceive an Israelite, to whom the time had come to offer to God His accustomed sacrifice, reasoning thus to himself? That is a true possession—that is a true offering—that is the salt of life—that God demands at our hands service which costs us something. The truth of this principle is shown in various ways. More especially it is shown by the increased store which we always set upon any possession which has cost us self-renunciation to obtain. The Canadian settler, who is surrounded by the rough-hewn chairs and tables of his own construction, probably values and cherishes these more than the owner of a fashionable London drawing-room does her magnificent furniture. In the one case they are the result of labour and toil, and very frequently, in the other case, they represent no more than someone else's toil. And it is an eternal law of God that we cannot have as much true pleasure from some one else's labour as from our own. Or if we do contrive to extort much pleasure from it, it is an indication of how very low we have fallen in character. It is one of the misfortunes of those who inherit possessions, that they are unable to appreciate the having them in anything like the same proportion as if they had toiled for them themselves. But I desire to put before you the view of the offering which every man has to make, willingly or unwillingly, unto his Maker. That offering is the sum of his own life's career. "We bring our years to an end," says the Psalmist, "as it were a tale that is told." And having brought them to an end, they are presented, as a long and patchy scroll, unto God who gave them. I conceive that when the smoke of the years of our life ascends in upward flight to God, that only can be an acceptable, or in any sense an offering or sacrifice to Him, which bears the trace of the eternal principle of having taken pains with it. Earthly successful careers, which in many ways are typical of spiritually successful careers, are produced by the age-long genius of taking pains. The fool physical, and the fool spiritual, is the man who takes no pains. The one cannot succeed, neither can the other. In an infinitely higher way our Saviour teaches us this same lesson: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." What else is this but saying that life—life—that magnificent possession given to us sons of God—this life is a sacrifice, living is a sacrifice, our years are a sacrifice, and this sacrifice, when we shall enter the portals of Hades-land, we must take, and present, and lay it upon the altar of God. Perhaps, then, the question to be asked is this: Is your spiritual life costing you anything? Sacrifice of money is but a small part of the life-sacrifice. The money is not yours—the life is. Many of you are toiling, and wearing out brain and body over the earthly life, are you straining every fibre, too, to make beautiful and glorious the life which is hid with Christ in God? I am not hinting that the spiritual life and the earthly life are separate and distinct—I know at least that they need not be—but do not make the spiritual life

earthly, but make the earthly life spiritual. Do all to the glory of God. But to those who find but little to do, there is the danger. Many a life stagnates because it eats away its heart in comfortable inactivity. Those of you who are fed, and clothed, and served, and protected, and toiled for by thousands of suffering others, let me tell you, you cannot pay for these things, therefore your life, when laid before God, must be a life that has cost you something, some scouring, some cleaning, if God can accept it. Yes, assuredly, you too must go up upon the hill of God, and by dropping your contribution of usefulness, real usefulness, into God's world, must help God. And the greatness and the reality of that sacrifice of love which Jesus made for the whole world, and for you, is an example of the sacrifice which He asks you to make of the jewel He has given you—your life! A diamond it is, unpolished, uncut, but capable of infinite beauty of form, infinite purity of lustre. He will help to shape and mould it, then to brighten and polish it, and then to keep its lustre undimmed and its sparkle clear. Finally, also, God will ask you for it, *i.e.*, your life, and if worthy, He will place it, a bright jewel, in the eternal crown. High destiny! Great end! How can I, thus conscious of the eternal plan, do else than present to Him my noblest and my best? I will not offer to the Lord my God that which has cost me nothing. (*A. H. Powell, M.A.*) *A costly gift freely bestowed*:—In Disruption umes, a poor woman, Janet Fraser, owned a small cottage and garden in Penpont, which she freely and cordially offered to the Free Church. A "sough" of this having gone abroad, the duke's agent called on Janet, and began by offering her £25 for the ground, presently rising to £50; but Janet declared that she had given it to the Lord, and would not recall it for all the dukedom of Queensbury. On her ground the church was accordingly built. (*W. G. Blaikie.*) *Service costs sacrifice*:—A fashionable and wealthy lady in America made up her mind to become a missionary. For a long time the church of which she was a member, doubting her fitness, delayed acceptance of her offer; but, at last, as she persisted, they yielded and asked her what sphere of labour she preferred. Looking down thoughtfully on her dainty gloves, she replied, "I think I should prefer Paris to any other place." That was the city that suited the belle of fashion rather than the neglected millions of China or India, or Central Africa. But our Master declares, "If any man will be My disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." (*H. O. Mackey.*) *Bibles gratis refused*:—When Mr. Campbell went upon his first mission to Africa, the Bible Society sent along with him a number of Bibles to be distributed to a Highland regiment stationed at the Cape of Good Hope. Arrived there, the regiment was drawn out in order to receive the Bibles. The box which contained them was placed in the centre, and on Mr. Campbell presenting the first Bible to one of the men he took out his pocket four shillings and sixpence for the Bible, saying, "I enlisted to serve my king and my country, and I have been well and regularly paid, and will not accept of a Bible as a present when I can pay for it." His example was instantly followed by all the regiment. (*Anecdotes of the Old Testament.*) *Give God the best*:—This is a touching story a missionary tells of a Hindu mother who had two children, one of them blind. The mother said her god was angry, and must be appeased, or something worse would come to pass. One day the missionary returned, and the little bed had but one child in it. The mother had thrown the other into the Ganges. "And you cast away the one with good eyes?" "Oh, yes," she said; "my god must have the best." Alas! alas! the poor mother had a true doctrine, but she put it to a bad use. Let us try to give God the best. Too long already have we put Him off with the drippings from life's overful cup.

Ver. 25. **And David built an altar there unto the Lord.**—*The altar and sacrifice*:—The history of David affords us an instructive lesson of the blessings arising out of sanctified affliction, as well as the dangers of prosperity. 1. At the beginning of the chapter it is said, "the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, go number Israel and Judah." In the parallel passage (1 Chron. xxi.) it is said "Satan provoked David to number Israel," *i.e.*, (as Bishop Hall remarks) God did so by permission, Satan by suggestion; God as a judge, Satan as an enemy. 2. It has occurred to some as difficult to see exactly wherein David's sin consisted. (1.) Distrust. God had said Israel should be as the dust of the earth, as the sand on the sea shore, and as the stars in the heavens—why count them then? (2.) Pride. David thought no doubt he would appear more formidable by a display of numbers, like Hezekiah after-

wards, he wished to make a display of his power. 3. Observe, again, "David's heart smote him after he had numbered the people; after, not before. Sin leaves a sting behind, though it may give a momentary gratification. 4. Remark David's sorrow and confession and guilt: "I have sinned and done very foolishly." Ah! here was grace; this was unnatural, it was supernatural; it was the very opposite of fallen nature to take all the blame to himself. 5. David was, on his repentance and acknowledgment, charged to rear an altar and to offer a sacrifice which was intended, no doubt, to represent that "without shedding of blood, there is no remission." I. **THE ALTAR AND SACRIFICE** represent the sacrifice of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the only sacrifice God will accept as an atonement for sin. 1. David offered "burnt-offerings and peace offerings." The burnt-offerings represent God's justice; the peace offerings represent God's mercy—a striking emblem of our great sacrifice! Here, in Jesus, "Mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other." Here, God's justice is satisfied, and His mercy manifested. Here, we see God "a just God," and yet "a Saviour"—"just, and the Justifier of all who believe." Where shall we look for the great proofs of God's righteous displeasure against sin? The great proof is found in the sufferings of God's own Son. Again, where shall we look for the great proof of God's mercy? You remind me of the ark in which Noah and his family were saved, or of Zoar, where Lot found refuge? Yes; but the great proof of mercy is to be found in the same garden, and on the same cross where we found the other. 1. In one sense, and that a very important sense, our acceptance with God cost us nothing—it is free. Nothing we can do is meritorious: salvation is God's free gift through Christ. This is the vital pulse of a sinner's hope—"By grace he is saved." 2. The other point is: our redemption cost God much. "Ye are bought with a price," said St. Paul to his Corinthian brethren; how great a price he did not say; he could not. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "God so loved." Who can say how much? There is no mercy out of Christ, and "no condemnation to them who are in Christ." II. **DAVID'S RESOLUTION AND CONDUCT** on the occasion of God's mercy to him. David's conduct by no means implies he regarded his offering as meritorious. (Ps. li. 16, 17.) "For thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt-offering; the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." It proved two things as regarded David's peculiar case, viz., sincerity and thankfulness. Sincerity—unlike the ruler mentioned in the Gospel, he wanted a religion which would cost him nothing, and therefore "he went away sorrowful." Thankfulness. David longed to show what he felt, like the leper (Luke xvii.), he "returned to give glory to God." Oh! what a spring it would give to charity, to feel as David felt. Observe, in the parallel passage (1 Chron. xxi.) it is said, David bought the threshing-floor for 600 shekels of gold. We can reconcile the two accounts by merely supposing the author in the book of Samuel stated the price of the oxen, while the author in the book of Chronicles mentioned the price of the threshing floor. Let me now mention a few particulars which the Gospel claims as proofs of gratitude, and God's Word proposes as tests of sincerity. 1. Coming out of the world. 2. The Gospel demands the sacrifice of every known sin—not one, but all; not in part, but entirely. 3. The Gospel demands of us to deny self. "Of all idols," says one, "idol self is worshipped the longest." Let me close with a word or two of direct and personal application. 1. I address those who suppose, by offering to God what cost them much, thereby to merit heaven. Turn, my brethren, to 1 Cor. xiii. 3. "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." This exactly meets your case. 2. To such as, Gallio like, "care for none of these things." I would say your case is an awful one. A religion which costs you nothing—which allows you to keep your sins—to be conformed to the world, and to indulge the flesh, is not of God. (W. E. Ormsby, M.A.) **And the plague was stayed from Israel.**—*The infliction and removal of the judgment upon David for numbering the people:*—These words record the removal of a terrible visitation sent from Heaven on the people of Israel. The circumstances connected with that Divine judgment, and the means by which its terrors were ended, are replete with the most valuable instruction. And therefore choose thee one of these three things—"Shall three years of famine come unto thee in thy land? Or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? Or that there be three days' pesti-

lence in thy land? Now advise thee what answer I shall give to Him that sent me." How forcibly does this part of our subject teach us the great danger of engaging in any scheme or course of action upon which we cannot ask the blessing of God! How carefully ought we to examine and weigh by the balance of the sanctuary, the motives by which we are actuated! How easily can God crush our most favourite plans and blight our dearest hopes, and punish our forgetfulness of Him, and dependence on our own strength, by turning those very things upon which our hearts were most bent, into sources of the bitterest anguish and the most humiliating mortification! Thus a man will often set his heart upon riches, and worship Mammon rather than God; and those riches are taken away from him after they have been for awhile possessed in abundance—a deprivation, which makes poverty far bitterer than ever it was before; or while actually possessed, they in various ways cause him troubles and sorrows more intolerable than any that fall to the lot of the poor. 1. The great danger of prosperity, and the folly of coveting riches and honours as the chief good. 2. The deceitful nature and the terrible consequences of sin. David's heart smote him after, not before, he had numbered the people. This is Satan's method of dealing with his prey, and this is the way he succeeds in beguiling men to ruin. He blinds the eye to the guilt, until the evil deed is done. How deeply is this felt by the penitent, when brought to loathe himself for his iniquity! What a sting is left behind by sin, though it may have been committed with very little alarm, and with scarcely any sense of its malignant nature! What a picture is displayed in this history of sin's terrible consequences—the angel of God running to and fro through the land with the sword of vengeance, and slaying seventy thousand men in less than three days! How it exhibits the Almighty's resolve not to let iniquity go unpunished! 3. The great and invaluable efficacy of the sacrifice of the death of Christ. The Almighty God, who is "angry with the wicked every day," and who has declared that all the nations that forget Him shall be turned into hell, has, nevertheless, made with them who believe in Christ, "a covenant well ordered in all things and sure," and, in that covenant, we have a Divine promise made, and the Divine veracity pledged, that they shall never perish, who rest their hopes on the offered propitiation. 4. The importance of promptitude in applying for mercy, and in deprecating the Divine wrath through the appointed sacrifice. 5. Finally, learn hence the duty of activity, liberality in the service of God, and for the benefit of your fellow sinners. It is a Scriptural precept—"Honour the Lord with thy substance." He who has a religion which costs him nothing has a religion that is worth nothing. (*H. Hughes, B.D.*) *The destroying angel arrested*:—If we knew how to enjoy our blessings in the fear of God, they would be continued unto us; but it is the sin of man that he extracts, even from the mercies of God, the poison which destroys his comforts: he grows fat upon the bounty of Heaven, spurns its laws, and awakens its vengeance. This was the case with the Israelites at the period to which our text refers. It is probable their sin was a general forgetfulness of God, and a vain confidence in the strength, numbers, and valour of the nation; for with this feeling of national vanity David was affected. The time was come when punishment could be no longer delayed; and the pestilence received its commission. Seventy thousand men died from Dan to Beersheba; and that the judgment might be known to proceed from God, an angel was made visible, with a drawn sword, directing, by His terrible agency, the vengeance and the death. The history indicates to us: 1. **THE STRICT REGARD PAID BY THE ALMIGHTY TO THE CONDUCT OF HIS CREATURES.** This is a consideration which ought ever to impress our minds. The want of it is one of the causes of the misconduct of men. All are not openly infidels; they do not deny a God; nor do they allow His existence, and deny His omniscience. All do not confine Him to His own heaven, and make it part of His greatness and grandeur to avert His eyes from earth. All do not make Him indifferent to sin. And say, with the unbelief of those of old, "The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it." But though we may not say this, we may be influenced by the very principle from which it proceeds. All who sin forget God; act as though there were no God, or He had no omniscience, or that He is indifferent to their conduct. To awaken us to a consciousness of the regard he pays to our actions, to His ever-hending, ever-watchful eye, it is, that He has so often specially interposed to punish sin, and in a manner which could leave no doubt of His agency. For this, among other purposes, the histories in the Old Testament have been preserved; that, observing the displays of His power and justice, we

might "sanctify the Lord in our hearts," and that the whole earth might "tremble and keep silence before Him." Does any one suppose that because He is but an individual, one amidst the myriads of the human race, he shall pass in the crowd, and escape the notice of his Judge? Let him learn that David was an individual, yet his individual sin was noticed, dragged to light, reprov'd, and punished. **II. WE ARE INSTRUCTED BY THE HISTORY TO CONSIDER SIN AS AN EVIL FOLLOWED BY THE MOST DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES.** The pride, and forgetfulness of God, of which David and his people were guilty, might appear, if sins at all, sins of a very venial kind, the common infirmities of human nature; yet they were followed by the dreadful choice of evils, and with the destruction of seventy thousand persons. One of the most fatal habits of mind is to treat sin lightly or with indifference. It is exhibited as a mark of eminent folly. "Fools make a mock at sin." **III. THE HISTORY ALSO EXHIBITS TO US THE ONLY MEANS OF FORGIVENESS AND ESCAPE FROM PUNISHMENT.** The altar was built unto the Lord: "David offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings; so the Lord was entreated for the land, and the plague was stayed." In other words, sin was expiated by the intervention of a sacrifice. This is the doctrine of every book of Scripture, of every age, and of every nation. Let us, then, observe that the testimony of the Church of God, from every age, is that the anger of Him whom we have offended can only be propitiated, and that He only can be approached, by sacrifice. When man became a sinner, then an altar marked the place in which he worshipped, and his offering was a bloody sacrifice. When Noah left the ark, his first act was to erect an altar, to reconcile God to a world which bore so many marks of His wrath; and at the smell of the sweet savour of the offerings, He gave the promise, "I will no more curse the ground for man's sake." When the first-born of Egypt fell beneath the stroke of the angel, it was the blood of the lamb sprinkled upon the door-posts that guarded in safety the offspring of Israel. When the plague broke forth against the rebels in the wilderness, Aaron ran between the living and the dead with his censer and incense, and the plague was stayed; but it was incense inflamed by fire from the altar of sacrifice. Thus, on ordinary occasions by stated, and on extraordinary displays of the Divine anger by extraordinary sacrifices, did the Church show forth the intended death of the true Sacrifice. This is our method of salvation: "We are saved by His blood," and it is important for us to know that, in this single doctrine of a substituted sacrifice, the whole method of our salvation is included. The manner in which sacrificial rites were performed illustrates even now the method of salvation. The offerer confessed the fact of his offence by bringing his victim; and he that believes in Christ, by assenting to this method of expiation, confesses the fact too: "I have sinned, and therefore I fly to Christ as my atonement." The offerer was prompted by the fear of punishment to slay his victim, and sprinkle the blood; so David in the text. If we are properly alarmed at our danger, we shall haste to the only refuge of a Saviour's bleeding side. The sacrifice was the instrument of sanctification; it supposed a covenant with God; the sacrifice was eaten; the parties were made friends; and sin, which only could make them enemies, was renounced for ever. Thus, the appointment of sacrifices supposes the confession of sin; a salutary fear of the terrors of a holy God; a just apprehension of the desert of sin, death in its most painful forms; and a reliance and trust in God's appointed means of salvation, and the renunciation of all sin, and the recovery of His blessing and friendship. All these are taught you and enjoined upon you by the death of Christ; and on these terms we invite you to receive pardon and salvation. **IV. WE OBSERVE THAT THE ERECTION OF THIS ALTAR BY DAVID WAS A PUBLIC ACT,** an act in which the public were interested; and in this respect it agreed with the practice of all ages. The building of an altar was ever a public act; the place was separate from common purposes; and it stood as a religious memorial for the instruction of mankind. 1. The erections themselves, and more especially the acts and observances of worship, are memorials of religious facts and doctrines. They keep a sense of God upon the minds of men; they turn the thoughts of the public, whether they will or not, to serious subjects. 2. Our worship is public, and the places we erect are places of public resort. 3. Besides this, our places of worship are to be considered as the places where the Gospel, the good and glad tidings of salvation, are announced to men. They are the places of treaty and negotiation between God and man. Ministers are the ambassadors of God. Clothed with authority by Him, they enter His house, and a rebellious world is summoned to hear from them God's gracious

terms of pardon, and His authoritative demand of submission. 4. They are houses of prayer, and remind us of our dependence upon God, and of His condescension to us. They are houses of shelter from the storms and cares of life; the places where we cast our care on Him, and prove that He careth for us; the place where He is known, eminently known, for a refuge. V. THE ZEAL AND LIBERALITY WHICH GOOD MEN HAVE EVER DISCOVERED IN THE ERECTION OF HOUSES AND ALTARS TO GOD. The words of the text are an instance. When Araunah saw David coming, he went to meet him; and, when informed of the occasion—"to buy the threshing-floor, to build an altar to the Lord"—he spontaneously makes him the offer of his threshing-floor. (*R. Watson.*) *The arrest of the plague*:—In the modern city of Rome is a fortress, once the mausoleum of the Emperor Hadrian, and bearing his name. About twelve hundred years ago, so tradition says, there raged a devastating plague in that old imperial town; and while people and pope and priests were making a procession with prayers, there appeared on the summit of the citadel the form of the Archangel Michael, in the act of sheathing his sword, to show that the pestilence was stayed. So there, in the place the vision, Gregory erected the statue of the angel poisoning on his beautiful pinions, and hovering over the city he had saved. Ever since, this edifice, converted into a stronghold, had been called "San Angelo," the Castle of the Holy Angel. Nobody asserts that an exquisite marble can render a fable true; the legend is only a poor little travesty of our grand old Bible story; but it may help in making our picture, as it shines out at the closing of our lesson. (*C. S. Robinson, D.D.*) *The site of the altar*:—The last entry in the appendix to Samuel consists of a document which may be described as the charter of the most famous of the world's holy places. By the theophany here recorded the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite received a consecration which has made it holy ground not only for Judaism and Christianity, but for Islam as well. Upon this spot, we can scarcely doubt, stood the great altar of Solomon's temple. To-day, as all the world knows, the site is covered by the magnificent mosque, the Kubbet es-sahara, or Dome of the Rock, the most sacred of Mohammedan shrines after those of Mecca and Medina. (*Century Bible.*) *Vicarious atonement*:—Starr King, one of the most eloquent champions of the Socinians, paid the following tribute to the doctrine of the vicarious atonement: "It is embodied by the holiest of memories, as it has been consecrated by the loftiest talent of Christendom. It fired the fierce eloquence of Tertullian in the early Church, and gushed in honeyed periods from the lips of Chrysostom; it enlisted the life-long zeal of Atanasius to keep it pure; the sublimity of it fired every power, and commanded all the resources of the mighty soul of Augustine; the learning of Jerome and the energy of Ambrose, were committed to its defence; it was the text for the subtle eye and analytic thought of Aquinas; it was the pillar of Luther's soul, toiling for man; it was shapen into intellectual proportions and systematic symmetry by the iron logic of Calvin; it inspired the beautiful humility of Fenelon; fostered the devotion and self-sacrifice of Oberlin; flowed like molten metal into the rigid forms of Edwards's intellect, and kindled the deep and steady rapture of Wesley's heart. . . . All the great enterprises of Christian history have been born from the influence, immediate or remote, which the vicarious theory of redemption has exercised upon the mind and heart of humanity."